



# Becoming **BIBLESAVVY**

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**THE GOSPEL OF MARK**



## **WELCOME TO BIBLE READING!**

You are about to experience the most influential book in human history. For thousands of years, this book has been impacting people from every cultural background and across every social status. What impact will it have on you?

You may be picking up the Bible because you're curious about what it says, but you're undecided or even skeptical about whether it is from God. Thanks for keeping an open mind and reading it for yourself. Perhaps you will find what so many others have come to believe, that when you open up this book, you not only read the words of human authors, but you also hear the voice of God.

A recent survey of a thousand churches concluded that the number one contributor to a person's spiritual growth is daily reading and reflecting on God's Word. It has more impact than going to church, listening to sermons, or serving other people (all things we still recommend!). Those things are critical to growth, but the single best thing you can do is spend time in Scripture every day.

This journal is designed to help people get into the Bible for the first time. If you have never picked up a Bible or have only dabbled in it here and there, this guide will give you a taste of the life-changing practice of daily Bible reading.

### **HERE ARE SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS DAILY HABIT.**

Choose a time and place where you will read the Bible every day. Many people prefer early morning because that's when Bible reading is least likely to get bumped by other activities. Others read the Bible on lunch break, or after their kids are put to bed. By choosing the same time every day, this is more likely to become a good habit.

Use the COMMA method to come up with an application for your life from each day's reading. The COMMA method is described in detail later in this journal, but the goal is to make sure you aren't just getting through the Bible, but that the Bible is getting through you. The COMMA method is a way for you to see for yourself what is in the Bible, ponder it, identify what it means, and see how you can apply it to your life.

Read everything, but focus on just one thing each day. Most of the readings will cover multiple stories within the book. After you read the passage for the day, zero in on just a part that struck you. You don't have to figure out everything. Just grab a hold of one thing each day.

Don't expect every day's reading to be a mind-blowing experience. There are going to be some passages that will be challenging to draw scintillating insights and applications from. Keep reading. It's the ongoing discipline of reading the Bible day after day after day that will transform your life over time. You don't have to come away from every passage with an amazing zinger for the day.

If you miss a day, you miss a day. The goal is to read the Bible every day, but if you miss a day, don't sweat it. Just pick up where you left off. This guide has 25 days in it. If you read every weekday, you'll finish the book of Mark in 5 weeks. That is about the right amount of time to establish a new habit. But, if it takes you 6 or 8 weeks, it is not a big deal. No guilt trips. The key is to just not let one missed day be an excuse to stop.

Check out the resources we have provided. We have provided a number of resources that we find helpful in getting context and learning to read the Bible at [ccclife.org/context](http://ccclife.org/context). Just because you are learning to read the Bible for yourself doesn't mean you can't get some help.

This guide works through the book of Mark, which is one of the biographies of Jesus in the New Testament. Why start reading the Bible with this book? Because the hero and the heart of the biblical story is Jesus. If you could ask those billions of people who have been transformed by the Bible what it was about the Bible that changed them, nearly every one of them would say: Jesus. What is it about this 1st century, Jewish rabbi that people find so compelling?

Read on. You're about to find out.

## THE COMMA METHOD

How do you move from text to life when reading the Bible? Here is a simple, five-step process for doing just that. The five steps in the process form the acronym COMMA.

### **C: Context**

When you're reading a passage from the Bible, before you can apply that passage to your own life, you need to understand what it meant to its original audience. What was their context? There are at least two contexts that should be considered for every Bible passage.

- **Historical setting:** Who wrote this book? Who were they writing to? What problem were they addressing in the lives of their readers? When did the action in this book take place? What was going on in the world at the time?
- **Literary setting:** There are different kinds (or genres) of literature in the Bible, and different rules for interpreting each one.

Information about the context of the book of Mark is included later in this journal. You can find additional resources for figuring out the historical and literary setting for each book of the Bible at [ccclife.org/context](http://ccclife.org/context).

### **O: Observations**

Next, read the passage and make as many observations about it as you possibly can. Let me suggest four things to keep your eyes open for. If it helps, you can use the acronym **TRTS** ("treats") to remember them:

- **T: Theme:** What word or phrase summarizes what this passage is all about?
- **R: Repeating Words or Ideas:** What comes up multiple times in the passage?
- **T: Truths about God:** What does this passage tell you about God (Father, Son, or Spirit)?
- **S: Something Striking:** Anything jump out at you for some other reason?

### **M: Meditate**

At this point, you pause to pray. It is not enough to get something out of the Bible, you actually have to get the Bible into you. There are many ways to do this, but the simplest way is to take the part of the passage you focused on in your observation and message and repeat it several times, either out loud or in your mind. Then, respond to the passage by talking with God about the message you got out of the passage. The message may lead you to praise God, confess sin, thank God, lament, ask God for help, or commit to doing something. Ponder the message from different angles, and listen to see if God's Spirit brings anything else to mind.

### **M: Message**

The next step is to determine the basic message—a timeless principle—that God is communicating through this passage. To do this, pick just one of your observations—you will probably have a few—and ask, "What message might I draw from this observation?" Try to sum it up in one simple sentence.

A tool to help you find the principle behind one of your observations is the acronym **SPECS**. Ask yourself, do I see one of the following in this passage:

- **S: Sin** to confess
- **P: Promise** to claim
- **E: Example** to follow
- **C: Command** to obey
- **S: Statement** about God

### **A: Application**

This is where the rubber meets the road. How can you put this principle into practice in your own life? Here are some tips for applying the message of a passage to your life:

- Make it personal and specific.
- Write it down.
- Pray for help.

This is a process that you can do on your own, with friends or family, or in a community group. Even if you do this privately, it is even more powerful if you talk with others about what you learned.

## **CONTEXT:** *The Gospel of Mark*

### **Overview**

The Bible is divided into two big sections. The Old Testament is everything that happens before Jesus shows up on the scene. The New Testament is everything that happens once Jesus arrives. The Gospel of Mark is one of the four biographies of Jesus that open up the New Testament. Mark tells the story of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection. The events in the book of Mark take place between 26 and 30 A.D., and it was written between 50 and 70 A.D., just a few decades after the events it reports.

### **Who is the author?**

Mark was an associate of Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends and disciples. Many scholars think that the Gospel of Mark is based on the recollections of Peter.

### **Who was the original audience of Mark? What was their situation?**

Mark was originally writing to Christians in the city of Rome and around the Roman Empire, who were facing persecution and hardship for following Christ.

### **What are the book's major themes?**

Watch The Bible Project's introductory video to the book of Mark, available at [ccclife.org/context](http://ccclife.org/context). Jot down a couple of key themes to be on the lookout for as you read the book.

### **Literary Setting: Narrative and Parables**

Most of the book of Mark is written in the narrative genre. Narratives are stories. Over one-third of the Bible comes to us in this form. As you read the stories in the Bible, keep in mind these principles.

- **Summarize the theme (or major lesson) of the story.** Most Bible stories do not come right out at the end and tell us the moral, the theme, and the major lesson of the story. It is our job to figure it out. Figuring out the main lesson will keep us from getting lost in the details of the story. You can get some pretty bizarre interpretations by reading way too much into a minor detail or two. What is the theme of the whole story? Why do you think God included this story?

- **The real hero of every narrative in the Bible is God.** No matter who else is included in the story, one character is always more important: God. Always ask the question, what is God up to in this story?
- **Decide what's descriptive and what's prescriptive.** Some details of Bible stories are merely descriptive. They give us the particulars of what happened. They are not meant to be a pattern for our lives. But other details of Bible stories are prescriptive. God is indeed saying to us readers today: "This is how I want you to respond in similar situations." Prescriptive parts of a story will always be backed up by non-narrative, directive statements in the passage or somewhere else in the Bible.

Mark also contains a number of Jesus' parables, which is a unique genre. Parables are short stories that Jesus tells to explain how things work in the Kingdom of God. Here are some helpful principles for reading parables:

- **Not every detail is symbolic.** Jesus' stories are full of imagery drawn from the everyday life of 1st century Israel. Often, this imagery is symbolic of deeper realities. But, not every detail has a one-to-one connection to something else. It is better to look for the one main point the parable communicates, rather than trying to find a hidden meaning in every detail.
- **Ask why Jesus told this parable in this situation.** Most of the parables Jesus told address specific people and situations. Who was Jesus talking to? The disciples? The Pharisees? The crowds? What was Jesus responding to when he told the story? What kind of reaction was he trying to get from his hearers?



**OBSERVATIONS**

**MEDITATE / MESSAGE**

**APPLICATIONS**

**QUESTION:**

Did you observe the summary of Jesus' preaching in Mark 1:15? "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" What would it look like if God was king in your life? As you read through the rest of the book, ask yourself: am I willing to repent (turn away from sin) and believe (trust Jesus to save and lead me)?

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QUESTIONS? WRITE THEM DOWN AND ASK A PASTOR

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QUESTION:

Here is something striking you might have observed in today's reading. Jesus says, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:17) What do you think this means? What kind of people does Jesus welcome? What does someone need to admit about themselves in order to follow Jesus?

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**QUESTION:**

The main point of Jesus' parable about the seed seems to be that different people respond differently to the good news which leads to different results in their lives. Which type of soil do you think best describes you? How are you responding to the message about Jesus?

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**QUESTION:**

In today's reading Jesus says that evil comes "from within, out of a person's heart" (Mark 7:21). He then goes on to list the sorts of things that come out from inside people. As you look at that list, do you see anything that shows up in your life? What does that mean about your heart?

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**QUESTION:**

Mark 8:27-31 is one of the big turning points of the book of Mark. And it all hinges on Jesus' question, "Who do you say I am?" That's the question that all of us have to answer when reading the story of Jesus. How would you answer that question?

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## OBSERVATIONS

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## APPLICATIONS

### QUESTION:

One of the principles of reading biblical stories is to decide what is descriptive (what happened in this situation) and what is prescriptive (what ought to happen in my situation). When Jesus asks the rich young man to sell all he has, most people think that is descriptive, something Jesus was just asking him to do. But, what is the principle behind that that applies to all of us? For each of us, there are certain things we hold on to so tightly that if we do not give them up, they will keep us from following Jesus. What might that be for you?

OBSERVATIONS

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QUESTION:

Did you observe Jesus’ summary of his mission in today’s reading? “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). What do you think it means that Jesus is a “ransom”? A ransom is something given in order to set someone free. Who needed to be set free? Why do you think Jesus needed to give his life to free them?

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QUESTION:

Did you think this passage was weird? Yeah, you're not the only one. This confuses a lot of people. For now, don't worry about figuring it all out. It might help to focus on the last section (Mark 13:32-37). Jesus says that he could return any time. If he came back today, how would you feel about seeing him face to face?

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**QUESTION:**

Reading the Bible requires using your imagination. As you read the story of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42), imagine what Jesus felt like in those moments. He was clearly in agony. He knew what was coming and wished he didn't have to do it. So what would motivate him to pray, "Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36)? What must he feel about you to say that?

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**QUESTION:**

If you were with the women and found the tomb empty, how would you react? If it is true, what would it change for you? As the book comes to an end, how has the experience changed you? What is your next step with the Bible? What is your next step with Jesus?

## WANT TO READ OTHER PARTS OF THE BIBLE?

JUMP INTO THE FULL BIBLE SAVVY PLAN.

At Christ Community Church, we are always reading through some section of the Bible as a church. It really helps to read same part of the Bible as the people around you. It means you can talk with others about it, and as a church, we offer additional teaching and resources along the way.

Now that you've read the story of Jesus, why not jump in with the rest of us? We will help you catch up.

To join in with the Bible Savvy Reading Plan, go to **[ccclife.org/biblesavvy](https://ccclife.org/biblesavvy)**.

### RESOURCES

As you read the Bible, we want to help you understand it, enjoy it, and apply it to your life. That's why we provide lots of resources to help you become Bible savvy.

- **Bible Savvy Journals:** We have designed journals similar to this one where you can record your observations, messages, and applications each day. They come in both print and digital forms. You can grab a print journal at our campuses or use our app. Learn more at [BibleSavvy.com](https://BibleSavvy.com)
- **Context and Overviews:** At [ccclife.org/context](https://ccclife.org/context), you can find information and videos that give background for every book of the Bible.
- **Sermons on Reading the Bible:** Over the years, we have taught thousands of people how to use the COMMA method to apply the Bible to their lives. See [BibleSavvy.com](https://BibleSavvy.com) for sermons on Bible reading.
- **The Bible Savvy book series:** Pastor Jim Nicodem has written a series of short, practical books explaining how to understand the Bible for yourself. They are available at any of our campuses.
- **The Bible Savvy Podcast:** Every week, the pastors of Christ Community have a conversation about one of the Bible Savvy readings from that week. Search "Bible Savvy" wherever you listen to podcasts or go to [ccclife.org/podcasts](https://ccclife.org/podcasts).
- **God's Good News:** Where are you in your relationship with Jesus Christ? God created you to enjoy a personal relationship with him and a purposeful life. Learn about God's Good News for you at [ccclife.org/godsgoodnews](https://ccclife.org/godsgoodnews).



