



FAITH
BIBLE CHURCH

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THE GOSPEL
OF MARK

It has been called the blue-collar gospel. It is, by far, the most action-packed and fast paced of the four life stories of Jesus. The Gospel of Mark, the second Gospel in our canon, is both the shortest and the fullest of the four. With a simple outline and a sharp focus on Jesus' works and passion, Mark will command our attention and capture our hearts with its account of Jesus the Servant.

What follows in this tool kit are selected elements of background and introduction that are intended to aid your understanding, study and application of the Gospel of Mark. Please use each section as you see fit, referencing each like a precise tool that has a specific purpose for your study. The contents are:

- ***The Importance of Mark***
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The Importance of Mark

"Without question, Mark's Gospel is one of the most exciting and intriguing of ancient Christian documents." (Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*)

"One can hardly exaggerate the significance of Mark's Gospel for the Christian Church. From a literary standpoint, the evangelist's designation of his work as the 'gospel of Jesus Messiah, Son of God' (1:1) not only set in motion the process by which the first four books of the New Testament came to be known as 'gospels', but he most likely was the first to pen the story of Jesus. In fact, Mark's Gospel may well have spawned the writing of the other Gospels." (Robert A. Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 1:8-26*)

"In the early centuries of Christianity Mark's Gospel was so overshadowed by its more 'orderly', fuller, and more theologically explicit neighbours that had it not been for its prestige as the gospel deriving from Peter it might well have fallen out of use altogether. Now that same gospel is everywhere praised for its powerful and thought-provoking portrayal of Jesus, and (no doubt in large part owing to the general modern view that it was the earliest gospel to be written) is the acknowledged starting point for most explorations of Christian origins." (R. T. France, *NIGCT: The Gospel of Mark*)

If, as we make the case for below, Mark's Gospel was the first one written, likely only a couple short decades after Jesus' ascension, then Mark represents the very first life-story of Jesus. The importance of a document like this cannot be overestimated. If the first, then Mark was also likely the first writing to be called a "gospel of Jesus Christ," attributing the word "gospel" or "good news" to the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of the Son of God.

As an unusually powerful modern-day anecdote, German classical scholar Gunther Zuntz relays his first encounter with the Gospel of Mark. As a noted scholar deeply familiar with the literature, history and context of the Roman Empire, Zuntz was, at the same time, quite unfamiliar with Christianity and the Bible. His approach to Mark's gospel was therefore as fresh and unbiased as one could expect in our generation. The German scholar relates his "strong impression" that "something very important was being put forward here with a superior purpose and concentration throughout the book... The style and content of the story arouse a feeling of otherness, a feeling that this is not a history like other histories, not a biography like other biographies, but a development of the actions, saying, and suffering of a higher being on his way through this anxious world of human beings and demons." (Zuntz' account translated by Lucas Grollenberg, *Messiah*)

Notice his concern with the content of Mark. It seems to be more than simply style, vocabulary or scope. Mark's record of Jesus, Jesus' works and undoubtedly His end were what characterized this first reading. Imagine how it would have been for the first and second generation Christians of Rome, having never been to Israel or heard some of the accounts contained in this Gospel record.

Embarking on a study of Mark is not a simple enterprise. But neither is it deficient in Christological and theological value, historical weight, transforming power or worship catalyst.

Authorship

None of the four Gospels in our canon reveal their author's name. It is not until the first half of the second century (A.D. 110-150) that titles appear on each of the four, assigned largely on the basis of church tradition, likely to preserve for subsequent generations what this first generation knew implicitly. Since many Jesus and church-focused books, letters and biographies were written just after Jesus' resurrection, it became paramount that priority of emphasis be given to those writings directly connected to an eye-witness apostle or the close associate of an apostle. This also played a role in recognizing the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as the official collection of New Testament books became obvious and officially agreed upon. Since Mark is not among the twelve apostles mentioned in the Gospels and Acts, where does this title come from?

Fortunately, early church history and specifically the writings of the early church "fathers" provide tremendous help. *Church Fathers* refers to many generations of church leaders around the Mediterranean area and beyond that began with the disciples of Jesus' disciples. They quickly became the most influential leaders, preachers and authors of the church for a millennium. The first reference to the author and setting of the Second Gospel comes from one of these leaders, an early church bishop named Papias who served as a pastor of Hierapolis, a city in modern-day Turkey. Papias died in A.D. 130. Preserved by another church father named Eusebius in a quote, Papias writes:

Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For Mark had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statement in them. (Eusebius, *History of the Church*)

Among other corroborating evidence, this quote reveals our first main point: Mark's Gospel is directly connected to the eyewitness account of the apostle Peter. This understanding seems to be rather full and unanimous among the church writings of this era. Another church pastor named Clement of Alexandria also weighs in, again recorded by Eusebius:

When Peter had publicly preached the word at Rome, and by the Spirit had proclaimed the Gospel, that those present, who were many, exhorted Mark, as one who had followed [Peter] for a long time and remembered what had been spoken, to make a record of what was said; and that he did this, and distributed the Gospel among those that asked him. (Eusebius, *History of the Church*)

But who is this Mark who was a follower or disciple of Peter? Since the title given was unelaborated, this Mark seems to have been implicitly known or identified among the early church. The man generally associated with this work is the John Mark of **Acts 12:12; Acts**

13:13f; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11 and 1 Peter 5:13. Most scholars agree that John Mark seems to be the most logical and contextual choice. I agree.

According to early church tradition, Mark preached the gospel in Egypt after his time in Rome and established several churches, eventually becoming the first bishop of Alexandria. Evidently, John Mark's mother was named Mary, in whose home the early church gathered in Jerusalem. This is also the probable location of the Last Supper (**Acts 1:13-14; Mark 14:14**).

"Another important source of the tradition that Mark wrote this Gospel is the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Mark (A.D. 160-180). It also stated that Mark received his information from Peter. Moreover, it recorded that Mark wrote after Peter died, and that he wrote this Gospel in Italy. Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 180-185), another early church father, noted that Mark wrote after Peter and Paul had died (Against Heresies, 3:1:2). Other early tradition documenting these facts comes from Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 150-160), Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 195), Tertullian (ca. A.D. 200), the Muratorian Canon (ca. A.D. 200), and Origen (ca. A.D. 230). This testimony dates from the end of the second century. Furthermore it comes from three different centers of early Christianity: Asia Minor (modern Turkey), Rome (in Italy), and Alexandria (in Egypt). Thus there is strong external evidence that Mark wrote this Gospel." (Constable, soniclight.com)

Furthermore, the testimony of the early church relates the Gospel being written from and to the Gentile believing residents of Rome. Irenaeus, yet another church bishop pasturing in the second century, relates that after Peter and Paul had both preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Rome, and perhaps even after they gave their lives for the same cause, "Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also himself handed on in writing the things that had been preached by Peter." (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*)

This concludes the three major points that should be noted in this section: the Second Gospel records the eyewitness account of the apostle Peter, was written at the hand of John Mark and was written from and for the residents of Rome.

Date

The date of authorship of Mark's Gospel is, of course, as detailed and difficult as the subject of authorship itself. Dating of New Testament books must take into account several factors. Obviously the life span of the author is first. Peter died around A.D. 67 in Rome. But since John Mark wrote down the eyewitness account of Peter, it is possible the final form of the Gospel came later than 67.

Roman history is also a key factor. The great fire in Rome in A.D. 64, likely at the hand of Emperor Nero himself, then blamed on the Christians, is an important marker in the discussion of Mark's date. The great persecutions that followed the fire seem to greatly influence and perhaps even be alluded to by some of the contents of Mark. The Suffering of Jesus the Servant would have been a powerful encouragement to the suffering Roman Christians under Nero. Furthermore, there seems to be no direct or powerful reference to the total destruction of Jerusalem under General Titus in A.D. 70. This is not an argument from silence, but rather a

powerful argument about silence. Mark, nor any New Testament book, explicitly mentions this catastrophic event as a point of history. Therefore the authorship of Mark likely falls between the fire of 64 and the collapse of Jerusalem in 70. I prefer a date early in this range, likely around A.D. 65-66, although it is possible that the true date is a decade or more earlier than this.

Purpose

It seems clear from even a simple reading of Mark's Gospel that his purpose was also simple. While specific weight is given to characterization of Jesus as a God's Suffering Servant, the general purpose seems to be to record a relatively short life story of Jesus, the Christ. The genre, or literary type, of Mark is most closely related to the Greek *bios* or life story, life account. All four gospels relate closely to the Greek *bios*. And while strict chronology, from our modern perspective, was not an ideal or value, the events and wording included, as well as the myriad events and wording excluded, were seemingly collated with this simple goal in mind: painting an accurate picture of Jesus, the Messiah, God's Son, for broad usage. Moreover, matters of purpose invariably relate to matters of audience and setting. This helps us revise and sharpen Mark's simple purpose into a more specific one.

"The traditional view that mark was written in Rome toward the end of or shortly after the Jewish war is still the most probable setting for this Gospel. Wherever it was composed, Mark should be read as a pastoral response to stressful times. The church faced major crises in the 60s. Christians had to cope with the death of eyewitnesses, which created the need to conserve and stabilize traditions about Jesus. We learn from Tacitus that the church in Rome was subject to vicious gossip and hostility (see also 1 Peter 2:15; 3:13-16; 4:12) and needed to fend off attacks from various quarters. Christians had to deflect government suspicion of them as a potentially subversive group. They also had to defend themselves against religious rivals who would foil the church's growth. What did Christians know of the origin of their faith? How could they respond confidently to the misrepresentations without knowing or having an account of what happened to their Founder, who was executed by sentence of a Roman magistrate? Mark compiled a written record of the preaching of Peter and perhaps others to edify the church and to aid it in the task of proclaiming the gospel in the Greco-Roman world.

Mark also composed his Gospel to encourage Christians facing increasingly trying conditions and to remind them of the foundation of their faith. Except for isolated local confrontations, Christians were relatively ignored until A.D. 64. Things changed dramatically, however, after a disastrous fire swept Rome that year. Then of the city's fourteen wards were destroyed. After the initial shock, rumors began to fill the still smoky air that the fire had been part of Nero's urban renewal scheme. Nero attempted to squelch the rumors with a program of tax relief, food giveaways, and rebuilding. When the gossip persisted, he found a scapegoat in the Christians. Tacitus [the Roman historian] reports [in brutally explicit detail]:

“Neither all human endeavor, nor all imperial largess, nor all the modes of placating the gods, could stifle the scandal or banish the belief that the [great Roman] fire had taken place by order. Therefore to scotch the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost exquisite cruelty, a class loathed for their abominations, whom the crowd styled Christians. *Christus*, from whom the name is derived, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate. Checked for the moment, this pernicious superstition again broke out, not only in Judea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself [Rome] – that receptacle for everything hideous and degraded from every quarter of the globe, which there finds a vogue. Accordingly, arrest was first made of those who confessed [to being Christians]; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the charge of arson as for hatred of the human race. Every sort of derision was added to their deaths: they were wrapped in the skins of wild beasts and dismembered by dogs, others were nailed to crosses; others when daylight failed, were set afire to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his garden for the spectacle and gave an exhibition in the circus, mingling with the people in the costume of charioteer or mounted on a car. Hence even for criminals who merited extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of pity, due to the impression that they were being destroyed, not for the public good, but to gratify the cruelty of a single man.” (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44) (David Garland, *Mark, the NIV Application Commentary*: 28-29)

Markan Studies

For far too long, scholarly attention and study of Mark was woefully lacking. This is due primarily to some commonly held conclusions in what is called the “Synoptic Problem.” The Synoptic Gospels (syn=together or the same, optic=seeing) are those that see the life of Jesus in generally the same way, Matthew, Mark and Luke. John, the Fourth Gospel, is very obviously different than the other three. It has a different structure, language, content and explicit purpose (20:31). Leaving John for a moment, studies of the three Synoptic Gospels have, for centuries now, included an ongoing conversation about content and chronological order or priority. In other words, which one came first? And how do the other two relate to the first one?

Combine this with the overwhelming overlap between the three and the problem, or as I like to call it, the “Synoptic Question” becomes apparent. For example, how much of the content of Mark do you think is found in Matthew, in many cases word for word? The answer is just five percent less than one hundred percent! There is less, but still substantial overlap between Mark and Luke. In fact, the only passages in Mark not found in Matthew, Luke or both are **Mark 4:26-29; 7:31-37** and **8:22-26**. Sixteen verses!

Primarily with regard to the First Gospel scholars felt obliged to make a decision about priority. Since 95% of Mark is in Matthew, for most of recent times, Mark has been understood as a distillation or abbreviation of Matthew. In other words, Matthew was written first and then Mark

came along as the cliff notes version. Recently, however, the tables have turned. For over a century now, new looks at Mark have uncovered convincing reasons why the Second Gospel should be considered first in priority (the first one written). This change of view, to which I am very sympathetic, has boosted Markan studies to celebrity proportions.

Gospel Outline and Resource

Building on the great work of others, I maintain the case that the Gospel of Mark can be easily divided into two sections, with a third pivot section in the middle. Ben Witherington's great work on Mark illustrates this simple outline.

Thus I would suggest that the structure of Mark's Gospel divides rather neatly into several parts. The first part emphasizes the raising of questions about Jesus, such as the following:

- 1:27 – What is this? A new teaching with authority (crowd)
- 2:7 – Why does this fellow speak this way? Who can forgive sins? (Scribes)
- 2:16 – Why does he eat with sinners? (Scribes)
- 2:24 – Why are they doing what is not lawful? (Pharisees)
- 4:41 – Who, then, is this, that even wind and waves obey him? (Disciples)
- 6:2 – Where did this man get this wisdom? (hometown folks)
- 7:5 – Why do your disciples not live by tradition? (Pharisees)

Thus we may present Mark's outline as follows:

- *The questions* – Who and why? – **1-8:27**
- *The who question answered* – Peter's confession of faith: Jesus is the Christ – **8:27-30**
- *What is the mission?* – A mission of suffering – **8:31; 9:31; 10:32**
- *Mission accomplished* – The Passion narrative – **11-16**
(The Gospel of Mark, p.37-38)

R. T. France divides the book similarly (NICGNT, Mark, p.13-14).

- 1:1-8:21 – Heading, Prologue and **ACT ONE: Galilee**
- 8:22-10:52 – **ACT TWO: On the Way to Jerusalem**
- 11:1-16:8 – **ACT THREE: Jerusalem**

The text of Mark obviously turns on Peter's statement in **8:29**. Allowing that small event to be the pivot point, we will be working with the simplest version of the outline.

- 1:1-8:26 – Who is Jesus and Why is He important? – *DISCOVERY*
 - 8:27-30 – You are the Christ! – *EXCLAMATION*
- 8:31-16:20 – What and How will Jesus accomplish His mission? – *PASSION*

If you would like more detailed introductory and background material, or perhaps verse by verse help through the Gospel of Mark, I would recommend www.Soniclight.com. These free Study Notes on every book of the Bible are written and constantly updated by DTS professor Dr. Tom Constable. They are accessible to all levels and represent a theology of free grace.

Preaching Outline

For our purposes in the life of the Faith Bible Church family, we have scheduled our time in Mark through the following sections, Lord willing. These are subject to change and are listed here as a potential help to small group studies or family discussion plans. There will be several important “interruptions” to the following schedule for Missions Sundays, the Christmas Season etc.

Sermon Passages:

1:1-8 – Introduction to Gospel (Started April 12, 2015)
1:9-15 – Baptism and temptation
1:16-28 – Disciples and Capernaum synagogue
1:29-45 – Healings and Galilee synagogue
2:1-12 – Healing and conflict
2:13-22 – Levi, feasting and fasting
2:23-3:6 – Sabbath and healing
3:7-19 – Retreat, healing and Discipleship
3:20-35 – Family and Satan teaching
4:1-20 – Parables
4:21-34 – Parables
4:35-41 – Stilling the sea
5:1-20 – Demoniac healed
5:21-43 – Healings
6:1-6a – Rejection in Nazareth
6:6b-13 – Twelve sent out
6:14-32 – Twelve recalled
6:33-56 – Water walk and healing
7:1-23 – Tradition and hand washing
7:24-37 – Gentile healings
8:1-26 – 4000 fed and Pharisees
8:27-33 – Peter’s confession – Center point of Gospel
8:34-9:1 – Discipleship
9:2-13 – Transfiguration
9:14-29 – Healing and demons
9:30-37 – Discipleship and servanthood
9:38-50 – Dense teaching
10:1-16 – Divorce and children
10:17-31 – Rich Young Ruler and discipleship
10:32-52 – Death and Kingdom and healing of Bartimeaus
11:1-19 – Palm Sunday and cleansing
11:20-12:12 – Prayer, faith and authority
12:13-44 – Controversy and questions
13:1-37 (2 weeks) – The last days

14:1-11 – *Bedikat Hametz* and anointing
14:12-42 – Last Supper and Garden
14:43-72 – Betrayal, arrest and denials
15:1-21 – Pilate and Scourging
15:22-47 – Cross, death and burial
16:1-20 – Resurrection and commission

Discussion Questions

The following questions for Mark are quoted directly from the great work of Warren Wiersbe in the “Be” Series of Chariot Victor Publishing. His work on the Gospel of Mark is entitled *Be Diligent* (1987).

Mark Chapter 1

1. What about Jesus’ life shows you His servant spirit?
2. Define the Roman’s struggle to accept that Jesus was the Son of God.
3. List three points in Mark’s gospel regarding the Good News.
4. How did Jesus’ baptism reflect His role as a servant?
5. List some ways that Jesus’ temptation reveals His servanthood?
6. What does a person’s sense of authority reveal about his servanthood?
7. When Jesus expressed His authority over demons, what did the people watching learn about Him?
8. When Jesus healed the people around Him of their illnesses, what did they learn of His servanthood?
9. In what ways can we be servants like Jesus?

Mark 2:1- 3:12

1. What kinds of things stand in the way of us following Jesus’ example of taking time for prayer?
2. Name some things that prayer time accomplishes in our lives?
3. What inspires you most about the account of the four men who lowered their friend through the roof so Jesus could heal him?
4. In this account, what relationship did Jesus forgiving the man’s sin have with healing his body?
5. Jesus chose to befriend the unlovable. How can we practice this in our relationships?
6. List some ways that becoming a Christian is much like saying “I do” in a wedding ceremony.
7. In what ways is Christianity distinctive from the world religions of our day?
8. Wiersbe wrote “Salvation is not a partial patching up of one’s life; it is a whole new robe of righteousness.” Describe what partially patching up one’s life is like.
9. Jesus broke traditions such as not working on the Sabbath. Why do you think he felt free to do that?
10. In some ways Jesus was leading a rebellion against traditional religion. How would you describe Jesus’ rebellion?

Mark 3:13 - 4:34

1. List some of the differences between being a celebrity and being a servant.
2. What do you think made the disciples respond to Jesus and walk away from their lives?
3. If becoming a Christian is like becoming a part of a new family, what responsibilities go along with that?

4. The Jews of Jesus' day thought that He was coming to set up a political kingdom. Describe the kind of kingdom that Jesus came to set up instead?
5. Name some reasons that the religious leaders of Jesus' day were so threatened by His popularity.
6. Why were parables a powerful way for Jesus to teach?
7. As you look at the church in our nation today, which of the seed/hearts in the Parable of the Sower would you compare your faith to: hard hearts, shallow hearts, crowded hearts, or fruitful hearts? Why?
8. List some ways that our lives are like the oil lamp in Jesus' parable in Mark 3:21.
9. Describe a time when you saw something happen that you believe was Satan moving against the work of Christ.
10. How do you think Jesus would invite someone, in today's language, to join God's family?

Mark 4:35 – 5:43

1. How can you explain the fact that the disciples saw Jesus do miracles and heard Him teach, yet were surprised that He could still the storm?
2. Why are we often amazed when we pray for something and God answers?
3. Discuss some reasons why difficult circumstances cause us to doubt God's care for us?
4. If we had an easy life, with no trials, do you think our faith would blossom more?
5. Wiersbe notes that Satan took away everything from the men his demons possessed: their jobs, their family, their friends. In what situations do you see Satan doing that today?
6. Discuss the courage and faith you think was involved for the sick woman to push through the crowd and believe Jesus could heal her.
7. If you had been Jairus, standing and waiting for Jesus to come see about your daughter, how would witnessing this woman's healing have affected you?
8. What kind of faith did it take for Jairus to keep believing Jesus could make a difference even after he heard that his daughter was dead?
9. As Jesus traveled through crowds of needy people, how do you think He decided who to respond to?

Mark 6:1-56

1. How do you define what it means to believe in something or someone?
2. From what you remember about Jesus' life, what would have convinced you that you could believe He was truly the Son of God?
3. What dynamics of a "hometown" would have made it difficult for the people of Nazareth to take Jesus seriously?
4. If you have been from Nazareth, what would have been your greatest challenge in accepting Jesus as the Son of God?
5. What do you think would have been the greatest difficulty in being a disciple of Jesus?
6. What do you think would have been the greatest joy in being a disciple of Jesus?
7. To what contemporary evil or notorious character would you compare the wife of Herod who requested John the Baptist's head on a platter? Explain.
8. Make a list of what Jesus taught about God's nature when He fed the 5,000 hungry people with only a small lunch.
9. What kinds of things did Jesus teach the disciples about God's nature when He walked across the water to their boat during a storm?
10. How would you define the connection between Peter's faith and his ability to walk across water?

Mark 7:1 – 8:26

1. The servanthood of Jesus Christ stood in sharp contrast to the religious leaders of His day, who used their positions to gain power over the people. In what ways do we see that same problem today?
2. On a scale of 1-10 (1=extremely difficult, 10=extremely easy) how easy do you think it is to obey God outwardly through ceremony, and yet be disobedient in your heart attitude? What spiritual problem does this create?
3. What are the positive effects of longtime traditions?
4. What are the negative effects of longtime traditions?
5. What hypocrisies do you see around you that Jesus would have rebuked?
6. How often do you think God's truth conflicts with the traditions in the church?
7. Wiersbe says: "Great faith is faith that takes God at His Word and will not let go until God meets the need." Describe an act of great faith that you have seen or heard about or experienced.
8. Through His miracles Jesus helped people solve the problems they faced. What does this teach us about how Jesus can help us face our own problems?
9. Even though the disciples witnessed the miracles of Jesus, they were still afraid when they faced trials. If God has come through for us in our lives, why do we still worry when problems arise?
10. How is false doctrine like leavening in bread?

Mark 8:27 – 9:50

1. If you had been allowed to sit in on one of Jesus' private sessions with His disciples, what questions would you ask Him?
2. Why do you think many people failed to understand that Jesus was God's Son, even when they witnessed His miracles?
3. If you had been among the disciples when Jesus told them of His impending death, what kind of thoughts would have run through your mind?
4. What was the relationship in Jesus' life between "suffering" and "glory"?
5. Wiersbe says that Jesus knew the crowds were following him just because of his miracles. For what reason would Jesus rather have them follow Him?
6. What is the cost of being a disciple of Jesus?
7. Describe a mountaintop experience you have had that make you feel, like Peter, as if you just wanted to stay in that place and never leave.
8. Read Mark 9:24 and describe a time that you came to God with a need as much as this father came to Jesus. What was the result of your petition?
9. Jesus used a child to teach a lesson on humility. When you watch a child, what do you see reflected of the humble, servant life that Jesus taught?

Mark Chapter 10

1. How would you describe our current society's view of divorce?
2. How did Jesus' mention of the wife in His directive on divorce elevate the status of women in that society?
3. What have the children in your life taught you about following God?
4. In Jesus' day, to not have children was a shame and a curse and to have them was a blessing. How does that compare with our view of children today?
5. Wiersbe says that the young ruler from Mark 10 "measured obedience only by external actions and not by inward attitudes." What is the appropriate way to measure obedience?
6. What is the most important lesson you've learned about money and its priority in your life?

7. In hindsight, it seems implausible that, in the face of Christ's servant leadership, the disciples could squabble over who would be the most important. From what you know of human nature, though, how do you imagine it happened?
8. Why does a person with a servant heart make the best leader?
9. If Jesus asked you the question that He asked Bartimaeus, "What do you want Me to do for you?" what would you answer?

Mark 11:1 – 12:44

1. Jesus' message and presence conflicted with birth the religious and political leaders of his day. In what ways is that still true today?
2. The people who welcomed Jesus at the "Triumphal Entry" into Jerusalem didn't fully understand what Jesus had come to do. What were they celebrating?
3. In what ways was the Israel of Jesus' day "fruitless"?
4. What did the miraculous death of the fig tree teach the disciples about God's desire for Israel?
5. Jesus was outraged that the temple was being used for commerce rather than prayer and worship. Does that same thing happen in our culture today? How?
6. Wiersbe asks, "If the Lord Jesus were to show up in our house of worship, what changes would He make?" What do you think?
7. Read aloud the parable in Mark 12:1-9. If the son represented Jesus and the tenants represented the religious leaders, what was the inheritance they hoped to steal from Him?
8. List some ways it is difficult to submit to government authorities, even though the Bible teaches they are ordained by God.
9. How do you envision the reality of heaven when we face spouses or loved ones we were related to on earth?
10. How can we give to God like the poverty-stricken widow who gave all she had?

Mark Chapter 13

1. What is your opinion of when Jesus will return to earth?
2. How important do you think it is to discern the exact time He will return?
3. Who were some of the "false Messiahs" of the last century?
4. In what ways does life get discouraging sometimes as we wait for Christ's return?
5. Who have you known who has experienced religious persecution?
6. How do you see religious persecution increasing in today's world?
7. What elements of our global political and economic situation speak to you of Jesus' return?
8. What elements of our global climate and weather conditions speak to you of Jesus' return?
9. Are there parts of the end-times, as you understand prophecy, that frighten you? If yes, what?
10. In our day-to-day lives, how can we remain alert and watchful to Christ's coming?

Mark 14:1 – 15:20

1. How can we follow Mary's example of making Jesus a priority by taking time to be with Him and honor Him?
2. When Mary anointed Jesus, the fragrance filled the house. How does our own worship fill our home with sweetness?
3. If you had been a disciple at the last supper, what would you have thought when Jesus said His traitor was among you?
4. When Jesus prayed in the garden, the disciples slept. What do you think their perspective was on the situation that allowed them to be so casual about it?
5. What does the fact that a large group of men came to arrest Jesus tell you about their understanding (or misunderstanding) of Jesus?

6. Describe how you would have felt had you been Peter when the cock crowed after he denied knowing Jesus three times.
7. How do we sometimes deny Christ today?
8. How do you explain the drastic change in the peoples' attitudes from their cheers during Jesus entry into Jerusalem to their jeers during His trial and crucifixion?
9. The charge against Jesus was that He "claimed to be king and stirred up the people." In what ways were those charges true or false?

Mark 15:21 – 16:20

1. What kind of fortitude would it take to face torture and death as Jesus did even though He knew He had the power to remove Himself from it?
2. What do you think convinced one of the thieves hanging on a cross beside Jesus to ask for Jesus' help?
3. What must have been the hatred level of the religious leaders of Jesus' day that they would stand at His execution and continue to mock Him?
4. When Jesus died, the curtain that served as a door to the holiest place in the temple was ripped open. What does that symbolize for you in terms of your access to God?
5. During the time between Jesus' death and resurrection, what kind of conversations do you think the disciples had?
6. How would you answer those who would argue that Jesus didn't really die on the cross, but only passed out and came to later?
7. As Jesus spent time with His disciples between His resurrection and ascension, what kinds of memories do you think they relived together?
8. How does Jesus' resurrection affect your day-to-day life?
9. When Jesus ascended back into heaven, He left us with a mission and a responsibility. How do you live out that mission?

Appendix A:

Repentance in the New Testament

If you've been around the church or Christians or Christian literature for almost any length of time, you've heard the word *repentance*. This is so because repentance is Biblical. Indeed, it is thoroughly Biblical. As we've discussed this topic in an early sermon of Mark, I wanted here to follow up with a document recounting the argument and covering *all* of the related New Testament texts. I will do so as briefly as possible.

Use this resource as needed. What follows is an in-depth Bible study that flows through several stages. Please engage with a critical mind, thinking your way through the texts quoted and listed. We must start our study with a definition of repentance. The answer to definition comes from both root meaning of a word and usage of the word within a specific context.

Repentance, the noun form, is translated from the Greek work *metanoia*. The Greek verb form is *meta-no-eh-oh* (another critically related verb, *epistrepho*, will not be treated here). The standard scholarly lexicon for New Testament Greek, named BDAG after an author list acronym, says this: "*metanoia* (*metanoeo*) primarily a 'change of mind,' also with the nuance of 'remorse' (as regret for shortcomings and errors); in [Biblical] literature with focus on the need of change in view of responsibility to deity: **repentance**, turning about, as turning away." Another resource says "a change of mind which results in a change of life(style)" (DBL Greek).

The repeated reference to "change" and "mind" comes from the roots of this compound word. "*Nous*" is Greek for *mind* or *understanding*. The prefix "*meta*" connotes the idea of *change*. Thus we can agree that the root meaning of the word centers on a "change of mind or understanding." This basic meaning holds true when we reference the New Testament. See the following texts:

Acts 8:20-22 ²⁰ But Peter said to [Simon the magician who offered to pay for the Spirit], "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!

²¹ "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² "Therefore *repent of this wickedness of yours*, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the *intention of your heart* may be forgiven you.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 ²⁴ The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵ with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them *repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth*, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

We see that clearly an internal resolve or change is in view. But as we look more closely at Scripture, we must ask a big question. Does the "change of mind" understanding of repentance capture all of what is found there? Does the root meaning full align with usage in context? In fact, we will find that New Testament usage of these terms represents repentance as more than just a change of mind. See Romans 2, for instance:

Romans 2:1-8 Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.

² And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. ³ But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do

the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶ who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: ⁷ to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; ⁸ but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

This reference to repentance follows the repeated use of “practice such things” and is followed by reference to a judgment of God rendered to each “according to his deeds.” This betrays what we will see in a majority of New Testament uses of “repent” and “repentance”: a vital link to actions, deeds and works. To test our hypothesis, try to understand these uses of the word apart from a context of actions.

Luke 17:3-4 ³ "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and *if he repents, forgive him.*

⁴ "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

Acts 26:19-20 ¹⁹ "So, King Agrippa, I [Paul] did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should *repent* and turn to God, *performing deeds appropriate to repentance.*

Paul to rebel church at Corinth: **2 Corinthians 12:20-21** ²⁰ For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; ²¹ I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over *many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.*

Hebrews 6:1-2 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of *repentance from dead works* and of faith toward God, ² of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

Hebrews 12:15-17 ¹⁵ See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; ¹⁶ that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found *no place for repentance*, though he sought for it with tears.

How could Esau's repentance simply be an internal change of mind in this text? Of course, repentance begins in the heart and mind, but again, it seems critically linked to actions.

Revelation 2:4-5 ⁴ 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and *repent and do the deeds you did at first*; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent.

Revelation 2:20-22 ²⁰ 'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. ²¹ 'I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. ²² 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they *repent of her deeds.*

What I see in these texts is a direct and vital link between the “change of mind” inherent in the root meaning of repentance with a tangible change of deeds, actions and works. To say that “real” repentance always produces deeds but is not the same thing as the deeds is difficult to justify logically. This clarified understanding of repentance continues in the several texts referencing the repentance of Nineveh at the preaching of Jonah (**Matthew 12:41; Luke 10:13; Luke 11:32**). The great city’s appropriation of sackcloth and ashes was ample evidence of their actions.

Based on Old Testament covenantal texts like **Deuteronomy 28-30**, this clarified understanding of the critical involvement of action also helps us with the Kingdom context surrounding the ministry and words of John the Baptist, texts replete with references to repentance.

Matthew 3:7-8 ⁷ But when [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

⁸ “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

John’s invitation is to the nation of Israel and specifically her religious and cultic leadership. The call is to repent and return to covenant faithfulness and obedience.

Luke 3:7-8 ⁷ So [John] began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ “Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

Peter speaking to the Jews in Antioch: **Acts 13:23-24** ²³ “From the descendants of this man [King David], according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, ²⁴ after John had proclaimed before His coming a *baptism of repentance* to all the people of Israel.

See also **Matthew 3:2; Matthew 3:11; Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:4; Mark 1:15; Mark 6:12; Luke 3:3; Acts 3:19; Acts 19:4** for more references to repentance in the ministry of John the Baptist and the Kingdom of God.

What does all of this mean? Having established a definition and context of usage, let us now discuss the practical implications of repentance. First, we must understand that repentance is for sinners, both saved and unsaved. While this inclusive conclusion may sound painfully obvious, its penetrating simplicity is often lost. In other words, repentance is not just for unbelievers. Repentance is God’s command and invitation regarding sin. We see this simple truth in the ample New Testament evidence that supports it.

Luke 5:31-32 ³¹ And Jesus answered and said to them, “It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. ³² “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

Paul to the Roman intellectuals on Mars Hill: **Acts 17:29-31** ²⁹ “Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. ³⁰ “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that *all people everywhere should repent*, ³¹ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

Paul’s words could not be clearer. God’s invitation is for all, everywhere.

Revelation 9:20-21 ²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of

brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; ²¹ and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts. Notice, yet again, the direct link between repentance and action in this passage.

Revelation 16:8-9 ⁸ The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. ⁹ Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory.

We've mentioned the preaching of Jonah above. His message to Nineveh was stubbornly brief: "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." (3:4) Whether or not the city believed *in* God for salvation, or more likely simply believed *that* God would do what He said He would do, the people's response was to fast and put on sackcloth and ashes. The King said that each should "turn from his wicked way and the violence which is in his hands." (3:7-8) When the Gospel writers recount this action as repentance, we should remember that the call was to unbelievers and their response could be seen in action.

The call of sinners to repent is probably not surprising. But Christians are also called to repent, and often in the New Testament. In addition to the texts of the Book of **Revelation 2-3** already mentioned, chapters written to churches, see:

Paul to the church at Corinth: **2 Corinthians 7:9-10** ⁹ I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. ¹⁰ For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

To the church at Pergamum: **Revelation 2:15-16** ¹⁵ 'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ 'Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

To the church at Sardis: **Revelation 3:2-3** ² 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. ³ 'So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

Notice the reference to "deeds" in verse 2. What is more, see the following verse with father/child language, again written to believers. It's one of my favorites.

To the church at Laodicea: **Revelation 3:18-19** ¹⁸ I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹ 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

As we continue, secondly, we must clearly see that repentance is absolutely critical for the life of discipleship. In other words, repentance is not just a one-time event. If anyone takes seriously the call of Jesus, with His apostles after Him, to follow Him, they must wrestle with the truths of repentance as often as possible, event moment by moment. Consider the short sampling of discipleship texts the follows. Even though they do not include the word repent/repentance, a change of mind linked with action is clearly promoted.

Romans 8:5-8 ⁵ For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For the mind set on the

flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,⁷ because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 12:1-2 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Ephesians 4:22-24²² that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,²⁴ and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

The wider context of **Ephesians 4:1-5:21** could be summed up with the idea of repentance. This is in the portion of the letter dedicated to our fellowship with God, our condition.

Colossians 3:5-11⁵ Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.⁶ For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience,⁷ and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.⁸ But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him--¹¹ a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.² For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;⁴ that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,⁵ not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;⁶ and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.⁷ For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.⁸ So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

We could easily fill a dozen pages with New Testament texts illustrating the central role of repentance in the life of discipleship. As you enjoy sitting with the Father and reading through your Bible, just keep your eyes open. You'll see it everywhere.

Finally, there are a handful of New Testament texts that are a bit more difficult to interpret. But with some hard work and theological precision, the contexts and intentions of these passages become clear. Some of them include references to forgiveness, baptism, salvation and life, which explain much of the difficulty. A proper understanding of these related terms and phrases as well as the syntax and vocabulary of the sentence helps us immensely. The inherent difficulty in all of the following texts arises primarily from the theological context and the assertions of the core teaching rather than the presence of the words repent or repentance.

Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus: **Luke 16:29-30** ²⁹ "But Abraham said [to the rich man now in torment], 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ "But [the rich man] said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' ³¹ "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

The rich man, a character in Jesus' story, clearly finds himself in Hades in fiery torment. He can clearly see Abraham from his location, with Lazarus, the previously poor beggar, near Abraham. The context makes all the difference as the story finds its root in instruction given to "Pharisees, who were lovers of money" and were "scoffing at" Jesus. The command for these Jewish leaders was to change their mind and their ways, returning to obedience to God's commands and covenants.

Acts 2:37-39 ³⁷ Now when they [men of Israel] heard this [Peter's sermon about the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection] they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" ³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

While some regard this text as an anchor text in demanding that baptism is necessary for salvation, I see it as a proper response to the recipients of Peter's sermon and their question. Peter's instructions involve elements relating primarily to sanctification and discipleship, thus repentance and baptism is expected.

Luke 24:45-47 ⁴⁵ Then [Jesus] opened their [the eleven disciples] minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance (for/and) forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Again, the link between repentance and forgiveness here is striking. The parenthetical option in the text represents a very subtle difference in a majority of manuscripts, replacing the "for" conjunction with "and." This perhaps illustrates a lower level connection between the two ideas, as Jesus' words possibly represent a more fully embodied discipleship rather than only salvation/justification.

Acts 5:29-31 ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered [the Jewish Sanhedrin Council], "We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. ³¹ "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

While difficult at the outset, this text clearly connects repentance to Israel, which is the perfect invitation to Jews who believed in the God of Abraham and His covenants.

Peter recounting to the Jerusalem church the conversion of Cornelius. **Acts 11:15-18** ¹⁵ "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶ "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" ¹⁸ When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

Paul to the Elders of the church at Ephesus. **Acts 20:18-21** ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, [Paul] said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that

was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house,²¹ solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of *repentance toward* God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Both texts from Acts represent the adequate response to the sin in a person's life. There are a few more difficult texts to examine.

Hebrews 6:4-6 ⁴ For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

"To what is it impossible for an apostate to be renewed? The writer said it is repentance, not forgiveness or salvation. Immediately the question arises whether this explanation is realistic since some believers who have departed from the truth have repented and returned to the fold of the faithful. I believe the writer meant that in the case of apostates, the really hard cases who are persistently hostile to Christ, it is impossible to restore such people to repentance (cf. **vv. 1, 3, 7-8**). [The word 'apostate' refers to extreme cases of departure from truth. We usually refer to less serious departure as 'backsliding.'] This inability to repent is the result of sin's hardening effect about which the writer had sounded a warning earlier (**3:13**). It is also the result of divine judgment (cf. Pharaoh, **Exod. 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17**). [The writer of Hebrews also wrote about three other impossible things. It is impossible for God to lie (**v.18**), for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (**10:4**), and for someone to please God without faith (**11:6**).]" (Tom Constable, Hebrews)

Texts like the following ones are difficult for some only because they reference death or "perish" as a description of temporal judgment by God or simply a premature physical death related to personal sin and rebellion. Repentance is the commanded response by God.

Jesus to the crowds concerning Gentile Roman rule of Israel: **Luke 13:1-5** Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? ³ "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴ "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? ⁵ "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

In the context of the Day of the Lord: **2 Peter 3:8-9** ⁸ But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

If there is any single chapter of the New Testament that comes to mind when discussing repentance, it is likely **Luke 15**. We will dismiss with the more familiar aspects of this great chapter as we point out those that remain critical for our purposes.

"Just as **1 Corinthians 13** is the classic New Testament chapter on love, and **Hebrews 11** is the classic chapter on the life of faith, just so **Luke 15** is the classic chapter on repentance. ...The misreading of the parables of **Luke 15** as though they applied to the salvation of sinners is very unfortunate. To be sure, it is wonderfully joyful when an

unsaved sinner gets saved. ...But it is not the joy described in these parables about repentance. To be saved, all the unsaved person needs to do is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (**Acts 16:31**)!" (Zane Hodges, *Harmony with God: A fresh look at Repentance*)

For sake of space, let it be said clearly that the context of all three of these parables, and in particular the final about the two sons, is clearly not about salvation from sin. The entire scene is set up by the fact that Jesus communes and eats with sinners. The professional "God-followers" of the day riot at the sight. "So [Jesus] told [the Pharisees and scribes] this parable, saying 'What man *among you*...'" **Luke 15:3** (emphasis added)

On the third story, Jesus, speaking again to the Pharisees about the sinners, says "A man had two sons." (**15:11**)

It is crystal clear that the "man" is a picture of Jesus or The Father. The "two sons" are clearly represented by those present: the Pharisees collectively and the sinners collectively. This is corroborated by the fact that the older son (arrogant Pharisees) is annoyed by the father's (Jesus') treatment of the younger, sinful son (the sinners). This is the whole point of the parable. It directly responds to the context set up in **15:1-3**.

Note the relationship of the three principal characters of the final parable. It is a father-son relationship. In fact, the father reacts strongly to the thought of the repentant younger son that he should be anything but a son. That is impossible. He was always a son. This is assumed and understood. Thus to say that the prodigal son "got saved" upon his return is to make two mistakes: first, to import a soteriological background to the parable, and second to misunderstand the clear sonship standing throughout.

The son's repentance restores him to fellowship with his father. This is where life is. That is why the father spoke of him as dead and lost. Being out of intimate fellowship with Our Heavenly Father is the context to which repentance is the only correct response. This conclusion gives an answer to the question in context.

"But though all this is true and sobering, it does not destroy the reality of the joy that should always be a part of the 'home-coming' of a repentant son. The parable assures us that God our Father always rejoices when one of His sons comes home. And if He does, so should we." (Hodges, *Harmony*)

The clear teaching of Scripture

Perhaps the most sacrosanct principle in Bible interpretation is to interpret isolated and unclear texts in light of the theological teaching of those texts that are consistent and crystal clear. While for the sake of space we did not engage the many sound arguments for their proper and unproblematic interpretation, when it comes to the few difficult texts mentioned above, this principle helps us immensely.

Suffice it here to say that salvation by faith alone in Christ alone remains the clarion call of the Scriptures, repeatedly confirmed by the church all the way back to the beginning. Any efforts, and there have been and are many, to add to this beautifully simple gospel have rightly been questioned and rejected. When speaking of justification, being declared righteous by God, the clear teaching of Scripture is that this declaration is gifted to the individual based on their believing trust in Jesus. That is the only condition. Bearing of fruit, changes in lifestyle, baptism and an observable repentance from actions and deeds are also completely Biblical, but clearly are not required for salvation from sin. The absolutely critical nature of these and many other Biblical responses must not be diminished, marginalized, dismissed or forgotten. They involve discipleship, sanctification, fellowship with God and life of purpose, holiness and ministry.

This must be stated and understood with great clarity. This is the firm teaching of Faith Bible church and the heart of the message of free grace.

"[Again, we] ask the question, if repentance is the internal resolve to turn from one's sins, is repentance a condition for receiving eternal life? And once again, we conclude, no. Repentance is not a condition for receiving eternal life, but it is a condition for possessing eternal life. By possessing eternal life we refer to enjoying a quality of life that only the believer in fellowship with God can have. Repentance is not about relationship, but it is about fellowship. In order to "get right with God," one must repent. If an unbeliever is in view, he must believe to receive the free gift of eternal life. He might repent before he believes or after he believes. It is his faith that saves him eternally, but it is his repentance which allows him to enjoy his faith. Repentance concerns fellowship." (Dave Anderson, *Repentance is for all men*: JOTGES 11:1)

Indulge one final piece of evidence to our conclusions regarding repentance. The Gospel of John is one of the few New Testament letters that includes an explicit statement of purpose and clearly the only Gospel to do so. The purpose is to share the good news of Jesus so that people put their faith in Him and find life in His name (**John 20:30-31**). The chief purpose of John is evangelistic. With this in mind, it should be worthy of note that the word repentance is not used in John anywhere, not once. Although some may say this is an argument from silence, it is more accurately an argument *about* silence. If, as some conclude, repentance is required, and therefore another condition of salvation from sin, why does the one Gospel explicitly devoted to this purpose completely omit it from its content? The Apostle John was very familiar with the term and concept of repentance as evidenced by the ample usage listed above in the Book of Revelation. This fact must be contended with and explained. Our synthesis above easily incorporates this critical piece of evidence.

In conclusion, it must also be noted that within the framework and boundaries described above, there is room for more specific division and discussion of repentance. Further study of other Greek words, such as the verb *epistrepho* as mentioned above, can be very helpful and enlightening to this incredibly useful study.

Appendix B:

Textual Criticism and The Ending of Mark

As we approach the difficult subject of the ending of Mark, perhaps a wider background study of the art and science of Textual Criticism will also be helpful to our study of the Gospel and the wider New Testament. We will first briefly discuss the ending of Mark and then explore a high-level discussion of Textual Criticism.

You may notice in your Bible, especially if you have any kind of Study Bible or a NASB, that after **Mark 16:8**, there is a notation of some kind or even a bracket ([]) that marks off the rest of the chapter in some way. This is so noted because there is a very rich history involving at least three moving parts. They are listed below as **Mark 16:8**, the “shorter ending” and “longer ending.” First, our oldest manuscripts of Mark end after **16:8**, “...for they were afraid.” The “longer ending” of **Mark 16:9-20** shows up in later manuscripts. A third piece of the puzzle is another ending that is often called the “shorter ending” of Mark. It sometimes appears after **verse 8** and sometimes after **verse 20** of the longer ending but is included with the longer reading in the Majority of manuscripts.

Mark 16:8: *...They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*

SHORTER ENDING: *And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.*

LONGER ENDING: ⁹ Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. ¹⁰ She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. ¹¹ When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it. ¹² After that, He appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country. ¹³ They went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either. ¹⁴ Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen. ¹⁵ And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. ¹⁷ “These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” ¹⁹ So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. ²⁰ And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.

Two of our most respected manuscripts end after **Mark 16:8**. These manuscripts enjoy old age and internal readings that reflect old age, in most cases around the Second Century. The shorter ending is most often included at some point in the longer ending, but is found without the longer ending in a few manuscripts of a later date.

Jerome and Eusebius, two important church fathers, however, know of almost no Greek manuscripts that contained the longer ending. As the decades proceed according to our manuscript dating, we begin to find notes in the margin of the text. Some of these notes say that older manuscripts that the scribe was familiar with did not have this section (v.9-20), while others include the longer ending but mark it off with asterisks or other notations, indicating that the scribes likely thought this section was not original. This “external evidence” map brings both the longer and shorter ending of Mark into question.

Looking at the Gospel of Mark alone, several scholars have concluded that the content, vocabulary and style of the longer ending read differently than the rest of the Gospel. This “internal evidence” thus seems to support an ending to the Gospel at **verse 8**, where the styles change. The above mentioned “external evidence” of manuscript tradition seems to agree. But why would the gospel end at **verse 8**? Why would scribes be inclined to add to it? Where did this additional text or information come from? While we can’t answer any of these questions definitively, there are good answers for each.

First, an abrupt ending to a life-story like the Gospel of Mark did have historical precedent. In fact, there are a host of examples in Greek literature of this kind of literary technique. It was employed as a way of bringing the readers into the story and making the genre transcend mere history or bios. It did away with the typical “the end” kind of last word and continued the story in the readers. This would obviously be something that readers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ would be interested and inclined to do.

Second, this abrupt ending technique is also obviously dangerous. In readers and copiers who do not understand the technique, it is very likely that some would question this ending. Was it cut off? Was the original ending lost? Did the John Mark, the original author, have a medical emergency before he finished? Invariably, these kinds of questions, especially as the decades after the original copy turned into centuries, led scribes to “solve” the problem by adding a shorter and/or longer ending.

Lastly, where did the material for these additional endings come from? This is very hard to answer. Since the vocabulary and style seem different, it is assumed that a different person authored them. We do not know who or when. While the content regarding snakes and poison seems a bit odd, it is absolutely critical, however, to note that nothing contained in the longer or shorter reading calls into question the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, the character of God, the gospel of grace, salvation by faith or any central doctrine of Scripture. Additionally, the inclusion of Mark’s version of a “Great Commission” also enjoys precedent in the other Gospels of the NT.

The footnote in the Nestle Aland 27th edition critical text of the Greek New Testament sums it up very well:

Because of such problems regarding the authenticity of these alternative endings [speaking of the internal and external evidence reviewed above], 16:8 is usually regarded as the last verse of the Gospel of Mark. There are three possible explanations for Mark ending at 16:8: (1) The author intentionally ended the Gospel here in an open-ended fashion; (2) the Gospel was never finished; or (3) the last leaf of the manuscript was lost prior to copying. This first explanation is the most likely due to several factors, including (a) the probability that the Gospel was originally written on a scroll rather than a codex (only on a codex [book form] would the last leaf get lost prior to copying); (b) the unlikelihood of the

manuscript not being completed; and (c) the literary power of ending the Gospel so abruptly that the readers are now drawn into the story itself. Ernest Best [Mark, 73] aptly states, "It is in keeping with other parts of his Gospel that Mark should not give an explicit account of a conclusion where this is already well known to his readers." The readers must now ask themselves, "What will I do with Jesus? If I do not accept him in his suffering, I will not see him in his glory." Double brackets have been placed around this passage to indicate that most likely it was not part of the original text of the Gospel of Mark. In spite of this, the passage has an important role in the history of the transmission of the text, so it has been included in the present translation.

It is also important to note that the longer reading has been attached to the Gospel of Mark for a very long time and thus enjoys a rich history in the Church. This "canonical criticism" approach to the longer reading sees **verses 9-20** as extremely important and worthy of study and discussion. Thus, if a student chooses to see this passage as un-original but extremely ancient and critical in the life of Mark's Gospel, she does so on good grounds.

Now, what is Textual Criticism?

Placing Textual Criticism

Since the goal of the Christian life is a fully orb'd life of faith, discipleship and mission, our first step must be to properly place the study of Textual Criticism in relationship to this goal and define it.

Simply put, our life of **discipleship** and faithfully following Jesus is built upon our understanding of the meaning of Scripture. This is called **exegesis** (knowing what a particular text means). Exegesis, in turn, is built on the study of **textual criticism** (knowing what a particular text says). These building blocks may look like this in relationship.



Textual Criticism is a critical step for one simple reason: the original text of our New Testament no longer exists. This brings us to definition.

"Textual criticism is the study of the copies of any written document whose autograph (the original) is unknown or nonexistent, for the primary purpose of determining the exact wording of the original." (Wallace, *Interpreting the New Testament Text*, 33)

By the Numbers

"The wealth of material available for determining the wording of the original New Testament is staggering... [By] comparison with the average ancient Greek author, the New Testament copies are well over a thousand times more plentiful. To put this another way, if the average-sized manuscript were two-and-a-half inches thick, all of the copies of the average Greek author would stack up four feet high, while the copies of the New Testament would stack up over a mile high. This is indeed an embarrassment of riches." (Wallace, *Ibid*, 43)

| <i>Greek Sources</i> | <i>Number of Copies</i> |
|--|---|
| Papyri (generally the oldest type of manuscript, extremely fragile) | = 118 |
| Majuscules (next oldest, Greek font in capital letters (uncial)) | = 317 |
| Minuscules (next oldest, Greek font in lower-case cursive letters) | = 2877 |
| Lectionaries (compiled readings for use in church worship) | = 2433 |
| Total | = 5745 (2006) = 5845 (as of March 2015) |

(Additionally; not counted in the mile-high illustration above)

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Versions (Scripture translated into other languages) | = 20,000+ |
| Quotations in the writings of the Church Fathers | = 1,000,000+ |

"Indeed, so extensive are these citations [in the writings of the Church Fathers] that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament." (Petzer, *Latin Version of the New Testament*)

When one takes all of this extensive evidence and compares it, the individual variations between them number in the tens of thousands. While this may sound alarming, this fact is mitigated by two factors: the overwhelming abundance of MSS evidence and the nature of the variants.

The NT enjoys, by far, a greater number of witnesses (MS evidence) than any other piece of ancient literature. Homer's *Iliad*, by example, is based on only 643 whole or partial copies. The New Testament enjoys nearly 6000, with additional evidence in translations and quotations, and more are being found all the time. Within this abundance the number and nature of variations in the text are also staggeringly unique. Suffice it here to say that the NT is a historical anomaly in this regard, statistically preserving near perfect agreement, from 95-99%.

| Author | Date Written | Earliest Copy | Number of Copies |
|------------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| Homer (<i>Iliad</i>) | 900 B.C. | 400 B.C. | 643 |
| Herodotus | 480-425 B.C. | A.D. 900 | 26 |
| Plato | 427-347 B.C. | A.D. 900 | 7 |
| Julius Caesar | 100-44 B.C. | A.D. 900 | 10 |
| Tacitus | A.D. 100 | A.D. 1100 | 20 |
| New Testament | A.D. 50-100 | A.D. 130 | 5800+ |

Three Types of Variants in the NT

1. **Insignificant Variants** – This is by far the largest group. These are represented most by spelling changes, most of which are nonsensical. Next are the transposition of words (Jesus Christ to Christ Jesus), use of synonyms, the presence or absence of articles (“the”) and so on. None of these make any difference whatsoever to the meaning of the text. They are non-factors.

Example: Consider the ways a Greek author could say “Jesus loves Paul.” Using strictly “Jesus,” “Paul” and one form of “love,” there are at least 16 ways to write this simple sentence. While there may be very subtle differences in emphasis, all say exactly the same thing. Consider now using different verbs for “love,” synonyms for Jesus like “Lord” or “Christ Jesus,” or even additional helping or introductory words. The possibilities have just increased exponentially.

2. **Significant but not Viable**– This second type of variant is dramatically smaller in number. These kinds of changes are often the inclusion of a word or several words that appear in a small number of manuscripts and are relatively easily explained. This speaks to viability, or a plausible claim to authenticity in the original.
3. **Meaningful and Viable** – By far the lowest number of variants fall in this category. This type is largely represented by the tendency for copying scribes to harmonize Gospel accounts, almost always by adding words or details to the shorter accounts instead of deleting details from the longer ones. With some TC principles we will discuss later, most of this type can be explained. Only about one percent (1%) of all textual variants change the meaning of the text to *some* degree.

A good example is the difference between an omega and an omicron (two Greek vowels) in the middle of the second person plural verb “to have” in connection with “peace” in **Romans 5:1**. The omega version makes the verb form subjective and is translated “let us have peace.” The omicron version makes the verb indicative and is translated “we have peace.” The different spellings would have been very simple to mistake while copying and both complete a real and common verb. The difference is considered meaningful even though no significant tenet of theology is at stake.

Process of Textual Criticism

“The threefold task of NT textual criticism involves: (1) gathering and organizing the evidence, including especially the collation (comparison) of manuscripts with one another, in order to ascertain where errors and alterations have produced variations in the text; (2) evaluating and assessing the significance and implications of the evidence to determine which of the variant readings most likely represents the original text; and (3) reconstructing the history of the transmission of the text to the extent allowed by the evidence.” (Holmes, *Introducing New Testament Interpretation*, 53)

These steps will help organize our understanding of the process. We’ve already mentioned the acquisition and organization of the evidence. Comparison of the texts has been accomplished for discovered texts and still continues for manuscripts recently discovered, as in the case of a collection of ancient papyri uncovered in the vaults of Oxford University. Evaluation of the evidence is the difficult and somewhat subjective task at hand. Finally we attempt to make decisions based on the evidence.

Approaches to the methods and practice of TC break down into three camps, generally speaking. These camps represent practices that give differing amounts of weight and credence to the two main kinds of evidence: internal and external evidence.

Internal Evidence

Internal evidence applies *directly to the scribes and editors involved in the transcription process*. Scribal work was a terribly technical, detail-oriented enterprise, as one may expect. Imagine your profession, with its attached income, is a scribe. This means that almost every day you sit at a long stone or wood table inside a scriptorium, where you, by the light of oil lamps or wax candles, copy the ancient Hebrew or Greek text from one document (the parent) to another blank piece of paper or parchment (the child). You do so one or two letters at a time, taking several precautions to make sure what you write is exactly what is written. However, you are also very familiar with the text you are copying. This time, it happens to be the Gospel of Mark. You are also extremely familiar with the Gospel of Matthew and Luke. There are times in this tedious process that your mind goes to another similar Scripture passage in Matthew. You also are very fatigued and the light is typically bad. Letters begin to look alike and sometimes you skip a word or a letter. Sometimes you skip a whole line as your mind goes on autopilot. All of these “hypothetical” scenarios actually happened in the transcription process. These are all factors of internal evidence, *factors directly applying to the scribes or editors of the copied text*.

When it comes to these common factors of internal evidence, consider this cleverly written illustration from David Parker in *The Living Text of the Gospels*. It illustrates both how easily these issues could have occurred, and how intuitively we can overcome them.

Everybody who reads the newspaper is expert in textual criticism, in coping with those distictive errors of omssion and displaced lines, and jumbling of leterset. This sophisticated process of recognizing nonsense and picking up the sense is so natural to us the classical scholars of ancient Alexandria or the Benedictines of that we perform it without thinking, unaware of our kinship with St. Maur. Textual criticism is not an arcane science. It belongs to all human communication.

Of course the errors and misplaced lines (lines 5 and 6 are transposed) in the above block quote are intentional on Parker’s part and hopefully serve as an ingenious example of how intuitive some of the principles of TC are. Read it a second time and most will understand all of Parker’s intended meaning.

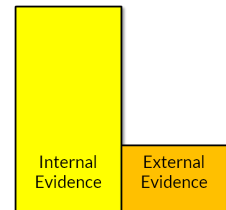
External Evidence

Matters pertaining to *the manuscripts themselves*, such as the relative date of the manuscript, the geography attached to the manuscript or text-type or tradition, the genealogical relationship between the manuscripts according to text-types, are all factors of external evidence. That is, they don’t relate directly to the letters and words of the written text. These factors are behind the scenes, related to critical background information.

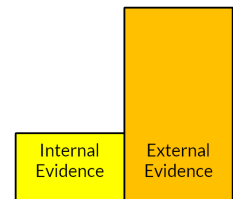
Three approaches

The following approaches arise from differing weight given to the two kinds of evidence mentioned above.

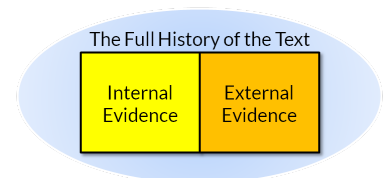
Rigorous Eclecticism is generally the term applied to those scholars and textual critics that “relies almost exclusively on internal considerations and places little if any weight on external evidence, treating the MSS as” a gathering place for readings that are evaluated on other grounds (Holmes, 55). Eclectic refers to the idea that each factor is treated individually.



The **Majority Text** approach is on the other end of the spectrum, giving considerable more weight to external evidence than internal. This view argues, with some credibility, that errors and un-original readings tend towards isolation in the family tree of MS transmission. Thus, this approach seeks to give weight to any variant reading that is supported by a majority of the MS evidence. While consideration still must be given to internal evidence, this view has sound reasoning and good examples on its side.



Finally, as you would expect, a middle-ground approach exists that is typically called **Reasoned Eclecticism**. Holmes, again, argues that, “if one take the history of the text seriously, it becomes impossible to rely entirely upon either external or internal criteria alone. Instead, depending upon the facts in any given instance, a reasoned eclecticism applies a combination of internal and external considerations.” (Holmes, 55)



Principles of Textual Criticism

The process we have been discussing can be condensed into several helpful principles to the student and practitioner of textual criticism, the three most important of which appear below in blue. They include, but are not limited to the following:

1. **All existing NT manuscripts are corrupt in some way.** That is, because we do not have any original copy of any NT book, each existing manuscript is a copy, and in most cases a copy of a few generations. Thus, because of human error, each fails to represent perfectly the content of the original.
2. **Not all NT manuscripts are equally corrupt.** That is, each manuscript should be investigated independently and weighed accordingly.
3. **Clear errors in copying of manuscripts tend towards isolation** instead of reproduction. That is, since scribes seem to be “thinking” and “assessing” the text as they copy, it is reasoned that *clear* errors in the parent manuscript used by scribes would be corrected instead of passed on. This is a central tenet for the Majority Text approach.
4. **If a particular variant harmonizes parallel readings it is probably not authentic** (especially in the Gospels). This is based on the working, and often verifiable assumption that scribes tend to harmonize parallel accounts by adding details to the shortest reading.

5. **The shorter reading is preferred** over the longer. Based on the above principle, TC finds that the text of NT has microscopically grown over the centuries. The longer reading is typically more easily explained through efforts to harmonize, thus the shorter reading is preferred. This principle is, with the next, the most important in TC.
6. **The harder reading is preferred** over the easier. That is, the variant that is more difficult to explain tends to be authentic. This follows logically from above as scribes tend to smooth out perceived difficulties rather than create them. This principle, with the previous, is the most important in TC.
7. **The reading which best accounts for the existence of other readings is preferred.** Again, this follows logically from above as shorter readings are expanded to harmonize and harder readings are smoothed out to explain. This is perhaps the mother principle in textual criticism.

Glossary of Terms

Abbreviations:

MS = Manuscript (singular)

MSS = Manuscripts (plural)

NT = New Testament

TC = Textual Criticism

Autograph – The original document. The first/final document written by the original author in the original setting.

Codex – A book. While papyrus and its successors were common writing materials, the scroll apparatus was most popular. With the advent of paper and the like, bound books became more popular based on their convenience of use. Some of our most important NT MSS are in the form of a codex (plural = codices). Codex Sinaiticus, a complete copy of the whole NT in majuscule form, and Codex Vaticanus, not as complete as Sinaiticus, are among the most important codices for TC (both majuscule MSS). They are both from the Fourth Century, over 1600 years old.

Eclectic text – For our discussion, this describes a Bible translation that has relied on diverse manuscript evidence and has made decisions on variants on a case by case basis. Most modern translations fall in this category.

Exegesis – The art and science of determining the meaning of a text. For our discussion, this involves work with the original language of the NT and a careful, methodical study of context, syntax, vocabulary, theology and purpose.

Extant – Existing. For our discussion, this word refers to MSS that we can touch, see and study.

Lectionary – A collection of assigned Scripture readings for appointed days in the life of the church. These compilations began to arise as the church became more organized and less persecuted (4th century or so). Although they do not contain whole books of the NT, their coverage of texts is wide and very helpful.

Majuscule – Also called an uncial, this is an early Greek MS written in capital letters, often without any spaces between words. They began to be produced in the Fourth Century. The earliest complete NT, codex Sinaiticus, is a majuscule MS.

Manuscript – For our discussion, a written copy of part or the whole of the NT. Some MS copies are small fragments no bigger than a child's hand containing only part of a verse. Others are books that contain the whole of the NT. Manuscripts are of several common types: papyrus scroll, vellum scroll, leather, paper scroll and paper codex. Each ancient manuscript is catalogued and numbered for ease of reference; a capital P designates a papyrus MS, whereas numbers, Greek or Hebrew letters designate most of the rest.

Minuscule – A Greek manuscript written in lower-case cursive letters. These begin to appear after the majuscule and form the great majority of NT MSS at 2877 in number.

NA27 – Nestle Aland 27th Edition. This is an eclectic Greek New Testament that contains an extensive collection of the most important textual variants in an "apparatus" that appears at the bottom of every page.

Nomina Sacra – Literally "holy name." This phrase refers to the prevalent use of abbreviations for revered names in the Greek manuscripts, usually names and titles of Jesus, God, Holy Spirit, etc. For example, by using the first and last letter of each word and denoting it with a line above, the name *Jesus* ΙC ΧC
Christ in Greek becomes:

These abbreviations are often the source of some significant text critical studies.

Papyri – For our discussion, a very important group of ancient NT MSS named after the material the MS is made from. Papyrus is a primitive form of writing material made from a reed-like plant that grew near rivers, mostly the Nile River. It was very fragile and did not stand up well to time and the elements. We have 118 NT papyri, the earliest one dating from AD 100-150 (P52). We have about 15 papyri dating to this time frame, which is amazing. Beginning in the Third Century (AD 200-299) we find a steady stream of papyri witnesses to the NT. The most important papyri for TC are the Chester Beatty papyri (P45 and P46) and the Bodmer papyri (P66 and P75).

Scribe – A dedicated copier of texts. Scribes often worked in *scriptoriums*, special rooms with long tables, ink wells and candlelight. They would slowly, methodically and carefully copy one text (the parent) onto another piece of writing material (the child). They regularly did so letter by letter, or two letters at a time, often with strict methods of checking for accuracy. Biblical scribes often felt the added pressure of handling the inspired Word of God. However, the scribal process had several significant hindrances: familiarity with the text and parallel texts, a desire to improve and smooth out the text as well as simple fatigue, poor lighting and the common mistakes of a very human process such as this.

Textual Criticism – The art and science of determining what a text says. This study is necessary when the original version, or autograph, of an ancient text is no longer extant. It involves the process of determining the original wording of a text through the careful study and comparison of all extant copies of the original.

Text-type – A collection or family of MSS that are generally share common features, patterns, geographical origins and traits in their variant readings. Perhaps it is most helpful to think of this in terms of a large family tree over many generations. Text-type can be understood as a section of that family tree that begins to take on its own characteristics, appearances and even language over time. Certain traits and customs passed on in this section of the tree may not influence other parts of the family. For NT TC there are three major text-types:

Western Text-type – A family of MSS produced especially from Rome and the west. This family began in the Second Century. Along with the Alexandrian, this family is often given heavier influence.

Alexandrian Text-type – A family of MSS produced especially from Egypt. This family began in the Second Century. Along with the Western, this family is often given heavier influence. The Alexandrian Text-type breaks down further into Primary and Secondary text-types.

Byzantine Text-type – A family of MSS produced mostly in the East. A later family based largely on Western and Alexandrian texts.

Transcription – This is the process by which a scribe copies a parent text. See Scribe above.

Translation – see Version.

Uncial – See Majuscule

Variant – Within the study of TC, any difference whatsoever in the comparison in the text of one manuscript to another (Examples: manuscript A reads “*Jesus Christ*” and manuscript B reads “*Christ Jesus*,” this is a variant reading in word order.) There are different classes and types of variants such as word order, omission, addition, spelling errors, as well as more easily explained scribal errors, etc.

Version – For our discussion this is another word for a translation of the Greek text of the NT, all or part, into another language. The versions, especially the Latin, have some limitations for their usefulness in determining what the Greek parent text actually was, but they also offer many great benefits. For example, there are roughly twice as many Latin manuscripts of the NT (10,000) than there are Greek (5700).

Resources

For more information and reading materials, see the following:

Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, Oxford University Press, 1968.

Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning, editors: *Interpreting the New Testament Text*, Crossway Books, 2006.

Scot McKnight, editor: *Introducing New Testament Interpretation*, Baker Books, 1989.

Appendix C:

How to study the Bible

I remember taking an exam upon my entrance to Dallas Theological Seminary. It is infamous among the student body. The goal of the test was to calculate our Biblical and theological knowledge at the beginning of our seminary career. We all take the exact same exam as we exit and graduate. The difference between the two scores is supposed to quantify the knowledge we gained during our tenure there. Whether or not the test adequately fulfills its intended goal, I remember approaching the first exam, as a first-year student, with wide-eyed and arrogant enthusiasm, was going to break the seminary records, of course. In fact, there would be an unprecedented hustle behind the large computerized scan-tron scoring machine when they entered my score card. "Something must be wrong," the technician would say. "No one has ever scored this high on the first test. There must be a mistake." So they would run it through again and yes, there was a mistake. The score would come out higher the second time.

Reality humbled me.

I had to gently hound an administrator for my scores and eventually she only reported the percentile of all test results in which I fell. It was nowhere near the top. In fact, it was right smack in the middle of ordinary. I was the vanilla of average.

But what I soon discovered was that my ordinary experience and understanding of the Bible would be transformed into an overwhelming affection for God and His Word. The truth slowly resurrected my heart and mind to the Scriptures. It was a beautiful beginning to a brand new adventure, no seminary admission or diploma required.

Perhaps you find yourself on a similar wrung of the knowledge/experience ladder. Perhaps you are miles ahead or even on the very first one. It doesn't matter. God's desire is that we all make progress in our relationship with Him, getting to know Him and love Him more each day. We do this by spending time with God, listening to Him and talking back. We spend time with Him primarily by spending time in His Word. So let's get to it.

The hope for this brief reference is to both aid and inspire the Christian of any age and experience to fall in love with God all over again through study of His Word. As with many of the other things I write, please consider this a tool. Use it as you see fit. It can become anything from a one-time reference to a slow-paced workbook. Whatever form it takes, the goal is the same: equip you to enjoy God through His Word on a consistent basis.

What is Bible study exactly? We talk about it and use these words often, but what do they mean? Why would we ever approach something like God's Word in a patterned, or methodical, way? Doesn't that seem artificial? Forced?

Yes, it can seem that way. To be honest that is a danger in Bible study. It has happened to many in the past. Very often theological students, pastors and professors of Bible or theology slowly, over a period of years or decades, begin to view the Bible primarily as a textbook, a code to be cracked, an experiment to be analyzed or even like a dead pear tree that they are desperately trying to bring back to life. Yes, this is a danger.

But let's be honest yet again. This danger is not imminent for most of us. Most of us tip-toe on the edge of the opposite danger, the one on the other end of the spectrum from dry academics. I'm talking about an intimidation and even fear of reading the Bible at all. Perhaps rather than intimidation, you struggle with simply lack of desire, indifference or even antagonism towards the Scriptures. If so, you are in ample company.

The truth about the Scriptures is far from either of these extremes. It is anything but dead and boring academics. Although it has ineffable depth and beauty, it is not a lifeless experiment fit only for a laboratory, lecture hall or library. Nor does God intend His Word to be intimidating or fearful. Yes, in its pages there are high cliffs to be climbed, dangerous waters to be navigated and sharp swords that pierce and challenge, but every page welcomes the most inexperienced youth as well as the seasoned scholar. That is its beauty. This feature makes the Bible the most unique piece of literature in human history. There is quite simply nothing that comes close.

Why Methods?

The word "methods" is indeed plural because there are many approaches and it involves many steps. Why a method? Why would one need steps or procedures to study the Scriptures? That is a great question. The answer is in the goal of our study of the Bible. The end result of Biblical study is the most important aspect of it. Where do we want to end up? What is the specific goal?

I would submit that the following popular goals, even though some are good, are not best:

- Knowledge to teach
- Knowledge to evangelize
- Knowledge for prideful reasons such as superiority, comparison, competition or argument
- Knowledge that fuels self-improvement

The following goals, although not exhaustive, represent God's intention for our study of His Word:

- Increased love for God
- Increased worship of God
- Life-change by the transforming work of God's Holy Spirit
- Increased capacity to represent God well by becoming more like His Son Jesus
- To familiarize ourselves with *The Refuge of Truth* and there find consolation, guidance and hope

Let me belabor the point in one final illustration. The difference between these two lists of goals is the reason why we have a method. A specific method of study produces a corresponding product or result. Generally speaking, assume that if we do A and B then we will produce C. And if we do X and Y then we will produce Z. We would never then intentionally try to produce Z by attacking A and B. A specific method or approach produces a corresponding product. So it is with study of our Bible.

Can you imagine the kind of study method that is geared toward the first list? It would focus on answering questions, memorization for the sake of conversation ammunition and a potential focus on legalism and self-righteousness.

Now can you imagine the kind of method that will intentionally produce the second list? It will be focused on the hard work of understanding God's intentions in every passage of the Scriptures, asking questions, application in worship and life-change as well as a reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the kind of method we are after. We want to realize these kinds of goals in our study of the Bible.

There are two approaches to Bible study: Bottom-up or Top-down. These are generally spoken of as Inductive and Deductive, respectively. **Inductive Bible Study**, the bottom-up approach, begins by observing the details of the Bible and examines them unto their logical conclusion. It allows the Bible to take the lead, or do the talking, so to speak. Inductive Bible study is the kind of study we will be discussing in this document.

However, **Deductive Bible Study** is also useful in its own way. It begins with a proposed conclusion and tests it by studying the details of Scripture. That is why it is described as a top-down method. This method, while useful for areas of Systematic Theology, can be significantly troublesome in the pulpit and in personal study because of the danger of talking to the text, instead of letting the text do the talking. As is clear from the descriptions, Inductive study is the best approach for overall effectiveness.

What is the Method?

Solid Inductive Bible Study method has at least four steps. These steps build on each other and guide the student to the best goals of the study. The steps are **Observation, Interpretation, Correlation** and **Application**.

Even though you may recognize and understand these words, do not be discouraged by the fact that they all rhyme and seem about as much fun as power-washing your driveway. These multi-syllabic steps are actually life-giving and exciting. Trust me. Or just stick with me long enough to see it for yourself.

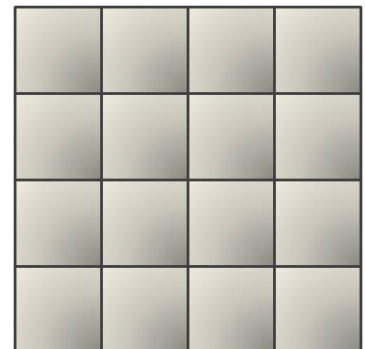
Observation

The first step in good Bible study is the most forgotten. It also happens to be the most important. Generally, most readers of the Bible jump from simple reading to matters of interpretation. They want to know *what it means*. Isn't that the point after all? Yes, but interpretation is only part of the whole story. We actually need much more than that. And in order to get more, we must begin with observation. Simply put, the better our observation of the text, the easier and more effective the rest of the steps will be.

Wait a second. I'm supposed to observe the Bible? Are you talking about biblical ornithology? (That's *bird watching*, by the way.) And, no I'm not talking about observation like someone looking through binoculars at a woodpecker. But observation like a scientist is not far off from the intention of this step. **Observation** in Bible study simply means that you pay patient attention to the details of the text. You read and reread. You look for key words, main verbs, connectors and maybe learn more about the English language in the process. Honestly, I didn't understand English well until I became a serious student of my Bible.

Let me quote Dr. Mark Bailey from Dallas Seminary on observation. "The more time you spend in observation, the less time you have to spend in interpretation and the fewer mistakes you will make." He says further, "The more adequate your observations, the more accurate your interpretations and the more effective your applications." As you can see, observation is vital.

Are you a good observer? Do you notice details? This comes more easily for some of us than others. Some of us dreamt about laboratory experiments as a kid. Many of us love the modern phenomenon of crime-investigative television, where we have to follow the clues to ascertain the truth. This is observation. If those well-dressed investigators drove their expensive SUV's to the crime scene but didn't do the hard work of observation, the show would be frustrating and brief. Are you a good observer? For example, look at the geometric image on the right. How many squares do you see? Think about it.



If your answer is in the teens, then you are way off.

If you observe that there are actually squares in the image that are larger than the smallest square (for instance there are sixteen small squares and nine 2x2 squares, etc.), then you will begin to get closer to the correct answer, which is thirty. This is just a simple example of how challenging observation can be.

In my first year of seminary, I took a class called Bible Study Methods, or *Hermeneutics*. One of our assignments in the class was to apply our study methods to **Acts 1:8**. "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends*

*Open my eyes, that I may behold
wonderful things from Your law.*

Psalms 119:18

of the earth.” We were assigned 25 observations based “exclusively on what you see in Acts 1:8.” Luckily my professor stopped there. Dr. Howard Hendricks would often make his students write 50, and follow it up with another 50.

Maybe you could take a stab at it. How many can you come up with? Remember, these are not interpretations, but simple observations. Let’s talk more about what observation is in Bible Study.

What exactly do I observe?

Observation of the Biblical text happens on an expanding scale from single terms, to multiple word phrases, to sentences, to sentence groupings, to paragraphs, to groups of paragraphs or chapters, to an entire letter or book.

Do you believe that every single word in the Scriptures is important? Do you believe that even the single-letter article “a,” as in “hammered a nail” is significant? In reality, the presence of an “a” instead of “the” can be extremely important in the proper context. Picture a hunky C.S.I. finding one unusual fiber in the middle of an oriental rug at the crime scene. It could break open the case.

As you practice Observation of a Biblical text, try to pay attention to:

Unusual, Difficult, Rare or Theological Words – These kinds of terms are usually significant. Some words appear only once in the entire Bible. Some were perhaps created by the author for a specific usage, such as the single word “*abundantly-overflowing*” in **1 Timothy 1:14**. Even in your English translation, if you can’t remember seeing that word or phrase often, that may be a clue that it is important and worthy of a closer look. Think about “*propitiation*” in **1 John 2:2**.

Repeated Words – Some words are repeated throughout a paragraph or even a whole letter. These are very often key terms in the overall theme and argument of the author. For instance, the word “*immediately*” appears 39 times in the 16 chapters of the **Gospel of Mark**. He is clearly trying to choreograph a high-action and fast-paced retelling of the Jesus story. What about the word “*better*” in the book of **Hebrews**, especially **chapter 11**?

Connecting Words – When the contrastive “*but*” begins a sentence rather than a coordinating “*and*,” there is a significant difference that must be noted. Look for connectors that identify *timing or temporal* connections, *emphasis*, *geographical or local* connectors, and *logical* connectors that help identify *reason*, *result*, *purpose*, *contrast*, *comparison*, etc. These words tend to be on the small side, but their impact on Bible Study is huge. How important is the word “*therefore*” in **Romans 12:1**? Other connecting words include, but are not limited to: likewise, also, consequently, yet, since, then.

Main Verbs – Verbs, or action words, carry the main thrust of a sentence. They are the heavy lifters in written literature. Identifying the difference between a main verb and supporting verbs

is key. Verb tense is also a key feature to determine (past, present, future). The subject of the verb, verbal force, verb tense and object of the verb (person/thing acted upon) are all key features to identify.

Structure – Often the way a sentence is structured is important. For instance, word order can easily reflect emphasis; words at the beginning or reserved for the very end of a sentence are often placed there for sake of added emphasis. (English translations like the *New American Standard* work to retain the word order of the original text even when difficult, and can be helpful here.) Look also for a “piling up” or multiplication of adjectives (words modifying a noun), similar verbs, or adverbs (words modifying a verb) within sentences. This is another element of structure that needs to be noted.

Relationship – For lack of a better term, this feature describes how phrases or sentences relate to one another. They are also described as elements of literary composition. For example, phrases or groups of phrases can serve within any of the following *relationships* in a sentence: *Comparison, contrast, repetition, continuation, cause, means, introduction, summarization*, etc. This describes how the phrases interact or relate to each other. **Matthew 6** is a great chapter to study this feature of observation in all of the ways listed above and many more.

Beyond these beginning steps, observation on the level of **context, logic** and **argument** are also extremely important when studying a larger section or whole book. These come with practice and experience at laboring to understand and evaluate what is written “between the lines” so to speak. The author communicates his intended meaning not only through specific words but more importantly through specific arguments placed in a specific context and according to references, reason and logic. Although it may sound distant, observation on this level is not out of reach for even a junior high student. It simply takes patience, attention to detail and critical thinking. Oh, and, as I said, practice.

Practice

Working the step of observation can be frustrating for those of us accustomed to functioning in an *immediate* world. We often seek the quickest, most convenient way of doing things. Waiting is not good. This may be why most of us are unfamiliar with observation in Bible Study. It takes time and effort. Perhaps this **Observation outline** will be helpful

1. Read the passage slowly. Then read through it several more times, prayerfully, thoughtfully.
2. Ask as many questions of the passage as possible. (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?)
3. Observe words.
4. Observe structure and relationship.
5. Try to identify the heart of the passage. What is the central word, phrase or sentence?
6. Observe how the other words, phrases and sentences relate to/support this central heart?

7. Work back down from high-level structure and heart to the details again.
8. Discard unimportant detail or observation and summarize your work by restating it.

Try these texts to start honing your skills of observation.

- **1 Samuel 5:1-12**
- **Luke 10:25-37**
- **Mark 3:1-6**
- **Matthew 17:1-13**
- **John 9:1-11**
- **Ephesians 4:1-10**

Interpretation

Unlike Observation, this second step is very familiar. In the step of **Interpretation**, we begin to ask questions concerning *meaning*. What does this text mean? You may enjoy the conversation that Lewis Carroll dreamt up between Alice and Humpty Dumpty. It speaks, even if rather comically, to the idea of meaning.

...As I was saying, that *seems* to be done right—though I haven't time to look it over thoroughly just now—and that shows that there are three hundred and sixty-four days when you might get un-birthday presents"

"Certainly," said Alice.

"And only *one* for birthday presents, you know. There's *glory* for you!"

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knockdown argument,' " Alice objected.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

Alice was too much puzzled to say anything, so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. "They've a temper, some of them—particularly verbs: they're the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, I can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That's what I say!"

"Would you tell me, please," said Alice, "what that means?"

"Now you talk like a reasonable child," said Humpty Dumpty, looking very much pleased. "I meant by 'impenetrability' that we've had enough of that subject, and it would be just as well if you'd mention what you mean to do next, as I suppose you don't mean to stop here all the rest of your life."

"That's a great deal to make one word mean," Alice said in a thoughtful tone.

"When I make a word do a lot of work like that," said Humpty Dumpty, "I always pay it extra."

"Oh!" said Alice. She was too much puzzled to make any other remark.
Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

So, if given the chance, we might object as Alice did. Who determines meaning? Does the reader of a document determine its meaning? Hopefully not. This would lead to an extremely relative interpretation, which can be extremely problematic. Unfortunately, this is a popular approach in group Bible study. One will often ask, "What does this text mean to you?" What if someone understands one meaning and another a contradictory or disparate meaning? There must be a more reliable way to get to the true *intended* meaning.

Better than the reader's intent is the author's and text's intent. The author of a text and the text itself should determine its meaning. That is, not what we think the author "meant to say," but what he actually did say and write in the document. Combined with a true understanding of the Bible's Inspiration by the Holy Spirit, this approach is the most objective and reliable. (See **2 Peter 1:20-21**)

Luke 24 is an envious account of Jesus "explaining" to two men all of the things concerning Himself found in the Scriptures. What a wonderful conversation to have eavesdropped on. The word "explained" is where we get the term *Hermeneutics*. It is the science and art of interpretation. And again to quote Howard Hendricks, it is the primary need of Bible study: "To determine what God meant by what God said." Bernhard Ramm has said it in a more expansive way: "The primary and basic need of [bible study methods is] to ascertain what God has said in Sacred Scripture; to determine the meaning of the Word of God."

How Exactly Do I Interpret?

Picture a birthday or anniversary present wrapped in several layers of paper. To get to the treasure inside, you must first unwrap each layer. This is similar to Biblical Interpretation. The first and most important layer is the immediate context of the passage including the basic paragraph where the text is found. The second layer is the wider context of the larger section or whole book. The last layer of interpretation is a study of the context of literature, culture, history, etc. that is outside of our Bible. The gift inside the wrapping is the meaning as God intended it to be communicated to us.

| |
|---|
| <p>"Then [Jesus] opened their minds to understand the Scriptures..." Luke 24:45</p> |
|---|

Let's look at this first and most critical step: the immediate text or passage and its context.

The Labor of Interpretation

There is significant work to be done in interpreting a Biblical passage of any size. This is true because the Bible was written long ago, in another place, in another culture, in other languages, in a different literary genre and style, and by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Each of these truths represents a considerable gap or hurdle that we must overcome in our interpretation of a text. To again quote Bernhard Ramm, "The second great need for a science of [bible study methods] is to bridge the gap between our minds and the minds of the Biblical writers."

Time – The Bible was written over a period of 1500 years, and the final part almost 2000 years ago. When was this specific book, letter, or prophecy written?

Place – Geography weaves its way into culture and language in intricate and delicate ways.

Culture – The Ancient Near East and Greco-Roman cultures of the OT and NT are alien to ours. Again, when was this specific book or letter written? Who is the author? Why was he writing it?

Language – Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek are clearly and adequately represented by English translations, but translation from one language to another inevitably loses some nuance of the original.

Literary – We do not often confuse newspaper articles with novels or personal emails with science fiction. These represent different genres of literature that are distinct. The OT and NT also contain distinct genres of writing, each with corresponding characteristics that are crucial for interpretation. Biblical Genres include: Historical narrative (**1 Samuel**), prophecy (**Amos**), wisdom (**Proverbs**), poetry (**Psalms**), gospel [often also called a *bios* or life-story] (**John**), epistle (**Galatians**), apocalyptic (**Revelation**). What makes this more complex is that often a particular book includes multiple genres. **Revelation** for instance is made up of epistolary, prophetic and apocalyptic genres; perhaps others.

Supernatural – The mysterious work of the Holy Spirit, both to write truth through a human author and communicate that truth to the mind of the Christian reader, is yet another facet in our interpretation because in this step we are asking this same Holy Spirit to teach, illuminate and convey meaning.

But, wait just a second here.

Interpretation shouldn't be this hard. Isn't the meaning of the text plain? Isn't it obvious?

In a word, yes.

But also, no.

These gaps represent significant difficulties in many texts that we read. The problem is really this: with any given text, the meaning is BOTH plain and deep. This is the nature of a Divine book. God is not trying to *hide* meaning, so it should be plain. But it is the Holy Spirit of the

eternal God that wrote this Scripture through the human authors and so it is always deeper and more *meaning-ful* than we expect. Add to this the difficulties of the gaps, and we've got a significant but joyous task before us. Below we see how much more meaningful the text becomes when we bridge the gaps.

Try this passage on for size.

Matthew 19:3 *Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?"*

This is simple isn't it? The Pharisees were asking Jesus about divorce. True.
They were questioning Him about legal reasons to allow a divorce. True.
They were asking Him if any reason is acceptable for a divorce. True.
Here this meaning is plain. It is obvious.

However, what you may not know unless you labor to understand the culture, background and language of the text is that a divorce "for any reason" had a long and colorful background among the Jews of Jesus' day. It was actually a specific kind of divorce, a "for-any-reason-divorce." Because of a rabbinical teaching tradition based off of **Deuteronomy 24:1ff**, certain Jews thought it was legal for a man to divorce his wife literally "for any reason at all." If she burnt supper, and it displeased him, he could divorce her. If he didn't like the color of her dress...well, you get it. This information makes the Pharisees' question and Jesus' response much more *meaning-ful* and interesting. This background only comes by the hard work of interpretation, bridging the gaps.

Tools of Interpretation

Just like observation tools, there are a small bag of implements that help us understand meaning in interpretation. Here are a few of the big-hitters.

Meditation – Just like with observation, the step of interpretation is best served with a healthy helping of patience. We must become accustomed to slowing down when we study our Bible. We must be patient investigators of the beautiful truth that God reveals in His Word. It is worth it.

Logical Flow/Argument – Each and every text was written by the human author with Divine inspiration by the Holy Spirit. This means that every sentence has a point, a goal, and is part of a larger argument or logical flow. Discovering and maintaining this big picture logic while zooming in on the pieces is the task of admiring the forest AND the trees. This is also the most dismissed and overlooked piece of interpretation in my opinion. It is difficult at first, but with practice it can be second nature.

Word Studies – Don't be intimidated by this idea. To study a word is not just for seminary students or egg-heads. Meanings and usage of individual words are absolutely critical to interpretation. Words also, and almost always, contain an instructive range of meaning. The

GOAL is to *discover* the meaning of words, NOT to *assign* words with meaning. This is a critical distinction.

With some simple resources listed below, try to study words in this simple way:

1. How is this word used in the sentence?
2. Is this specific word used elsewhere in the immediate context? How?
3. Is this word used elsewhere in the same book/letter? How?
4. Is this word used elsewhere by the same author? How?
5. Is this word used elsewhere by other authors?
6. How does this information help me clarify meaning in the passage I am studying?

This simple format of word study will open up an unexpected beauty in your study of God's Word.

Figures of Speech – Break a leg. I'm not sure where that came from, but we recognize it for what it is. We are not hoping for someone to snap their femur, but actually to do well. This is a figure of speech and the Bible is full of them. To understand them in their context and culture will reveal their intent. The most common figures are simile (uses "like") and metaphor, but there are many other kinds. Example: What does "cause your face to shine" mean in **Psalms 80** and **Deuteronomy 6:25**?

Person/Place Names – These are often very meaningful, especially in the Old Testament. A good Bible will often help you with these meanings and translations in the margin. Example: What does the name "Isaac" mean and how does it relate to the story in **Genesis 18 and 21**? You'll crack up at that one.

Structure and Synthesis – As you progress through a Biblical book or letter, try hard to maintain the forest for the trees. The meaning of individual words, phrases and sentences support the overall argument and are really meaning-less without the big picture. Context is everything. It may help to keep notes as you study. Try to continually hone and refine your understanding of the overall message of the book and how each section supports it. Try to identify the key verse or verses and synthesize your thoughts as you go.

Resources – For a serious student of the Bible, access to and familiarity with a couple key resources is critical. Don't be scared of these. Many are written for a lay audience.

First of all, a good **Bible** is absolutely essential. You should own one that fits your age range and reading level. Prefer those that offer *cross references* and perhaps *study notes*. These are often very helpful (see the WARNING below as it applies to study notes).

A **Concordance** is a great second step. This tool will allow you to easily track word usage in the word-study steps mentioned above. A **Lexicon** (essentially a dictionary that focuses on Biblical words) will take it to the next level by defining the range of meaning and usage of a word.

Next you will need several good **Introductions**, which is a technical term for overview. A good one for the OT and a good one for the NT is a great start. This will help you get a summary of each book, including brief discussions of author, date, occasion, etc.

Beyond this you will eventually want to build your library by adding **Theologies** and **Commentaries** on specific books as extended and specific reference tools (I highly recommend the FREE commentary notes on every book of the Bible at www.soniclight.com).

WARNING: With written works from any author and especially online resources, READ CRITICALLY. Filter what you read through a biblical grid and use Spirit-led discernment. The Bible is the only book that is without error in the original manuscripts. That means that every other one gets it wrong somewhere.

Practice

Robert Traina, in his great resource *Methodical Bible Study*, outlines phases of Interpretation and breaks them down into three basic steps. Because of their simplicity, I will repeat them here.

1. Interpretive Questions

Based on your observation of terms, structure, etc. in the first study method step, you will begin to form as many specific and relevant questions of the text as possible. Over time, this will become intuitive and internal. Interpretive questions may look like this: What is meaning of this term, this structure, this form, this context? Why is the larger reason for stating it this way? How are these two clauses related? Who is he talking about? Who is speaking? What is the sense of this verb? Why does he speak in the negative rather than the positive? What? When? Where? Why?

2. Interpretive Answers

Based on the plethora of questions generated, now we begin to answer them. This is the heart of interpretation. This relies on many factors besides the hard work mentioned above. It depends on the miracle of illumination by the Holy Spirit. This is God opening your mind to the meaning of His Word. We should first and always PRAY for God to reveal Himself and teach us through His Word. It also relies on common sense, intelligence and experience. The hard work we already mentioned composes the objective “meat” of interpretation. We employ all of these methods to press on to answers. This process must be patient, thorough and methodical. It may happen quickly for a given passage; however you may also find you enjoy investing time.

This advertisement appeared beneath a picture of a puzzled young boy reading a letter. It was promoting the new book by Mortimer Adler entitled *How to Read a Book*. It appeared in *The New York Times*, April 10, 1940 and illustrates the process of questioning.

How to Read a Love Letter

This young man has just received his first love letter. He may have read it three or four times but he is just beginning. To read it as accurately as he would like, would require several dictionaries and a good deal of close work with a few experts of etymology and philology.

However, he will do all right without them.

He will ponder over the exact shade of meaning of every word, every comma. She has headed the letter 'Dear John.' What, he asks himself, is the exact significance of those words? Did she refrain from saying 'Dearest' because she was bashful? Would 'My Dear' have sounded too formal?

Jeepers, maybe she would have said 'Dear So-and-So' to anybody!

A worried frown will now appear on his face. But it disappears as soon as he really gets to thinking about the first sentence. She certainly wouldn't have written that to anybody!

And so he works his way through the letter, one moment perched blissfully on a cloud, the next moment huddled miserably behind an eight-ball. It has started a hundred questions in his mind. He could quote it by heart. In fact, he will – to himself – for weeks to come.

Anyone who has ever received such an important correspondence relates to these sentiments. Reading the Word of God, essentially a letter from God to you, is much the same.

3. Interpretive Summary

This final step is the important work of synthesizing and summarizing your work in order to arrive at the main message of the passage. The parts must be assembled together to form a whole, and the whole must be in line with the larger message of the book and even the higher message of the Bible. It may help to list the main truths you have discovered, state the main theme or message of the passage, outline the passage, paraphrase it or even illustrate it in art or diagrams.

Try to apply these principles and steps of interpretation to these familiar texts:

- **Psalm 23**
- **Romans 8**
- **Luke 15**
- **Matthew 4:1-11**
- **Psalm 1**
- **1 Timothy 1:3-17**

So far we have covered the first two steps of our Bible Study Method Plan: Observation and Interpretation. We have seen that the step of Observation is the stop most people forget or misunderstand. It prepares us for solid Interpretation. "Observation is discovery; Interpretation is digesting. Observation means depicting what is there, and Interpretation is deciding what it means." Now we will continue our discussion by looking at steps 3 and 4: **Correlation** and **Application**.

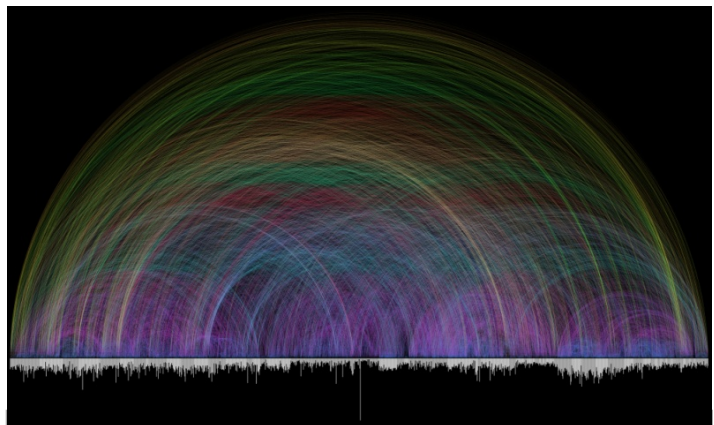
To remind us of the overall purpose of our study, allow Roy B. Zuck to speak again from his instructive work *Basic Bible Interpretation*. "Bible study is an intellectual pursuit in which we seek understanding of what God says. But Bible study must go beyond that to include spiritual discipline, in which we see to put into practice what we read and understand. Heart appropriation, not merely head apprehension, is the true goal of Bible study."

Correlation

This step of Bible study methods tries to see the passage under review in the greater and grander scope of the whole Bible. It is the art of seeing the Bible as a whole. Along with Observation, step one, this is the most forgotten step of solid study methods. It logically follows adequately examined observation and interpretation and it provides a solid basis for thoroughly Biblical application, our fourth and final step.

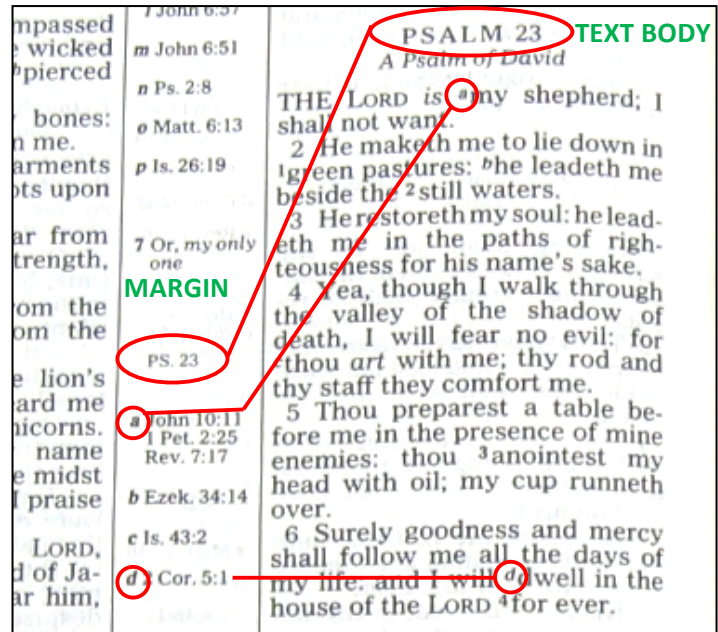
Correlation, of course, means *to connect*. It is the work of recognizing relationships and as such is closely related to Interpretation. Some actually consider this step as a part of Interpretation. Although we are treating it differently here, Correlation and Interpretation should be understood as partners in methodical Bible study. One leads to the other. One informs the other. Each sharpens and clarifies our goal of determining accurate meaning and transforming application.

As a critical partner to Interpretation, we will touch on a few very important aspects of Correlation, including: Cross-Referencing, Use of the Old Testament within the New Testament (including Old Testament types and allusions), New Testament use of other New Testament teaching, themes, vocabulary, and finally, developing principles that bridge interpretation and application.



This image is a visual representation of Biblical cross references. The long line at the bottom middle is **Psalm 119**, the longest chapter in the Bible. The colored arcs represent clear cross references from chapter to chapter, over 63,000 of them. When you factor in allusion, which is more difficult to track than clear references or quotes, this large number may double or triple.

Cross Referencing is an extremely important facet of good interpretation and correlation. A good Bible will go a long way in facilitating this skill. The image here illustrates this tool well. *First* locate the corresponding chapter (and sometimes verse) in the margin. Next, notice that several key words or phrases will be notated with small letters that correspond to other reference passages listed in the margin. Connect the dots. For example, here in **Psalm 23**, the phrase “my shepherd” (most often the word or phrase immediately following the small letter is intended in the reference) is designated with the superscript ^a. In this case the superscript ^a in the margin leads you to three passages: **John 10:11**; **1 Peter 2:25**; **Revelation 7:17**. In each of these passages you will find similar uses of “shepherd.” Finally, repeat these steps in **John 10**, **1 Peter 2** and **Revelation 7** and you may see a reference to **Psalm 23**, but hopefully other passages will be listed there and your study will continue. After reading all of these passages (some of which may only relate in vocabulary alone, others in larger theme and context) a clarified picture of the text and context in your original passage emerges.



Specific types of Bibles specialize in including abundant cross references. Free online or inexpensive hard-back concordances will take your cross-referencing study even further.

A study of cross references in wording and vocabulary as well as character and theme leads directly to the fascinating topic of **Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament**. Let me first say, specialized scholars devote their whole lives to this subject and an increasing amount of expensive academic books are produced on the subject each year. That being said, this facet of Bible Study remains accessible and profitable for even the beginner.

The authors of the New Testament used the Old Testament in diverse ways. They include:

- Simple quotation – **Hebrews 1:5-13**; **Matthew 2:15**
- Clear reference without quotation – **John 1:17**; **Matthew 19:3** (refers to **Deuteronomy 24:1**)
- Veiled reference or allusion – **John 1:51** (refers to **Genesis 28:10ff**)
- Analogy or Illustration – **James 5:17** uses Elijah to illustrate a man of prayer
- Type and Antitype (examined below)

When a faithful Bible student comes across an element of a text or longer passage that may be a use of the Old Testament within the New (or use of other writings within the same testament and time period), several key questions must be investigated:

- How is the reference/quotation/allusion used?
- Why is it used in the present context?
- What about the author's purpose is benefitted by this usage?
- What about the original context of the referenced material is pertinent to the text studied?
- How would this reference have been received by the original audience?

The literary tools of **Type and Antitype** are also common features of the Bible, as well as the source of common abuses by its readers. Throughout the history of the church there have been many who see deep spiritual significance and Biblical relevance in the number of hinges on the doors of Solomon's sanctuary or the two coins that the Good Samaritan gave to the innkeeper. These are not true Biblical types. A **Type** is an element of literature that *resembles and corresponds to something else*. The **Antitype** is the *counterpart*, literally "answering to the type," and is *that to which the Type refers*. In more simple terms, a *type* foreshadows the *antitype*. Let's look at an example. Jonah, who spent three days in the belly of a fish is a *type* of Christ, who spent three days buried in the earth (**Matthew 12:40**). So, in this case, Jesus is the *antitype*.

Perhaps some examples of Biblical types will help clarify this sometimes difficult concept. Think about: Melchizedek and Christ (**Hebrews 7:3ff**); the Passover feast and Christ's sacrifice (**1 Corinthians 5:7**; etc.); the Feast of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit (**Joel 2:28; Acts 2**); the Old Testament Tabernacle and Christ/our access to and fellowship with God (**Hebrews 8:5; Hebrews 9:23ff**).

WARNING: Not all things that refer or resemble something else are types. It is a slippery slope to begin seeing correspondence behind every story and illustration. Roy B. Zuck in *Basic Bible Interpretation* helpfully instructs that Types have the following characteristics:

- **Resemblance** – A natural and significant correspondence between type and antitype, not a superficial or shallow relationship.
- **Historical Reality** – Based in actual persons, places, things, events. Types rise naturally out of the text and are not something read into the text by the student.
- **Prefiguring** – Types have a forward focus, a predictive or foreshadowing nuance.
- **Heightening** – From type to antitype there is escalation, increase. The true antitype is always superior to its type.
- **Divine Design** – Types are resemblances planned in the mind of God, not merely analogous references invented or contrived in the (sometimes fickle) mind of man.
- **Validation by the New Testament** – Scripture must indicate or designate the type in some way.

New Testament use of other New Testament teachings, themes, wording and phrasing, as well as Old Testament use of the Old Testament is yet another facet of Correlation and generally follows the same principles and guidelines as Use of the OT in the NT above.

What is the goal?

Let's be honest and remember that in our Bible Study we are headed somewhere. We have a goal in mind. We want accurate meaning and true transformation in our personal lives, in addition to the ability and responsibility to minister to others these same goals.

One of the chief goals of Correlation is to synthesize the hard work of the first three steps of methodical Bible study. This synthesis should produce principles and themes that bridge the gaps of time, place, culture, language and literature.

A **Principle** is "an outstanding and abiding truth that is not limited to a moment in time." Let me offer an example: Humans are corrupt and sinful. After the fall into sin in **Genesis 3**, this statement is a universal truth. It is a principle. The rest of the Bible corroborates this truth.

Establishing principles from the text is not the same as "spiritualizing" the text. My professors in seminary would remind us countless times, "*principlize, don't spiritualize.*" This means that as students of the Bible we are to try hard not to force every teaching into some preconditioned and mystical interpretive box. The task is to connect the "then" Biblical world to the "now" contemporary world without losing any meaning or significance. Confusingly, this is simple work as well as being very difficult work.

Think about these two necessities as you extract principles from the text you're studying:

- Complete familiarity with the text and its context (this means the hard work of steps 1 and 2)
- An ability to think with the whole text and context in mind

Proceed with these helpful steps:

- Ask simple diagnostic questions of the text: Who, what, when, where, why, how?
- Record all the truths contained in the text.
- Group these truths by subject
- Determine the central, major, guiding truths and the secondary, non-central ones
- Reword these central truths into simple sentences that will begin to form principles
- Principles are simple, positive statements of fact, written in the third person.

Practice

This brief discussion forms the skeleton of a sincere study of Biblical Correlation. Work your way through the skills and elements mentioned in this section in these beautiful passages: **John 5; Hebrews 1; Revelation 4-5**. In these passages (as any) you will find good fodder for study. Pray. Think. Write.

Application

One of my favorite seminary professors and mentors would often say “Truth not lived is truth not learned.” That is a nice and neat way of saying just how essential application is to Bible Study. This is where the rubber meets the road. Action time.

Before we begin to explain our final step, let’s pause for a moment and remember what is at stake and why we are reading a document like this. Throughout our study I’ve tried to illustrate common pitfalls in popular Bible study methods. We’ve noticed a few already and here in Application we see perhaps the most devastating.

- Most people completely overlook the step of *Observation*
- *Interpretation* becomes the first and last step for many and is often mishandled
- *Correlation* is misunderstood and rarely applied in a significant way
- **Application** (life change) is difficult and often exchanged for simply increased Knowledge

Arriving here at our final step actually helps us make sense of where we have been in the previous three. Observation really allows the text to speak to us. It curbs our sometimes capricious and unconscious way of interfering. Interpretation furthers this process by using methods and tools that help us to determine the meaning of the text. Correlation furthers and clarifies this process of determining meaning as well as prepares us for landing the plane in the entire intention of the Bible itself. Application then translates the principles of Correlation into practices. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** reveals this intention: Life Change, instruction that leads to truth, equipping for good works and making one adequate for this task. This is Application. This is our ultimate goal. Bible study is incomplete until true Application is discerned and appropriated.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Howard Hendricks in his popular and worthwhile book on Bible Study Methods, *Living By the Book*, repeats a similar warning about misunderstanding application. “The Bible was not written to satisfy your curiosity; it was written to transform your life. The ultimate goal of Bible study is not to do something to the Bible, but to allow the Bible to do something to you, so truth becomes tangent to life.”

Look up **Joshua 1:8** and **Ezra 7:10** and meditate on what you find there. How do these passages speak to application?

Where does application begin?

What is the purpose of Application? It may seem obvious but let us state it clearly, for the purpose of Application defines our pursuit of it. One of my seminary professors summed it up in three important terms. **Relevance**: Application makes the facts of the Bible meaningful to your

personal life. **Realization:** Application promotes Living Truth instead of simply learning truth. And **Response:** Application calls for a commitment to the truth rather than simple consideration.

Prayer

Did you see that word coming? Prayer? Do not overlook or underestimate the power and relevance of prayer in Bible Study. I have tried to mention this throughout the study, but lest you gloss over it, permit a repeating. I have personally experienced, time and time again, the absolute necessity of prayer in Bible study. I have studied without prayer, and I have studied through, in and with prayer. The results and transformation are starkly different in each situation. We **MUST** begin with prayer as we sit to open our Bible. We must pause when we come to certain trouble spots or overwhelmingly magnificent revelations. We must conclude with prayer for continual life change and transformation. After all, every time we pick up our Bible to read and study we must remember that we are doing so *with a Living God*. We study *with a Partner*. If intimacy with God is our goal, then we must never allow mere abstractions, details or information to be the purpose of our study.

The beautiful and haunting words of Philip Yancey in *God the Jilted Lover* provide an apt warning.

As I read through the pages of the Bible, I was haunted by the reality of a God who lets our response to Him matter that much [the anger and pain of a wounded parent or lover in Jeremiah and Hosea]. ...I realized afresh a danger in our study "about" God. When we tame Him, in words and concepts, and file Him away under alphabetized characteristics, we can easily lose the force of the passionate relationship God seeks above all else.

There may be no greater danger to those of us who write, talk, or even think about God. Mere abstractions, to Him, may be the cruelest insult of all.

Soaked and steeped in prayer, Application begins as every other step in Bible Study begins, by asking questions. We are simply asking: How does this truth apply to my life? What does it demand of me?

Roy B. Zuck, again from *Basic Bible Interpretation*, offers some helpful pointers as we begin to ask questions of all that we've learned through the first three steps.

- Build applications on interpretations
- Determine what was expected of the original audience
- Base applications on elements present day readers (that's you) share with the original audience
- See the principle in the text
- Think of the principle as an implication of the text and as a bridge to application
- Write out specific action-responses
- Rely on the Holy Spirit

A list of simple Application Questions may be the easiest reminder and Bible Study help. A list of questions that you can ask any and every text of the Bible may begin like this:

- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a sin to avoid or confess?
- Is there a promise to place faith in?
- Is there a person to emulate or examples to follow?
- Is there a person that is a negative example of what to avoid?
- Is there a godly characteristic to appropriate?
- Is there a correction necessary to my thinking?
- Is there an activity I need be involved in?
- Is there a passage to commit to memory?
- How can I respond to God in worship from this truth?
- How does this text lead me to pray?
- What does this text demand of/for my relationships?

Can you think of other questions to add to this list? Consider printing it out or writing it in the inside cover of your Bible or perhaps on a bookmark as a reminder.

Application is not rocket science, it actually comes easily when you prepare your heart and mind properly.

One of my closest friends studies his Bible with two different color pens. The blue pen is used for the first three steps of Bible Study Methods. His seminary training and immense ministry experience has helped him excel in these areas. The red pen is used to record and work on Application. At the end of his study time, the page or pages before him can be easily discerned. Was he focused entirely on meaning in blue ink? If there is little red ink, then he sits back down to meditate further and prayerfully work out true application. His goal is life change, not simply knowledge.

Maybe you can consider adopting a similar game plan.

Where do I start in Bible study?

Okay, after all of this discussion (some of it rather academic and lengthy, I admit), where in the world do I start? Perhaps you actually feel MORE intimidated by the Bible than before you began reading this resource. Maybe you feel more distant than ever before from the living Word of God.

Press through that. Pray through it. Reject it as false intimidation and shallow distance. It is not true.

Step One is the Only Step and therefore the most important: **Schedule time to read God's Word.**

That's all you really have to do. If you are IN the Bible, then God's Word will do God's Work. Combine simple *presence* with a conscious *intention* to study it well and...well, that's all you really need. These two ingredients: *presence* and *intention* combine to form a marvelous explosion of truth and grace in the life of the believer.

It really doesn't matter where you start reading, but if you need some suggestions, try one of the four Gospels (my favorite is **John**) and the book of **Psalms** at the same time. Read the Gospel at your own pace, repeating the same section several times to slow yourself down. Read the Psalms one or two at a time, again repeating the same ones for several readings to maximize impact. Move from there to the book of **Acts** and/or the letters of Paul. You really can't go wrong.

If you are up for something more challenging try a minor prophet ("minor" simply refers to the size of the written material, not the impact or value; thus "minor prophet" equals "smaller books of prophecy") and practice your Interpretation skills in the background of the book. Try wisdom books like **Ecclesiastes** or **Proverbs**, working hard to understand how that specific genre works.

Again, it doesn't matter where you begin. Just begin.

I pray that your labor in the Word of God is the greatest adventure of your life. May God richly bless you as you press into Him through His Word.