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**Teaching the Narrative Approach to the Gospel of Mark:  
Energizing God's People through the Story of The Gospel**

A Project Submitted to  
the Faculty of Emmanuel Christian Seminary  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
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## INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

The study of the Bible by individuals and groups can be undertaken in a variety of ways. Often students are asked to fill in the blanks in a workbook or to take notes on a lecture. Bible study usually involves interjecting a wide variety of resources into the equation. These resources include commentaries, word studies, Bible dictionaries, historical background information and more. The attempt is often made to “get behind the text” by looking at such things as: Who wrote it? When was it written? To what audience was it first intended? What sources were used in the writing? How was the text redacted over time? And other such questions as these.

As valuable as those disciplines are, the student is often forced to often speculate as to the answers to those questions. What we do have, however, is the text itself. The text is the “given” that we all can possess, study, question, and discuss. Everyone, regardless of previous Biblical education, can come to the text alone and ask questions, see patterns, and converse with others about the author’s style and delivery.

This project is titled: Teaching the Narrative Approach to the Gospel of Mark: Energizing God’s People through the Story of the Gospel. What would happen in a group of diverse people who study together through Mark’s Gospel with just the text itself at its disposal? Would it excite them or bore them? Would they feel empowered or overwhelmed? Would such a study produce greater Christian community, lead to greater spiritual insecurity, or something else entirely? Ultimately, is this method of Bible study a positive, life-changing experience or not? The over-arching research question for this project is: “Does small group Bible study on the Gospel of Mark, using the Narrative

Approach, increase the student's excitement for the study of Scripture and increase the student's desire to study the text in deeper, more specific ways using these techniques?"

Chapter one will describe the project itself: What led to the choosing of this as my final project? How is this project limited in scope? How was this project designed?

Chapter two will describe the Narrative Approach to the Gospel of Mark.

Narrative criticism in general will be described, along with specific application to Mark's Gospel. Here, the various elements of looking at the text through the literary lens will be put forth. The appendices include the handouts given to the class in preparation for our adventure through Mark. This material was thoroughly discussed prior to opening the Gospel for study.

Chapter three will focus on the data. Who were the participants used in this venture? The means used to present and gather the data used in this project will be explained. The method of analyzing the data will be described. Next the initial and final questionnaires, which are identical, will be introduced (see Appendix I). Finally, the actual final focus group discussion will be included verbatim.

Chapter four contains the evaluation of the data that came from this focus group. What are the conclusions to the initial research question when compared to the data? What are the themes that emerged from the data? These questions will be fully explored. The conclusion will summarize the project and the research data findings. Implications of these findings will be discussed as they apply to the future use of the Narrative Approach to group Bible study in the church.

## CHAPTER 1

### ORGANIZATION OF THE PROJECT

The beginnings of this endeavor come from a deep love for the Bible, and the communication of the Bible's life changing truths to the church and the world. I have been in ministry since 1983 and in that time have led, facilitated, and participated in countless Bible studies. Some of those gatherings produced lifelong change in understanding and in the practice of my faith. Sadly, others were more perfunctory and easily forgotten. What factors made the difference? Over the years it has also been evident that in some Bible studies there is the buzz of excitement, the joy of community, and the "light-bulb" of discovery, when eternal truths become personal. Along with all others who desperately want to bring Scripture to life for people, I wanted to find what works well and what does not.

After taking a 2012 Doctor of Ministry course on "Current Issues in New Testament Study" with Dr. Mark Matson, the focus of this final project became clear. While acknowledging the place of historical criticisms when approaching the Bible (the Gospels in particular), Dr. Matson opened my eyes to the Narrative Approach to the text. He drew a thick line on the white board and an arrow pointing behind it. He told us most New Testament criticism was concerned with what is behind that line---the supposed author, the date, the sources used, the redaction of the text, etc. While not meaning to disparage any of those approaches in the least, they are almost always speculative at best.

He then introduced us to another approach that focuses exclusively on the text itself. This was the Narrative or Literary Approach. The text is the "given" that we have

before us. We can wrestle with it, learn from it, and be changed by it. The text itself is sufficient to communicate God's truth and to transform God's people. I became excited about the possibility of using this method of Bible study in the local church setting and helping people see Scripture through a new lens. It is this Literary/Narrative Approach that then became the context for this final Doctor of Ministry project.

That experience in Dr. Matson's class led me to this project idea and the following over-arching research question: "Does a small group Bible study on the Gospel of Mark, using the Narrative Approach, increase the student's excitement for the study of Scripture and increase the student's desire to study the text in deeper, more specific ways using these techniques?"

### **A Caution Noted**

It is acknowledged at the outset that this method of Bible study is not the only effective means of studying the Scriptures. God has used, and continues to use, a wide variety of types, styles, and methods of study. The effectiveness of any study depends on far too many different factors to be dogmatic as to "the right way" to do it. Factors for a successful study include the facilitator, setting, method, resources, people/personalities in the group, and so much more.

This project is limited in two significant ways. The Narrative Approach explores one way among many for Scripture study in a small group. Also, this method is limited to the study of the Gospels (in this case the Gospel of Mark). The narrative method would likely work very well in other story based genres of Scripture. It would, however,

struggle to be effective in a study looking at an Epistle or the more didactic writings of the Bible.

### **Project Design**

The means of gathering data for this project took place over 12 consecutive weeks, between January 6, 2013, and March 24, 2013. There were twelve participants who took part in the study, including me, as the facilitator. The focus group met every Sunday night from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The gatherings took place in the home of one of the couples in the group. Light snacks were available, but we did not stop or break during the two hour period. The schedule of topics for each session was published in advance (see Appendix E). On the first night, ground rules and guidelines were discussed to set proper boundaries for our times together (see Appendix F). The participants were given a questionnaire (see Appendix I) that dealt with their approach and views about Bible study in general. Also, we watched a dramatic narrative presentation of the Gospel of Mark by Max McLean.<sup>1</sup> It was a memorized presentation of only the text (NIV) of Mark's Gospel. I wanted the participants to hear the entire text straight through before we started working through it together in our study.

The second night, the participants were each given a three ring notebook with the group guidelines, some general instructions regarding the study, and 19 pages of fill-in the blanks information teaching the basis of the Narrative Approach to the Gospels (see Appendix D, G, H, and J). Together we discussed the essentials of this method so the

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<sup>1</sup>Max McLean, *Mark's Gospel: On Stage with Max McLean* DVD (Worcester, PA: Vision Video, 2009).

members of the group would feel empowered to begin attempting this type of study on their own. They were also given pages with just pericope headings from Mark's Gospel so they could take their own notes on the text itself and bring it back for discussion at the next meeting (see Appendix L). The pericope pages were handed out each night in preparation for the next week's chapters.

Weeks 3-10 found us taking roughly two chapters each night in Mark's Gospel. We practiced together looking at those portions of the text through the narrative lens. Members of the group each brought their own thoughts, insights, questions, etc. taken from just the text itself. They were instructed to not use any other resources; no commentaries, no Bible dictionaries or encyclopedias, no word studies, and no cross references to any other gospel. They were to just use Mark's text, and look at it as divine literature given to God's people. The Narrative Approach itself will be discussed in much greater detail in the next chapter of this project.

During the 11th week of our time together we revisited the DVD dramatic narrative of the text of Mark's Gospel by Max McLean. The purpose was to see if the participants noticed anything new or different than the first time they viewed this presentation. We had been studying the narrative of Mark at that point for 8 weeks together. Did they hear the text differently having participated in this type of study together? This question is asked and answered as part of the Long-Interview on that next week. It should be noted that one of the participants was absent this night, and therefore, was not able to answer this question in the Long Interview.

Our final night together was the post-class discussion. This was a two hour, open-ended, free-flowing discussion of our time together in this study. Everyone was present

and participated freely and energetically in the Long Interview group debrief. More will be explained about this night later in the project.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE NARRATIVE APPROACH TO THE GOSPEL OF MARK

The focus group study that produced the data for this project met for the express purpose of studying the Gospel of Mark solely from the narrative point of view. Much of what is covered in this chapter was communicated to the participants during the second night together in order to prepare and equip them for this kind of study. The student/participant handouts from this portion of the focus group can be found in the appendices.

The Narrative Approach is only one method of Bible study. Other criticisms have their place. Historical, source, form, tradition, redaction, and textual methods were explained to the focus group in brief. These criticisms are valid and important. For this project, however, the participants were not to “look behind” the text using these other means. The Literary or Narrative Approach seeks to look at the text itself and only the text. It asks questions like: How is it structured? What words are used? Is there repetition of words or phrases? What is the setting described? Who are the characters and how do they interact together? What is the sense of tempo (the pace of the narrative) and time (order of events in relation to past, present or future) in the text? How is the plot developed? Anderson and Moore argue that “narrative critics seek to learn more about ‘how’ the story means, that is, how the implied author uses characters, settings, plot, and rhetoric to communicate meaning.”<sup>2</sup>

The premise of this method rests on the belief that, however these words came to be our text (historical redaction), this IS the text that we have. This is what God has

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<sup>2</sup> Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 54-55.

given to us to better understand who he is, and what his purpose was in Jesus.

Everything about the text (word order, phrasing, character involvement, place and more) is viewed as intentional. What is in the text is in the text for a reason. Each element serves a purpose in getting the Gospel message to the implied and intended readers of the first century and every century thereafter. The literary elements of the text were constructed by the author as tools of persuasion. The Biblical writer creatively and intentionally used various literary devices to lead the reading/listening audience to certain conclusions about God, Jesus and the world.

Narrative criticism helps correct both the liberal and conservative extremes in the study of Scripture. Liberal scholars have tended to pick apart a text by dividing it into small fragments that supposedly, at some point, were reconstructed into the current text (i.e. the JEPD view of Isaiah). Conservative scholars, conversely, pick apart the text by devising nice, neat, systematic theologies, which conveniently fit everything they believe. The Narrative Approach adds so much to the discussion because it forces the student of the Bible to simply deal with the text itself---as it has been preserved for us. That might mean wrestling with questions about theology that the text does not answer. It means thinking, praying and talking through the stories of the Gospel together without the influence (and bias) of commentaries, theological reference works, or even other Bible writers. The students must ask, "What is THIS text (and only this text) trying to communicate to its readers/listeners?"

The narrative method also sees the text as a complete whole. While the text is studied in smaller units, the students attempt to see how that periscope fits into the entire body of work given to us in this Gospel.

Leland Ryken lists a number of ingredients that make up this new approach to the Bible:

- A concern with the literary genres of the Bible
- A new willingness to treat Biblical texts as finished wholes instead of a patchwork of fragments,
- A focus on the Bible as it now stands instead of conducting excavations in the redaction (editing) process behind the text, and
- An inclination to use literary instead of traditional theological terms to discuss the stories and poems of the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

A Gospel account is primarily a story, THE story of Jesus of Nazareth. The literary genre is not didactic in the traditional method of direct pronouncements of precepts and truth. It does not spell out, in detail, the major doctrines of the faith. It does, in fact, often omit commentary that defines the “whys” of the actions described. The theological reasons for the crucifixion of Jesus, for example, are not explained in any depth by the author of Mark’s Gospel. That doctrinal reasoning is left to authors like Paul, Peter, and John (in his Epistles). Bruce Demarest keenly observes that “the Evangelists’ theology of Jesus in the Gospels is rather thin. But their experience of Jesus is rich—so strong and convincing in fact that it prompted them to lay down their lives for him. Experience changed them from tired, lukewarm, followers into tenacious, blazing disciples of the risen Lord.”<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that experience is our god. Jesus is the focus of the Gospel, and therefore, our focus as well; but Jesus is met in the stories of the Gospels, not simply in doctrinal creeds written about him.

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<sup>3</sup> Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1984), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1999), 101.

We are drawn to Jesus through the stories the four evangelists have told about him. The Gospel narrative acts as a spiritual magnet of sorts. Without lots of external commentary on the story, the story alone constantly points the audience to Jesus. When we see a movie about a famous person's life (Lincoln, William Wilberforce, etc.) we relate, we feel emotions, and we are drawn to them or repulsed by them. That is the power of the Gospel genre as seen in the Gospel of Mark. Thomas Boomershine sees the Gospel as a way for Christ himself to be the first story teller. "Through stories Jesus becomes present. There is a sense in which Jesus tells his own story, first to and through the evangelists and then to and through us."<sup>5</sup>

As Craddock put it: "Much of the Bible is obviously to be overheard before it can be heard."<sup>6</sup> When Mark's Gospel first was communicated, it was communicated orally. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie clarify the cultural setting in which this story originated. "Recent New Testament research has dealt with the first century as an oral culture in which probably no more than 5% of the people were literate...Mark's Gospel was composed to be told aloud and heard all at one time, probably in the marketplaces, at evening gatherings, or at synagogue-like assemblies."<sup>7</sup>

This approach has critics. Tambling warns us that "narrative, simply because it tells a story, is under suspicion."<sup>8</sup> Yet simply because truth is communicated by way of stories does not in any way diminish the truthfulness of the message. God uses both narrative and direct teaching all through the Bible. The Bible clearly tells us to not

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas E. Boomershine, *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Fred Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), 96.

<sup>7</sup> David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999). Xii.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Tambling, *Narrative and Ideology* (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 1991), 93.

murder in the Ten Commandments; but the story of Cain and Abel also communicates that same message through the narrative.

However, for some, the narrative is a lesser form of communication at best. Jesus would obviously not be in that camp. To study the Gospel of Mark (or any other Gospel for that matter) through the narrative lens does not attempt to answer all (modern day) theological questions. Often Jesus himself, when someone was attempting to back him into a theological corner, simply told a story. Thus, he left the interpretation and application up to the listener. So, let us be clear, the Gospel was written “from the persuaded to be persuasive,”<sup>9</sup> as Malbon so aptly put it. Mark’s author wrote his work for the purpose of convincing this audience of the work of God in the person of Jesus. The means of persuasion, however, differs greatly from Romans, where Paul is laying out one theological doctrine after another in (what he hopes to be) a clear, unambiguous, and convincing argument.

Malbon goes on to state that looking at Scripture through this lens, the question is not so much “what” as “how?”<sup>10</sup> There is something wonderful and exciting about looking at God’s written communication to us in this fashion. A story is so much richer and more complex than a simple didactic statement. Ryken compares it to the difference between a photo and a portrait. A photo is virtually objective. It shows every detail as it appears to the eye. A painted portrait is more selective in its detail, highlights, etc. It shows what the painter wants the viewer to see.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Hearing Mark: A Listener’s Guide*, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press) 2002, 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Ryken, 133.

The rest of this chapter will now briefly describe the basic elements of the Narrative Approach used in this type of Bible study. These components include: the author, narrator, setting, plot, point of view, element of time, rhetoric, major and minor characters, readers, and finally some distinctive features of Mark's Gospel.

### **The Author**

In his classic work on narratology, Mieke Bal states: "A narrative text is text in which an agent relates ('tells') a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof."<sup>12</sup>

Many scholars including Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie debate the original authorship of Mark. The authorship (the 'who') is unknown. Two major proposals are often put forth. The first "accepts a tradition from the second-century church leader Papias, who attributed this Gospel to a certain John Mark, 'an interpreter of the Apostle Peter' who wrote down the traditions about Jesus but 'not in the right order.' These scholars place the origin of Mark's Gospel in Rome in the mid to late 60s C.E. some thirty years after the death of Jesus and shortly after the execution of Peter and the harsh persecution of Christians in Rome by Emperor Nero."<sup>13</sup>

Other scholars argue for no direct link to Peter. Rhoads and colleagues go on to say that some "locate this Gospel in or near Palestine, usually in a rural atmosphere,

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<sup>12</sup> Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, 2.

perhaps Galilee or Syria. They date the Gospel during or just after the Roman-Judean War of 66-70 C.E....”<sup>14</sup>

In the Narrative Approach, arriving at some strong conclusion as to the identity of the author of this Gospel is not necessary. The point is not who, but how. It is stipulated up front that whoever the original author was (with the implied author being “Mark” in the Gospel’s title), the Holy Spirit used that person to bring God’s truth to us in the form of a story. The power of this approach does not depend on whether the author was well-known or unknown, Jew or Gentile, well-educated or uneducated. It is the text that author (whoever he was) has left behind that is of primary importance.

Make no mistake, as Boomershine writes, “The authors of the Gospels were skilled storytellers who knew what they were doing.”<sup>15</sup> The author uses story to communicate truth and to elicit a response. He/she draws the listener/reader into the action, deliberately setting them up in ways that play on their emotions and channel their conclusions to a desired result. As with any great piece of literature, the author uses conflict, suspense, humor, and more to focus the attention of the audience to where he/she desires.

## The Narrator

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>15</sup> Boomershine, 30.

In literary studies the writer/author is often distinguished from the narrator. As Bal argues, “the writer withdraws and calls upon a fictitious spokesman, an agent technically known as the narrator.”<sup>16</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie define the narrator in this manner: “The narrator refers to the way the story gets told—the voice of the storyteller, point of view, the overarching beliefs and ethical norms of the narrative, the manner of address and tone of the narrative, as well as the storytelling techniques in the narrative.”<sup>17</sup> The narrator directs the story of the author and thus the direction of the audience’s attention.

When you watch a television show or movie, you are not keenly aware of a director behind the scenes, but he/she is there, none-the-less. The narrator controls the “camera angles,” that is, the way the reader/listener receives the action. The core values and beliefs of the author are communicated through the narrator by means of how the story unfolds and is presented.

Genette’s famous work on narrative discourse clarifies the different types of narrators in literature. Some narrators are the main character in the story. This is the case with *Moby Dick*, which begins with a first person account from the opening line of, “Call me Ishmael.” Other narrators are external to the story, not one of the characters; they are third person narrators.<sup>18</sup> In this case, the reader/listener is not consciously aware of the narrator because he/she is not a character in the drama. However, he/she does control the drama, expressing the original author’s values and goals.

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<sup>16</sup> Bal, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 186.

An excellent description of the difference in the omniscience of the narrator can be found in Rhoads, Dewey, Michie's work. Narrators also range from having objective omniscience to having unlimited omniscience. Narrators with objective omniscience only relate what can be seen and heard. Limited omniscience narrators tell the reader/listener thoughts and feelings, but only those in the mind of the protagonist. Finally, unlimited omniscient narrators tell anything about the story, including what is happening in the minds of the characters and what is happening at any other time or place.<sup>19</sup>

The narrator we find in Mark's Gospel is an unlimited omniscience narrator. He knows the past, present and future. He can disclose the inner thoughts and intentions of any of the characters, including Jesus. This feature is a clear advantage to this type of Bible study. The student begins to realize that he/she is given information by the narrator that the characters in the story did not have at the time. We have a sense of being insiders into the narrative drama, like murder mystery viewers who see and know things that the show's characters do not yet know.

David Rhoads and his fellow authors point out that this intimate, inside information is used by the narrator to help the reader feel close, or distant from the characters in the story.<sup>20</sup> They go on to illustrate how we learn of the inside secret plotting of the Scribes and Pharisees that is not spoken aloud or we learn of Jesus' love for the outcast. Our emotions are often directed by the disclosures of the narrator to the readers. It must be pointed out, though, that interestingly enough, the teachings of Jesus

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<sup>19</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, 39-40.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 43.

are not given to the readers early. The Gospel audience learns what Jesus teaches at the same time the characters do in the story.<sup>21</sup>

### The Setting

Kingsbury offers a clear definition, “A ‘setting’ is the place, time, or social circumstances in which any character acts.”<sup>22</sup> In the story and study of the Gospel of Mark, the setting may prove to be quite important and symbolic. The four major settings we find in Mark’s writings are the mountain, the wilderness, the sea, and Jerusalem. Anderson<sup>23</sup> and others, point out the long held representational meanings of these particular settings. The “mountain” is where God often meets with his leaders (i.e. Moses, Jesus). The “sea” is a place of chaos and fear, yet a place where God demonstrates his power and authority (i.e. Jonah). The “wilderness” represents a place of divine care (i.e. the Israelites in the wilderness). Finally, “Jerusalem” is the Holy City symbolizing both the presence of God in the positive sense, and the seat of corruption in the negative sense.

In studying the Gospel of Mark through the narrative lens, it is important to take note of the possible significance of the setting. Settings are not random backdrops. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie observe that “they provide the conditions—the possibilities and the limitations—within which the characters chart their destinies.”<sup>24</sup> It becomes quickly obvious that the story of Jesus in Mark’s writing is generally divided between the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>22</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson and Moore, 37.

<sup>24</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, 63.

two major settings of Galilee (including the Gentile area of the Decapolis) and Jerusalem. The message of the kingdom that Jesus brings is embraced much quicker in Galilee, and is resisted more in entrenched Jerusalem. The movements of Jesus and the disciples from shore to shore (“the other side”), and from Galilee to Jerusalem encapsulate much of the setting in Marks’ work. In *Mark as Story*, the authors point out that “Jesus moves quickly (‘immediately’) from place to place, changing settings more than 40 times in these travels.”<sup>25</sup>

### The Plot

As with all good literature, a well-written story carries the reader/listener along with a well-crafted plot. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie give us this definition. “Plot has to do with events: how they are arranged, how they are connected, and what they reveal. Events are actions or happenings that bring about change.”<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Malbon puts a slightly different spin on the concept of plot. The “story” is the WHAT of the narrative such as events, characters, and setting; while the “discourse” is the HOW such as the rhetoric or the way the story is told within the plot.<sup>27</sup>

The connection, the glue that holds the story together, is of course Jesus. In particular, however, it is conflict between the characters that drives the plot—specifically in how they each relate to Jesus.<sup>28</sup> The plot is moved along by Jesus, proclaiming by word and deed the rule of God in the midst of roadblocks and resistance from all sides—

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 66-67

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Hearing Mark: A Listener's Guide* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

disciples, the crowd, and the religious establishment. No matter how chaotic it might seem in Mark's Gospel, things are never out of hand. God is directing the events behind the scenes and leading this story to a purposeful conclusion. The prologue and introduction of Mark's account of the story of Jesus take the mystery of purpose off the table. The book opens by making the intent of the writing unmistakable. "This is the story of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). It is immediately followed with prophetic validation from Isaiah in Mark 1:2-3. It is then proclaimed by the neo-Isaiah, John the Baptist. Even God himself validates the Gospel's conclusion at the very beginning at Jesus' baptism: "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased" (1:11). Then, before starting his ministry, Jesus passes the temptation test in the wilderness with flying colors. The author's goal for the reader, that is, the conclusion the author wants the reader to come to, is deliberately laid on the table before the plot hardly begins. This is clearly salvation history being communicated through this plot.

Ryken and Kingsbury remind us how just how thin the veil is between the natural and supernatural world. "Natural events (birth of babies, storms, etc.) are portrayed as supernatural; not so that you will take reality less seriously but more seriously."<sup>29</sup> In this plot the thin curtain between the earthly world and the divine world is torn down and events from both worlds mix together for God's purpose. There is the continual penetration of the supernatural into the earthly order: God's voice sounds, the Spirit descends, Satan tempts, Demons shout, Jesus overrides nature, and more.<sup>30</sup>

So as the student looks at this plot—you assume every event is written down for a reason. Obviously some details were included and others discarded. Those details given

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<sup>29</sup> Ryken, 181.

<sup>30</sup> Kingsbury, 1-2.

are viewed as important in the telling of the story. Kingsbury will not let us forget the one who is always center stage in this drama. “Jesus drives the plot in a kaleidoscopic variety of scenes, events, dialogue and encounters—all revolving around Jesus.”<sup>31</sup> The cosmic struggle of the kingdom of God and kingdom of the earth is played out in every scene. The reader/listener is often on the edge of his/her seat. He/she is watching as Jesus lives out the message of the Kingdom of God before an often spiritually deaf and blind world. The narrator has the student hoping Jesus will win, cheering for the disciples to finally understand, and for the bad guys in the religious establishment not to prevail.

The plot in Mark’s Gospel ends curiously. The resurrection is not explained theologically (as Paul does in his writings). The book ends in a way that almost leaves the conclusion to the reader/listener. It is as if the author says “You have heard the story. You have seen the evidence. You know the truth. Now it is up to you either to be afraid and silent or to be bold and tell the Good News yourself.”

### **The Point of View**

When you tell a story, you describe the actions from your own point of view. You put forth the facts you want to make known. You decide which details need further clarification, and which details can be omitted. The person listening to the story will

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 133.

place a greater or lesser credibility on your story based on their view of your trustworthiness.

When you watch a movie or television show, the director determines the camera angle by which the viewers will see the action take place. As a person watches the plot unfold from that intentionally predetermined point of view, you begin to form some conclusions. Depending on the point of view, you are drawn to certain characters and repulsed by others. For example, imagine the difference it might have made if the story of the healing of the lame man lowered through the roof had been told through his eyes; or what if the healings done on the Sabbath had been from the point of view of the Pharisees rather than from Mark's narrator?

It is important to understand that the narrator is not neutral. According to Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, "the narrator functions like the director of a film, who is responsible for the presentation of the whole story. Viewers observe the scenes and characters from the director's arrangement and perspective, although they never see the director."<sup>32</sup> In using the literary approach students are taught to ask, as Genette writes, "who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?"<sup>33</sup> Although this project strictly looked at only Mark's perspective, Christians are blessed to have, generally speaking, the point of view of four different authors of the Gospel Story.

### **The Element of Time**

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<sup>32</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, 43.

<sup>33</sup> Genette, 10.

As with point of view, literature also has the ability to influence the presentation of “time” in the story line. This feature of literature has several characteristics that shape the telling of the plot. How “time” is expressed is related to the order of events, speed of events, and effect that time has on the perceived importance of events.

The story teller may mention an event that happened in the past and insert its details into the current events. Likewise, the omniscient narrator may tell of events that are far off in the future. Malbon spells out the technical, or literary terms for this. “An event may be narrated after its logical order in the narrative world (analepsis). An event may be narrated before its logical order in the narrative world (prolepsis).”<sup>34</sup> The events are not strictly chronological. They are told for the purpose of getting the reader/listener to receive this new kingdom in Jesus the Christ. Time, as Rhoads and others sees it, is marked by Mark more by key moments and opportune time than by hours and days.<sup>35</sup> The narrator is much more concerned with kairos (the right time) and not so interested in chronos (sequential time).

The tempo of Mark’s narrative is fast-paced, moving quickly from event to event. The word “immediately” is used frequently, and gives the text a sense of urgency. Since this Gospel rendition is the shortest of the four Evangelists, with the sense of a fast-paced recitation of events—this Gospel is often mistakenly seen as less important, a kind of junior version. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Mark’s use of time is masterful. *Mark as Story* states, “Tempo refers to the relation between the theoretical time it would take for an event to occur in the story world

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<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark’s Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 16.

<sup>35</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, 65.

(event-time) and the time it takes to tell about it (narrating-time).<sup>36</sup> He establishes Jesus' identity by moving quickly from one miraculous encounter to another. He shows Jesus' superior wisdom in out-thinking his opponents at every turn. But also, like a great film maker, when the plot arrives at the Passion Week, he slows down the scenes to indicate importance, giving the reader an opportunity to take in the gravity of what is happening in the story line. The first half of Mark's work flies by quickly, moving the reader/listener at an almost dizzying speed from one occasion to another. The entire back half of the story is focused on basically just one week in the life of Jesus. The Passion Week is viewed at a much slower and intentional pace. The reader/listener is forced to consider the implications of what is happening in the plot. The storyteller has been leading his reader/listener to this climax, so he takes his time at this point. The change of pace is obvious and striking. This deliberate slowdown alerts the reader to pay attention here. Listen carefully, this is the point!

### **Rhetoric**

As has already been mentioned, an author writes with purpose. He/she intends to persuade the reader to think, feel and live differently because of what is being communicated. The tools at the author's disposal include the many and varied facets of rhetoric. Malbon writes, "Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. By the way the story is told, the implied author persuades the implied reader first to understand, and then to share and extend, the story's levels of meaning."<sup>37</sup> There are far too many aspects of rhetoric to

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>37</sup> Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*, 18.

discuss in great detail here. For our purposes, a cursory description of the major types of rhetoric used by Mark will have to suffice. These are fleshed out in greater detail by Rhoads,<sup>38</sup> and other writers.

- Repetition of words (i.e. “tax collectors and sinners”) alert the reader/listener that this is important.<sup>39</sup>
- Foreshadowing or anticipating future events (i.e. “will make you fishers of men” or “the one who will betray him”).
- Retrospection (recalling earlier events).
- Type scenes—Coming to Jesus, making a request, overcoming an obstacle, touching/speaking, healing, reaction of person/crowd.
- Sandwiched episodes (Jairus’ daughter, woman with blood, Jairus’ daughter or Peter in courtyard and Jesus on trial or fig tree and temple cleansing).
- Series of threes (Jesus prays three times in garden; Peter denies Jesus three times; Pilate asks three questions; crucifixion in three hour intervals, etc.).
- Other elements of rhetoric: questions, riddles, quotations, irony (“King of the Jews” or blind who “see”), parables, and analogies.

### Major Characters

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<sup>38</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, 47-54

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 48

This element of literature proves to be one of the most useful in Bible study. The Scriptures are full of intriguing people—heroes and villains, powerful and powerless, and believers and critics—all involved in salvation history as it unfolds before us on the pages of the text. *Mark as Story* gives us this definition, “Characters are the actors in the story—their identity and place in society, their motives and drives, their traits, their way of relating to each other, their disclosure in the plot, as well as the changes and developments that take place in the characters as a result of the action.”<sup>40</sup>

Jesus (from the first verse to the last) is the main character. He is seen as unconventional, sure of himself, comfortable in his own skin, and not flustered by the cultural chaos swirling around him. He knows who he is and he knows his purpose in life. Kingsbury keeps the focus where it belongs. The narrative of Mark is always about Jesus. All the other characters are viewed in relationship to him. “Jesus is the protagonist of Mark’s story. Of the major characters, he is the one who always views reality—what is good or bad, right or wrong, true or false—the way God does.”<sup>41</sup>

The true identity of Jesus is not known by the characters in the story (except by God the Father, the demons [3:11] and outsiders like the Centurion [15:37, 39]). Kingsbury states, “It also suggests that humans cannot perceive aright what Jesus is until they view his entire life and ministry from the perspective of the cross.”<sup>42</sup> However, the readers/listeners are told the distinctiveness of Jesus from the very beginning. Part of the joy of studying the Bible with this approach is to know who Jesus is, but then to watch the characters in the story try to figure it out.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>41</sup> Kingsbury, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 6.

Malbon does an excellent job of summarizing the major characters in this Gospel text. The four major “characters” in the Gospel of Mark are Jesus, Religious Authorities, the Disciples, and the Crowd. Some of these characters are “flat” and some are “round.” A “flat” character is simple and consistent. His/her actions are very predictable. Round characters, on the other hand, are complex, dynamic and changing. They reveal new aspects about themselves as the story progresses.<sup>43</sup> “Flat and round” is not the same as “minor and major.” Jewish leaders are not minor but they are flat. Flat and round are also not the same as positive and negative. The anointing woman is flat and positive. The disciples are round and both positive and negative. Only Jesus is round and positive.<sup>44</sup>

The narrator uses the characters to help shape the readers/listeners reactions to the story. You feel sympathy and empathy toward certain characters and you are disgusted by others. In many ways the reader/listener sees him/herself in the actions and reactions of the characters on the page. You are drawn into the story itself as you see and hear the interplay between the characters. You hear their words, observe their choices, and see their conclusions being formed in the midst of the unfolding drama. It is almost impossible not to compare those things with your own emotions and beliefs regarding this man Jesus.

The religious authorities are the second of four major characters in the text. As Jesus is the protagonist, they are the clear antagonists. Rhoads, Dewey, Michie see fear as the reason for their reactions to the person of Jesus. “Fear is at the root of the authorities quest—fear of losing their positions with Judean/Roman patrons; fear of

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<sup>43</sup> Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*, 10-11.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

losing face with peers; fear of losing power and wealth.”<sup>45</sup> An important distinction must be made here. All too often, Christians and non-Christians, alike have mistakenly blamed “the Jews” for killing Jesus. In truth, according to Malbon, “Mark’s narrative clearly depicts the Jewish leaders as a whole, and not the Jewish people, as enemies to Jesus.”<sup>46</sup> And even here the “religious leaders” cannot be painted with so broad a brush. Nicodemus, Jairus, and others in authority are treated by Jesus (and Mark) with special care. She goes on to say that “the Markan Jesus does not give up on one struggling between faith and unfaith. Fallibility is forgiven.”<sup>47</sup> But stubborn, closed-minded pride is not tolerated.

Viewing Mark’s writings narratively, however, the reader might want to reconsider the total disregard for the religious leaders. Rhoads, Dewey, Michie point out the handicap from which the Jewish leaders had to operate. “The authorities do not know that Jesus is the Son of God. They have had no access to the private vision at his baptism, his confrontation with Satan, or his private teachings...In this light, the Markan authorities can be viewed sympathetically in terms of the culture of the time.”<sup>48</sup> While Rhoads, Dewey, Michie’s observations are true, it is also clear from the narrative that the author wants the readers/listeners to be drawn to Jesus, sympathetic to the disciples, and disgusted by the religious leaders.

The disciples are, as a group, the third major character in the text. As Kingsbury put it, “the disciples plainly stand out as a single character.”<sup>49</sup> It is in the role of the disciples that the reader/listener can most see himself or herself. Tannehill sees the

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<sup>45</sup> Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, 121.

<sup>46</sup> Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*, 195.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>48</sup> Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, 87.

<sup>49</sup> Kingsbury, 9.

connection this way, “The author composed his story so as to make use of this initial tendency to identify with the disciples in order to speak indirectly to the reader through the disciples’ story.”<sup>50</sup> There are times when the disciples’ actions or reactions mirror what you think you might have done in that situation. Other times it is easy to feel disappointed at the slowness of Jesus’ friends until you realize that the narrator has let you in on the inside information as to Jesus’ identity—information that the disciples were not privy. Dewey makes this important distinction: “The implied reader’s situation is that of the disciples, but his or her values are those of Jesus.”<sup>51</sup>

How does the character of the religious leaders differ from the character of the disciples? Primarily the difference resides in the heart. Both can be wayward and wrong, the disciples truly want to “get it” but the religious leaders REFUSE to “get it.”

Another interesting trait of the disciples concerns their obedience versus their blind ambition. Malbon argues that “when the disciples respond to Jesus’ request for assistance, they are often successful; when they volunteer assistance on their own, they are usually off course. Apparently, to follow Jesus, the disciples must follow Jesus’ lead.”<sup>52</sup>

As a whole, the disciples act as constants in the story line. They react to the events of the narrative rather than create them. As Kingsbury sees it, only one of the twelve alters the direction of the plot. “Except perhaps for Judas, the disciples do not greatly influence the plot, or course of events, in Mark’s story.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Robert Tannehill, “*The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role*,” *Journal of Religion* 57 (1977): 392-393.

<sup>51</sup> Joanna Dewey, “*Point of View and the Disciples in Mark*,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 21 (1982): 103.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>53</sup> Kingsbury, 8.

The final “major character” is also made up of many people who function in the text as one. There are several important differences between the crowds, the authorities, and the disciples. The crowds are not the enemy combatant with Jesus as the religious leaders are. They seek Jesus out regularly, but not for intentional conflict. They come out of curiosity or in need. They appear and disappear throughout the narrative, providing teaching opportunities for Jesus. Malbon gives us this pithy summary, “Crowds come to Jesus, disciples go with Jesus.”<sup>54</sup> Malbon goes so far as to call the disciples and the crowd together, a “composite portrait of followers of Jesus.”<sup>55</sup> They do not compete with each other; they complement one another; however they are not the same. It is to the disciples alone, not the crowd, that Jesus entrusts his deepest teaching and ultimately his further mission to the world.

Malbon’s summary is helpful in understanding Jesus’ reaction to the various characters he encounters in the story. “To those who argue from authority (Pharisees and Scribes), Jesus argues from a higher one. To those who listen (the crowds), Jesus speaks. To those who ask questions (the disciples), Jesus dialogues.”<sup>56</sup>

### **Minor Characters**

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<sup>54</sup> Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*, 79.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>56</sup> Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*, 92.

Other than the four major characters: Jesus, the authorities, the disciples and the crowds—other people appear on the scene to spice up the narrative. They constitute what the literary world would call, the minor characters. What is a “minor character?”

Rhoads, Dewey, Michie clarify the difference: “Minor characters do not play ongoing roles in the story. They make brief, cameo-appearances and then disappear. They are not a group character, because individually they are not connected to each other. . . . The brevity of their appearances and, in most cases, their anonymity in no way diminish their importance.”<sup>57</sup>

These “minor” characters in Mark’s Gospel would include The Gerasene demoniac, the Syrophenician woman, the anointing woman, the leper, and others. Kingsbury sees these “minor” roles as being significant in a major way. Their role in the story is often to display great faith in Jesus, in contrast to either the disciples or the authorities. They often function as foils or contrasts to the major characters.<sup>58</sup> Malbon also praises the contribution of these actors. “The minor characters are most often presented as exemplars. In their brief moments of narrative time they serve as models for attitudes and behaviors appropriate also for the major characters of the narrative, and especially for the implied audience.”<sup>59</sup> Often, the minor characters Mark gives us are the opposite of the stereotype the reader/listener might be tempted to give them. Jairus (Mark 5) is a good synagogue leader. Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:43) is a religious leader who is positive, truly looking for God’s kingdom. They are not the “meat” of the message, but rather the “flavor.” They accent the plot, rather than move it along. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie believe that “Jesus and the minor characters (for the most

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<sup>57</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, 129.

<sup>58</sup> Kingsbury, 25.

<sup>59</sup> Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*, 198.

part) embody what God wants for the people. The authorities embody what people want for themselves. The disciples vacillate between the two ways.”<sup>60</sup>

There are many women who play the role of “minor character” in the Markan Gospel. These women include Peter’s mother-in-law (chapter 1), the woman with the issue of blood (chapter 5), Jairus’ daughter (chapter 5), the Syrophenician woman (chapter 7), the widow with the offering (chapter 12), the anointing woman (chapter 14), and the women at the cross and the tomb (chapters 15, 16). In reading these pericopes, it is clear that women are predominantly portrayed as good and positive. While there are villainous women in Mark’s writing, like Herodias, by and large women are portrayed in a positive light. “Woman characters are not as numerous as men in Mark, nor are their names as frequently given, but their connotative value, like that of the men, is determined not by their sex or their numbers, but by their relation to Jesus and their actions—either toward Jesus himself or in light of Jesus’ demands for fellowship. No one is excluded from fellowship; no one is protected from fallibility,”<sup>61</sup> wrote Malbon. The term “minor character” is a misnomer of sorts; given the important role they play in the story. The minor characters are certainly not minor.

### **The Readers**

The story is clearly all about Jesus, but the story is told FOR the reader/listener. The reason these events were recorded was for communication and transformation of

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<sup>60</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, 101.

<sup>61</sup> Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*, 66-67.

those who would listen. The narrative invites us in to see, listen, and experience the life of Jesus and then decide for ourselves to accept or reject it. Boomershine sees the narrative almost like a seductive invitation: “The story invites us to be there in all the immediacy of each of the senses. The sights, sounds, tastes, touches, and smells of this event in Jesus’ life can emerge in prayer. That experience can, in turn, shed light on our relationship with Christ and on our mission.”<sup>62</sup> This is especially obvious at the abrupt ending of Mark’s story as the rest is left up to the listener/hearer. Each person to whom the story is told must then decide if he or she can see/hear the kingdom of God breaking through in the person of Jesus. It is as if the author is asking, “what will you now do with this message?”

Here lies the genius of the Narrative Approach. Unlike direct, precept-oriented teaching, the story has a different appeal. Boomershine’s overarching conclusion is beautiful: “Trust the story. The stories of God, when told faithfully out of a commitment to understand and internalize them deeply, have their own power and life.”<sup>63</sup> They are like seeds planted in the soul of the human heart, that germinate and start to grow on their own, messing with and meshing with our own stories. As Craddock put it so well: “The text has not just a past but a future, and that future is toward the reader/listener....”<sup>64</sup>

These basic elements of the narrative or literary approach were practically put to use each week in life of the participants. The terms defined above would be part of the language used when the group came together to discuss the text assigned for that week. A three page “reading reference sheet” was created for the participants to use in their study. I developed some questions to ask of the text designed to help us think narratively.

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<sup>62</sup> Boomershine, 51.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>64</sup> Craddock, 63.

The questions were divided into topics: general, narrator, setting, plot, point of view, element of time, rhetoric, major characters, minor characters, and the Narrative Approach itself. This reference tool was created for the participants to use in their own private preparation for group discussion over each night's periscopes in Mark. We did not refer to this sheet during our group times together. The "reading reference sheet" can be found in Appendix K.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE DATA**

This chapter will concern itself primarily with the data used in the evaluation of this project. The participants will be described first. This will be followed by an explanation of the method of analysis and the use of triangulation. The beginning and ending questionnaire will then be discussed. This questionnaire (the same one given at the beginning and end of the study) can be found in the Appendix I. Finally, the Long Interview transcript will be provided.

#### **The Participants**

The participants for this group study were chosen by invitation only. It was my desire to vary the sample by age, gender, length of time as a Christian, and longevity at Highline Christian Church. A letter of invitation to the project was hand delivered to the potential participants two months prior to the beginning of the study (see Appendix A). All those asked accepted, which brought the total to 11 participants, plus me. Each participant also signed and initialed a form indicating their understanding of the purpose and expectation of the project (see Appendix B). The group functioned very well with 11 participants. However, I would not recommend any more than 10 or 11, and in fact, would suggest limiting the size of the group to only 6 to 8 members. The more intimate number seemed to take away the fear people often have of talking in a group. Everyone took part in the discussion each night. It was not a problem, at all, to get the students to

share their thoughts and insights. As a group, we always had more to say than time to say it. A smaller group would not necessarily “fix” that “problem,” but it would enable more people to interject more often in the group dynamics of the night.

Of the 11 participants—3 were new to the faith; 2 were new to Highline; 1 was currently on staff at the church; 1 was a former staff member; 3 were current elders; 4 were in their 20’s; 1 in her 40’s; 5 were in their 50’s, and 1 in his 60’s. Six indicated that they had never been a Bible study leader and 5 indicated they had.

The attendance was excellent for the 12 week project. No one missed more than once or twice, and the vast majority were present every week. Each and every one of the eleven who took part in this project was a blessing to me personally and to the group as a whole. Individually, each person contributed his/her own personality, insights, and perspective that made the group function better. While later in this project, it will be elaborated on in greater detail, it should be mentioned here that this type of Bible study (the Narrative Approach) is amazingly effective in a group setting. I am deeply indebted to all those who sacrificed twelve Sunday nights and hours of personal preparation for our time together. I am forever grateful!

### **The Methodology of Analysis**

This was a qualitative study to attempt to determine the effectiveness of the Narrative Approach in the small group setting. The methodology was guided by the qualitative research process. Grant McCracken makes it clear that in contrast to quantitative research, which seeks to identify and define categories before the study; the

qualitative method discovers the themes and categories during the study itself.<sup>65</sup> The Long Interview was the culmination of the group's time together and provided the data for the conclusions made in this project. Qualitative research is concerned with "informational, not statistical, considerations,"<sup>66</sup> as Guba and Lincoln put it. McCracken described it this way: "The Long Interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves."<sup>67</sup> The respondents play the crucial role in this type of research analysis.

The driving research question allowed for those participating to communicate openly and with minimal conversational boundaries. The Long Interview method was implemented to allow the researcher to listen and explore unanticipated issues, questions, thoughts, and concerns without unduly influencing the discussion. The group interview questions were given two weeks early without discussion. The intent was to allow the respondents to have time to think over their experience with the Narrative Approach in the group. Then, they would come to the final meeting with some preparation as to what they each would like to communicate to the group regarding this approach.

The Long Interview was conducted at a private home (the same home where the focus group had been meeting). It lasted two hours and was tape recorded so the researcher could transcribe the discussion verbatim. The interview questions served as very flexible guides for the group discussion (see Appendix N). They were intended to begin a conversation, while leaving plenty of room for the discussion to go anywhere the group wanted. I did not participate in the particulars of the Long Interview except to

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<sup>65</sup> Grant McCracken, *The Long Interview Qualitative Research Methods*, Volume 13 (London, England: Sage Publications, 1988), 16

<sup>66</sup> Y.S. Lincoln and E.G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985), 202.

<sup>67</sup> McCracken, 9.

occasionally rephrase an individual's comment for clarification, or to keep the conversation within the boundaries of the topic at hand.

The systematic analysis of the data provided by the participants in the study group was transcribed, and carefully read multiple times. The theme of the project itself (the Narrative Approach) became the basic method used to analyze the data. The focus group simply looked at the text itself without outside resources in order to come to a conclusion regarding the purpose and message of the Gospel of Mark. As the researcher, I analyzed the data for this research project by looking at the text of the Long Interview itself. I was using the same approach to analyze the project that the students used to examine the Gospel of Mark. The text of the Long Interview became the narrative I used to arrive at the conclusions cited in Chapter Four.

As I read and re-read, I color-coded the verbatim of the Long Interview looking for key phrases and themes to emerge. The repetition of key phrases or ideas allowed for a degree of quantitative data to be added to the data in the transcripts. Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman observed that "coding data is the formal representation of analytic thinking. The tough intellectual work of analysis is generating categories and themes. The researcher then applies some coding scheme to those categories and themes and diligently and thoroughly marks passages in the data using the codes."<sup>68</sup> That process of analysis yielded much fruit that will be the basis for the conclusions given in chapter four of this project.

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<sup>68</sup> Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999), 155.

## Triangulation

Once I had read the long-interview transcript and coded it completely, I used an evaluation approach to validate the conclusions. This is known as “triangulation.” It is vital that the findings be credible. Lincoln and Guba state “There are three such activities: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation.”<sup>69</sup>

Triangulation is the method whereby the data is reviewed by another source. The conclusions of the researcher are thereby challenged and/or verified.

I found the process of triangulation confirming. The person who acted as the consultant in this project is very familiar with this methodology, and quite experienced in utilizing this approach. He was given the transcript of the Long Interview without comment. He did his own analysis of the data, and sent his conclusions regarding the primary themes to be found in the group interview. I did not read his deductions until my own research conclusions were put in writing. When the consultant’s analysis of the data was read, it was discovered that, although worded differently—he had isolated the same major themes from the data that I had identified. After confirming these major topics through this part of the process, I began to draw conclusions regarding the overarching research question and the implications of such conclusions. Those will be detailed later in this project.

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<sup>69</sup> Lincoln and Guba, 301.

### **The Beginning/Ending Questionnaire**

Although the research method for this project is qualitative, and the primary tool for that research is the Long Interview; a quantitative questionnaire was given at the beginning and end of the class to gain a general benchmark of the participants' current interest in, and experience with Bible Study. The questionnaire (see Appendix I) consisted of 20 very basic and general questions regarding each individual's habits, enthusiasm, and general approach to the Bible and Bible Study. There is some intentional overlap in the wording of the questions. This research technique helps the researcher measure the genuineness of the answer to a particular topic. As the questions probe some similar topics, the researcher is able to look for consistency in a participant's response to that topic.

The participants were not provided their answers from the identical pre-class questionnaire. One student was absent when the questionnaire was given the second time and thus there are only ten student responses analyzed in the data below. In each case, the question will be given followed by each participant's answer pre-class and post-class. Then a brief conclusion will be offered regarding the data given for each question. The students were allowed to write in an answer to the question if they felt the options given didn't adequately represent their position.

#### **1. I read my Bible**

- a. Every day

- b. Several times a week
- c. Once a week
- d. Occasionally
- e. Never

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Several times a week	Every day
<b>Participant 2</b>	Daily	Daily
<b>Participant 3</b>	Occasionally	Occasionally
<b>Participant 4</b>	Occasionally	Occasionally
<b>Participant 5</b>	Daily	Daily
<b>Participant 6</b>	Several times a week	Several times a week
<b>Participant 7</b>	Once a week	Several times a week
<b>Participant 8</b>	Occasionally	Every day
<b>Participant 9</b>	Occasionally	Every day
<b>Participant 10</b>	Several times a week	Several times a week

This question was designed to get a baseline understanding of how often the Bible is read by each participant. All the respondents, except three, answered the same way on both questionnaires. Those who answered differently indicated an increase in Bible reading. Two participants showed marked improvement in this area going from “occasionally” to “everyday.” This welcome increase is possibly indicative of the study needed to prepare for our study in Mark’s Gospel. The conclusion, however, is not certain. It may very well be those three individuals have a greater desire to read the Bible on a more frequent basis.

**2. I am involved in a regular Bible study group.**

- a. Daily
- b. Weekly

- c. A few times a year
- d. Rarely
- e. Never

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Weekly	Weekly
<b>Participant 2</b>	Weekly	Weekly
<b>Participant 3</b>	Weekly	Weekly
<b>Participant 4</b>	Few times a year	Few times a year
<b>Participant 5</b>	Weekly	Weekly
<b>Participant 6</b>	Weekly	Weekly
<b>Participant 7</b>	Weekly	Two times a week
<b>Participant 8</b>	Never	Weekly
<b>Participant 9</b>	Rarely	Weekly
<b>Participant 10</b>	Weekly	Weekly

This question served as a means to gauge each respondent's regular participation in a group Bible study of any kind. Everyone, with the exception of three, had been and continues to be involved in a weekly gathering. One indicated the less often participation of a few times a year. The two other persons recorded an increased involvement. One went from "rarely" to "weekly" and the other from "never" to weekly."

**3. What is your level of excitement in personal Bible study (in general, not referring to this focus group)?**

- a. Very Excited
- b. Excited
- c. Routine
- d. A Little Boring
- e. Dry as Dust
- f. Non-Existent

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Routine	Routine
<b>Participant 2</b>	Routine/Excited	Routine/Excited
<b>Participant 3</b>	A Little Boring	Routine
<b>Participant 4</b>	Routine	Routine
<b>Participant 5</b>	Very Excited	Very Excited
<b>Participant 6</b>	Excited	Excited
<b>Participant 7</b>	Excited	Routine
<b>Participant 8</b>	A Little Boring	Routine
<b>Participant 9</b>	A Little Boring	Excited/Routine
<b>Participant 10</b>	Very Excited	Very Excited

Question three attempts to get at the emotional level as it relates to each person's desire for Bible study. Six of the ten indicated no change. Three of the ten had their level of emotional energy improve from the first questionnaire to the last. One person recorded decreased enthusiasm going from "excited" to "routine."

**4. I need to find an approach to the Bible that will give me new zeal for Bible study. I'm feeling kind of dry.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Agree	Disagree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Agree	Disagree

<b>Participant 7</b>	Agree	Disagree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Strongly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree
<b>Participant 9</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Disagree	Disagree

Of the seven participants who indicated that they needed/wanted to find an approach to the Bible that would give them more zeal, over half recorded improvement in that area. No one showed greater need at the end, than at the beginning, for a Bible study that would give them more zeal.

**5. The Bible can be approached the same way you would approach literature in general.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Disagree	Agree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Disagree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 7</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Disagree	Depends on the book
<b>Participant 9</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Disagree	Agree

The response to this question, pre and post class, shows a great deal of change in opinion. Going into the study many (6 of 10) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the Bible can be approached like you would other literature. Following our group study together, 5 of those 6 students were more ready to accept this method of Bible study. The one who put “depends of the book” indicated that if it was a narrative book in genre it could be studied this way (strongly agree), but if it is of a more didactic genre then it does not lend itself to this approach (strongly disagree). This result is encouraging in several ways. It shows that the students see value in studying the text of the Gospel of Mark in the same manner you might study any great piece of literature. It further points to a possible willingness to engage in this method in a future study. Finally, the positive trend in the post-class answers would lead me to conclude, that the students did not see the literary approach as a threat to the authority of the text of the Bible.

**6. I prefer to study the Bible in a group.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree

<b>Participant 7</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree
<b>Participant 9</b>	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Agree	Strongly Agree

The pre and post test results do not indicate a great shift. Most students remained unmoved regarding this issue. It should be noted that 8 of the 10 either marked “agree” or strongly” agree. One participant’s desire for group study seemed to lessen, while two participants increased. It will be shown in the Long Interview transcript, however, that the students verbally indicated an overwhelming love of the group dynamics to this approach. Their comments at that point are overwhelming positive in what they had experienced together. Further, they spoke strongly about what would be lost had this endeavor been attempted individually without group feedback and input.

**7. It is hard to figure out what the Bible is trying to say. I get confused easily and sometimes I think I miss the main point.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 7</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Disagree	Disagree

<b>Participant 9</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree

This question produced a mixed result. Of those who indicated confusion in their own Bible study, one moved from “agree” to a neutral position. Most, however, initially stated that they did not have a problem in this area. Of those participants in that case, two moved from “disagree” to “neither agree nor disagree” possibly admitting that confusion had increased.

**8. I need commentaries, sermons, study aids, and other Bible tools. Just using the Bible alone isn't very effective for me.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Agree	Disagree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Agree	Agree

<b>Participant 7</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 9</b>	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Agree	Disagree

The results here point to a shift among half of the participants. Five of the ten participants did not acknowledge a change in this area. Among those whose positions changed, they moved to a position of not feeling the need for outside resources to experience effective Bible study. This would be a goal in the further use of the Narrative Approach to Bible study. Often, students of the Bible believe they are inadequate and incapable of understanding Scripture unless they have extensive knowledge from outside sources. This belief can discourage the believer from even attempting to read and understand the written Word.

**9. It is easy for me to see how the stories of the Gospels fit together.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Disagree	Agree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 7</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Agree	Agree

<b>Participant 9</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree

Once again, half of the participants did not show movement in this area. Of the half that showed movement, 4 of the 5 indicated a greater ability to see how the Gospel stories fit together than they did previously. Only one student, Participant 10, ended up neither in the “agree” or “strongly agree” column. The Narrative Approach works hard to illustrate how each pericope fits into the big Gospel story that is being communicated throughout the entire text.

**10. I think I’m equipped enough to just read the Bible and get much out of it.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Disagree	Agree
<b>Participant 7</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 9</b>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Disagree	Disagree

Three participants moved towards the direction of just reading the Bible to get something out of it. 6 respondents were unchanged. One showed less confidence with a study of Scripture alone.

**11. When I read the Gospels it's easy to see the way the story is written to elicit a certain response from the reader.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Disagree	Agree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Disagree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 7</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Disagree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 9</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Disagree	Agree

Six of the ten participants showed a marked change here. All the movement was in the direction of students seeing the Gospel writer's intent in a clearer way post-class. No one indicated a lesser understanding from the pre to the post questionnaire. This topic came up repeatedly in our study together. It is encouraging to see the change in this area. The intent of the Gospel writer becomes crystal clear in the opening verses of the text. The rest of the Gospel only serves to confirm the assertion offered to the reader/listener at the beginning. Four "strongly agrees" and four "agrees" in the final survey are an encouraging result for the positive effects of this method.

**12. The Gospels contain a collection of stories about Jesus. To be honest the stories seem to be randomly arranged with little intentional connection and flow.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Agree	Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Agree	Disagree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 7</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 9</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Agree	Disagree

Once again 50% of those responding show the positive effects of the Narrative Approach. There is a greater sense of the intentional arrangement and flow of the text of the Gospel. Two of those indicating a positive change jumped two places (i.e. from “neither agree or disagree” to “strongly disagree”). In the Long Interview it was clear that the Narrative Approach greatly benefited their understanding of the big picture of the Gospel text.

**13. The stories of the Gospels are important but the real focus needs to be on what Jesus actually said (like the Sermon on the Mount and the Great Commission).**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Disagree	Disagree

<b>Participant 7</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 9</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree

How important is the role of the “story” itself in communicating God’s truth to humans? This question was asked to get a sampling of the students’ view of didactic teaching versus teaching imbedded in the narrative action in the Gospel. Here again, 50% of the participants did not change their answer from the first time they took the questionnaire to the last. However, of the 50% whose answer did vary, however, the change is striking and obvious. All of those participants moved in a direction that would point to a positive impact of the Narrative Approach that they had experienced. Participant 5 shows the greatest disparity by moving to the complete opposite extreme.

#### **14. Dominant themes stand out to me clearly as I read through a Gospel.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Disagree	Agree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Agree	Agree

<b>Participant 7</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree
<b>Participant 9</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Agree	Agree

50% of the participants' answers remained the same from one test to the other.

Four out of the five participants whose answers changed, would indicate a positive impact of the Narrative Approach as dominant themes were more easily recognized. This question is an overlap with Question 9. The consistency of the participants' answers can be seen in the post-class responses to each question.

**15. I've read through the Gospel or heard sermons on it so many times that it's hard to find it fresh and exciting anymore.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Agree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Agree	Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Agree	Disagree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Agree	Disagree

<b>Participant 7</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 9</b>	Agree	Disagree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Six of ten participants had their answers vary from one questionnaire to the next. In the pre-class questionnaire, half of the participants found it hard to see Scripture as “fresh” and “exciting.” In the post-class inquiry, all of those with variant answers indicated a positive response to the study. This particular question gets to the heart of the over-arching research question. It indicates that, yes indeed, this study did produce more excitement and enthusiasm for the study of God’s Word.

**16. A Gospel (such as Mark’s Gospel) was written to give us an objective look at the life of Jesus.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Agree	Disagree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Disagree	Agree

<b>Participant 7</b>	Disagree	Agree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 9</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Disagree	Disagree

Over half (60%) recorded no change. Three of the four students whose answers changed indicated seeing the Gospel account as a more objective look at Jesus' life.

**17. To look at a Gospel through the lens of literature (characters, plot, setting, etc.) seems somehow wrong or not very spiritual.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 7</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 9</b>	Agree	Disagree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree

60% of the respondents changed their answers, and all the changes show a more positive disposition toward the narrative/literary method of Bible study. This result is most welcome. While only one initially expressed concern over this type of study (Participant 9), in the end, all the students were comfortable (“disagree”) or very

comfortable (“strongly disagree”) with this kind of study of the Bible. This question corresponds to Question Five. The answers indicate a consistency with this issue.

**18. When I read a Gospel story I usually just try to understand the story as a whole. I don’t find the details all that enlightening.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 7</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 9</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree

70% show no movement here. 20% moved toward appreciating the details more, while 10% showed less interest in the details. Please note later on, in the Long Interview, when the details of the text gets mentioned multiple times, the participants universally affirm the value of the details and how this method caused them to pay more attention to them.

**19. I have confidence when I read the Bible that I can get new insights that strengthen my faith.**

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Agree	Agree
<b>Participant 7</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree
<b>Participant 9</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree

80% of the answers did not change. This is the highest percentage of consistency between the pre and post questionnaires. The 20% that did indicate change, however, once again changed in a positive direction. This question is an important indicator in the participants' confidence in approaching the Bible themselves and coming away with something positive in their walk with God. Only one person specified something less than "agree."

**20. I usually find group Bible study a little boring and predictable.**

- a. Strongly Agree

- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Pre-Class</b>	<b>Post-Class</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 2</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 3</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 4</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 5</b>	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Participant 6</b>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 7</b>	Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 8</b>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 9</b>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
<b>Participant 10</b>	Depends on the setting	In a typical setting

Sixty percent of the answers remained the same. Twenty percent moved in a positive direction (less boring and predictable), and 10% moved in a more negative (more boring and predictable direction).

Overall, the comparison of the questionnaire given before and after shows a general positive effect of the focus group Bible study. The participants showed a greater openness to this method. They exhibited more confidence in the use of the text itself. They also, generally, showed a greater interest or enthusiasm toward Bible study. These preliminary conclusions will be fleshed out in much greater detail using the primary instrument of data evaluation, the Long Interview.

### **Post Focus Group Discussion**

The final meeting for this focus group took place on Palm Sunday evening, March 24, 2013. Everyone was present, and eager to discuss their perspective on our shared experience through the Gospel of Mark. A set of questions had been given to class participants two weeks prior so each one would have an opportunity to seriously reflect on their own personal reaction to the Narrative Approach (see Appendix N). They were encouraged to jot down any thoughts they might want to share at this final meeting. The discussion lasted for a full two hours. The same questions guided the interview. The following is the transcript of that discussion.

Tim: So this is our last night together. It is bitter sweet, really. It's been awesome! You guys have contributed way more than anything I hoped for. I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I have, and I'm anxious to hear your reflections.

The goal tonight is to simply talk openly about what we've experienced. I want you to know there aren't right answers and wrong answers. I'm not going to be graded by my professor on you giving the "correct response" to any question. The desire is to know what you honestly experienced as we went through Mark looking at it through the Narrative lens in our group. So, I want to hear your honest reflections on the adventure we've taken.

As you notice we're taping tonight's discussion with three different recorders so I have back up in case something goes wrong. And, I want you to know that when it's transcribed you will be given a participant number. I mentioned that to you at the start.

That is so you will have some anonymity when this thesis is published. You will be “Participant 1” or “Participant 4” or whatever.

My role tonight...I’m really not participating in the discussion per se. I’m not going to be answering the questions along with you. This is your night. My role is to kind of guide us on the journey, as we go through the Narrative Approach. So thank you, in advance, for your candid responses.

Also, after the session, if there is anything else you want to say to me---you can send it by email; you can hand me papers; you can call me, tweet me, whatever. You know how to get a hold of me. Sometimes people think of things later, and are like, “you know I wish I’d said that.” I’ll be writing this over the Summer so you’ll have an opportunity if something else hits you and you go “I really wished I’d said \_\_\_\_\_.” So I’m going to pray and then we’ll go down this list, and I’ll just try to keep us in the bounds of narrative criticism as we discuss it.

Father, each person in this circle is precious to me. I thank you for the time they’ve given these past dozen Sunday nights. I thank you, Lord, and I pray you will bless them in their walk with you. I pray, God, that as they look at the Scriptures that it will be fresh and new. I pray you’ll deepen their understanding of who you are, and what you’ve done. I thank you for the thought they’ve given even into tonight as we discuss the Narrative Approach together. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

So let's begin. I think everyone, but Participant 11, had an opportunity to watch the DVD the second time through. So let's just begin by asking you to discuss your observations the second time you watched the DVD presentation compared to the first time you watched it.

Participant 8:

The first time, I was looking at the story and everything that happened in it. The second time, I was focusing more on the telling of it. His emphasis on things and how it all flowed, rather than the background information.

Participant 4:

I feel like there were things I noticed the second time that I didn't notice the first time, because we discussed it in such great detail. For example, the fig tree sandwich. I wouldn't of even given it a second thought the first time. I would have just flown past that detail, but since we've talked about everything so broken down--I caught stuff like that the second time around.

Participant 9:

I think that my familiarity with the topic make it look easier, and not as easy, because I sort of knew like where he was going but as he was talking about certain things, like bits and pieces of the discussion that we had surrounding that pericope or that verse would come to mind. I was definitely more familiar with the material. And I think the fluidity seemed more noticeable, more emphasized this time; just because the idea of everything weaving together instead of being individual little stories.

Tim:

Okay, so by fluidity you mean what exactly?

Participant 9:

How everything sort of fits together, I guess. He has little pauses in his dramatic telling that I didn't notice the first time. Whereas after having gone through, learning more about the Narrative Approach, and looking at the book through the Narrative Approach, it's like, there is an arrangement to it. It all goes together. It's not individual little stories.

Participant 8:

When you're reading or studying or particularly listening to a sermon, you get two or three verses here, and you focus on just that pericope. But when you're looking at the whole thing you see much better "okay this follows this." So you can look at it referencing this two chapters earlier. Where you might not think about it if you were just sitting down to read your ten daily verses or whatever.

Tim:

Okay.

Participant 9:

Yeah, that, what he said (laughter).

Participant 6:

I felt like my familiarity with it made it go faster. It just seemed like the whole video was like "What? We're already there?" Where the first time, I was struggling to stay focused with it. And I was really surprised how early on Jesus referred to the end, and how early the religious leaders wanted to kill him. And so, I don't know, that never popped out to me before. I think by studying it through the narrative lens, it was like, "wait a second, did that really come that soon?" Because I don't remember it being that soon. I think just seeing the whole thing at once, versus a chapter at a time or two chapters a week kind of thing made it even more—"Whoa that came early in his ministry!" I mean, before Mark records the naming of the disciples, the appointing of the twelve, they had already started to want to kill him. That was cool to see that in the video.

Participant 7:

I was tired last Sunday. So my brain was wandering. But I saw the audience reactions a lot and I never saw that before. I never noticed what the audience was laughing at. What the audience was doing their little things to, and this time I did.

Tim:

You're talking about the audience being Max's audience?

Participant 7:

Max's live audience. They're responding to how he is telling the story. And that adds something to the story as you hear the reactions of the audience.

Participant 10:

I felt, that, in watching it a second time through, that I was listening for specific things; like the detail, or in some cases the lack of detail in the different parts of the video. Cause that's one thing that has stood out to me as we were going through it, where he's used great detail like "green grass" or something along that line. So that stood out to me a lot more this time. I also felt like at the end, I could somewhat retract my statement about "I'm not so sure it could end at 6:8; whereas, 16:8 excuse me." Whereas at the end of the video I thought, you know, if they just backed up one verse, I could see it ending there. (Laughter). Anyway, and the other thing was just seeing the parallels of the slowness of the disciples to the slowness of myself. For some reason that stood out to me as he was going through the telling.

Tim:

Anyone else? Participant 3, go ahead.

Participant 3:

So I really like the Narrative Approach. But watching the video, it's too fast to pick up on things. So while we studied the Narrative Approach slowly, you see little things; you notice little things. But watching it the second time, for me personally, it wasn't really different. I think the tools that we use all the time like Participant 6 said, foreshadowing, wanting to get rid of Jesus early on. That's setting the theme for the whole thing. But other than, like, really big elements like that, it's just a story to listen to. And maybe that night go home and think about it. That's my perspective.

Tim:

Okay.

Participant 2:

One of the things that did just jump out at me; probably the main thing, maybe the only thing that jumped out as being different than the first time I saw it, was that I noticed that Herod and Pilate put to death their prisoners mostly because they cared too much about how they looked to others—both of them. And that, I don't even remember us discussing that in our discussion on Pilate putting Jesus to death. And it was like something that really stood out when I reviewed the story; listening to him tell the story of Herod and John the Baptist vs. what we had just seen with Pilate. We have just studied Pilate; then to see Herod. It was kind of like "Wow! They are like cowards-kind-of-people, you know? Just too concerned about what people thought or not interested in doing what was right. They had to save face or something, so it was kind of interesting to notice that.

Tim:

Let me pick up on what you, Participant 2 said, and what Participant 3 said. Because we did go through it slowly—chapter by chapter; pericope by pericope. Was there something different hearing it orally? His pace is kind of fast but as opposed to reading it and talking about it? How did you experience it just listening to it? Cause that's a different medium.

Participant 7:

One of my thoughts was, when you hear him speaking, you hear him saying the things and emphasizing the words. It's a story he's telling. But as we sat here and went over the stuff—all of you guys came up with stuff that I go "Wow!" It amazed me the things we could see and hear in what we were reading. It changed the story so much for me.

Participant 3:

I think part of it, is we are all used to the instant replay world. You know, whenever anything happens we get a replay of it. And so for me it was so fast when he's reading it—that in a movie that's a visual or verbal play or something. But they build it for today's audience and I think they make important things painfully obvious. And when I'm reading it, I read a sentence and back up and read that again. And when he was saying it verbally there was so much I couldn't...you know cause if you start thinking about themes and details, your brain will be tuned out for that next part; mine will.

Participant 2:

I have to say the only thing I noticed was the Pilate thing. But for the most part I don't recall having any other insights or moments when I saw it the second time.

Tim:

Okay.

Participant 8:

I think one of the things, listening to it and watching it, that comes out—is that it's almost like the teller—Max in this case—is just repeating what's been written over the years. But if I was seeing it for the first time, it's almost like he's remembering and throws it in. "Oh yeah, that made me think of this. And that made me think of this!" It's much more conversational to hear it or see it than it is to read it.

Participant 5:

I agree with some of the points earlier. I thought that it flowed very well. I was surprised the second time through how quickly the plot moved and how interesting and memorable some of the characters were—the characters I didn't remember the first time through. But I thought that ultimately it flowed very well as a story of salvation and I thought it was extremely powerful too. It's so different than listening to a Shakespearean play or hearing Homer read aloud or any other bit of literature you want to think about. They are interesting and sometimes captivating. But this was powerful and it demanded a response from the reader. And a lot of plays and things you hear read to you don't. So that's what struck me. I found it even more powerful the second time through.

Tim:

Okay...anyone else want to say anything about the DVD?

Participant 9.

I found myself looking for and taking note of some of the repetitions. Like whenever "amazed" would come up, he'd usually have the same facial expression, like "WHOA!" kind of look. Or when he felt the disciples weren't getting it he had the sort of blank "duh" look. So I kept looking for the repetitions that were associated with different characters or certain responses to things.

Tim:

Okay. Let's look at the second question. Talk about how the Narrative Approach to Mark will affect your future study of the Gospels. Not necessarily this Gospel, but any of the four Gospels.

Participant 3:

Yes. (pause) (laughter)

Tim:

Good. Go for it Participant 3. I would love to hear you do that right now.

Participant 3:

Oh! I thought, I took the question more like "will you discuss this with other people?" So I took the question more as "when discussing Biblical texts, will I include the Narrative Approach?"

Tim:

I see.

Participant 3:

Yes I will.

Tim:

Okay. What ways do you think you will?

Participant 3:

Well, this is going on to another note, but the thing I wrote was: It's very helpful to understand the amount of the basketfuls of bread....I think that because we live in a society that debates whether the Bible is fact or fiction—that we go so far in saying “no, it's real; it's fact” that we say the number of baskets full was just a number. It was just a historical recording of how many basketfuls were left after Jesus fed the 5,000. And when you look at it this way it's like “Well, it's a number but it's also more than just a number and maybe the person who wrote this text—got it by God—decided it was more important, you know, did they have an accurate representation 50 years later, or was it more important to record the miracle and say that it was for the Jews?” The 12 basketfuls of bread left over being the 12 tribes of Israel. And I think we're resistant to that sometimes. So doing that (kind of study) in a safe place is helpful.

Participant 5:

I thought it was very encouraging to me and it's probably going to be my operative approach as I go forward with the Gospels. Fancy way of saying this is pretty much how I'll start looking at the Gospels. I think it makes sense because the Bible is a sacred text and all you're doing with the Narrative Approach is treating the text as sacred. You're saying that the text means something. You don't have to go beyond the text to get meaning from it. Look at what's in front of you. See how it fits together. I have to steal your line Pastor Tim from earlier today in your sermon that “God doesn't mince words. That he puts things in the text via the Gospel writers for a reason and you should study it.”

Participant 11:

I like keying off of that and what Participant 7 said earlier, that you can come at it—as long as you can read---that's the requirement you have to have, or be able to listen to someone else read. You don't have to have a big theological degree or a PhD in something. You don't know even the other books of the Bible, per se. So it's self-contained in that regard. And what Participant 7 was saying, it's amazing what you can extract out of just the text, without going beyond the text. And so, there is insight in just

the text. And sometimes when we do the cross comparisons on a particular verse or a particular word—sometimes that can be distracting in terms of what the author of this particular narrative was trying to convey. So I feel like this approach does let us feel like we can gain insights from God’s Word, just from reading the text.

Participant 5:

And if I may, I mean I said this to Participant 10 earlier today. I’m probably the newest Christian and it can be, from my point of view, daunting to be in the room with people that you know know the Bible better than you do. Yes, I’ve read it through more than once; but I’ll bet that most everybody here knows the Bible through and through better than I do. And yet the Narrative Approach allows me to be on the same footing as everybody else and to derive meaning from what’s in front of me. And that’s a good thing, too, as a student.

Participant 6:

My comment is along those lines. I feel like I can enjoy the study more because I’m not so stressed about trying to find or remember what everything is about and feeling inferior because I don’t know what the connections are or what the other Gospels say or all like that. It’s like, “It’s fresh! You can just enjoy it and not stress about what you don’t know.”

Participant 9:

I second that.

Participant 4:

I agree.

Participant 8:

One of the things I wrote down on the other sheet we had is that it makes study much simpler and straightforward because everything you need is right there in front of you.

Participant 7:

I looked at this from early in the beginning...that um...it reminded me of Israel and we’re sitting with the Rabbi. And my picture is of Tim and the Rabbi sitting across from each other in this remote little area. And we’re having this discussion. And he’s teaching, but it breaks down into discussion stuff. And we’re asking questions. And I’m looking at this thinking, “WOW!” He talked about the diamond; the 70 facet jewel. You look at it. You turn it and you see another facet. You see something different and different and different. But 70 times and the light is different, so you do it again. You

see something different all over. And that's what I see doing this type of study. Every time you do it you're going to see something different.

Participant 6:

Ummmm

Participant 7:

You're going to see with a new light. What Participant 5 said struck me and I'm going "Wow! I never thought about that. Oh, Participant 11 said this about this and I've never thought about that either." So it changes how I see what the book is saying to me. What the story is saying to me. It's different. It's new. It's exciting. Each Sunday I've been excited to be here. It's just like "what am I going to see next?"

Participant 1:

The thing I've noticed in my reading, I'm reading through the Bible, I'm reading through Numbers right now, and Luke and Psalms and Proverbs. It's a whole different perspective now. Numbers is still challenging. I'm still trying to figure out what this author is trying to say. I'm looking at Luke now in the same kind of light and trying to see where Luke is coming from and how things fit together. Still reading in bits and pieces it's a little harder. But in my general reading it's changed.

Participant 2:

One of the things I feel like is that it helped me give proper emphasis to the text and the details became more interesting. Instead of "hurry up, get past those" they gave it more...it just kind of clarified some things. The details became much more important. And my feeling is, I think I would like to review all the Gospels this way. But I was telling Participant 11 and Participant 10 that I'd like to try to synthesize them all, too, at a separate time. Try to find all the stories and put them together and get all the details together. I think that would be really fascinating as well. But I think what I really enjoy...and it's pretty much how I study the Bible when we have led Bible studies ourselves. We have always just dealt with the text. We've never really gone off and done a lot of cross reference study or pull out the commentaries. I might get out a Bible dictionary and see if there might be something about a topic, but I've always pretty much just focused on the text. This wasn't a real departure from how I did it. But instead of going "oh this detail, I just don't get it" it made me stop and look at those details a little more closely. And I found myself going, and this is really hard. My big bug-a-boo is those prophets. I think they are really hard. I'm in the prophets right now. And I'm sitting there looking at that and reading a verse and pausing and saying "what might this be talking about" because I have no clue. But it was helping me even there. So...

Tim:

Anyone else on how it will influence your study of the Gospels? Or for that matter as Participant 1 and Participant 2 were talking, really any narrative text.

Participant 10:

I think that one thing that really stood out to me in this study was that I don't ever remember another study where I had a clear view of the author's purpose and intent through the study. Everything has been so piece meal, and like you say pull out here and pull out there. To see it as a whole, and that there is purpose in it and to kind of discover what the purpose is along the way. That really stood out to me and it's like "Oh my goodness, that makes so much difference in just understanding the detail if you see what the purpose of the whole flowing through the narrative really is." So that was the big thing for me and so it will definitely affect what studies I might do in the future, and how I might do them.

Participant 9:

I agree with Participant 10 and on a similar note, having done this and looked at it this way, it makes it a lot harder to just dismiss certain parts. As you read, you know, there were times where in a pericope it's like "I have no clue what that's trying to say." I just wrote a question mark in my notes. And then we come here and talk about it and it's like "OH! It actually DID mean something. It's significant!" (Laughter in room).

Participant 8:

The naked man

Participant 9:

Sure, that's a good one to throw out. So having used this approach it's a lot harder to simply dismiss something as "Oh, that really didn't matter all that much." No, it does have a significance even if I can't puzzle it out on my own. So, it's not that I would dismiss it as not true or I'd dismiss it as "Okay, that's over my head, moving on." So it makes me pause a little bit more and try and figure out, okay, what might this be included for.

Tim:

So before this looking at some of those pericopes what would be your attitude?

Participant 9:

Moving on! Like the parable of, what was it, the mustard seed thing. I don't know how many times I've read through the Bible. I don't know how many times I've

read through the different Gospels for, you know, stuff at church, stuff at school—since I went to a Christian school—or for my own personal studies. But it’s just like, you know, come across something like the parable of the mustard seed—okay, no clue what this is about. I’ll read it but, I’m not going to pay attention to what I’m reading. And having been introduced to Narrative Criticism. It’s Biblical. I mean I’ve done Shakespeare in high school and stuff like that. And it just makes it a lot more difficult to sort of move on and dismiss those. It’s like “no, this is significant. I may not understand its significance, but it is here for a reason.

Tim:

Okay.

Participant 5:

It’s also a lot more fun too. Like you said the very first time we got together it’s like a Columbo episode, and there are little clues in there. And Participant 7 mentioned it at one point too. It’s like a detective story. There are little clues here and if you think like a detective, you start to put together why is this here? Why is that there? How does this relate to that? And how does this foreshadow what’s coming up? And it’s more fun too. Which of course makes it more interesting, and makes you more engaged, and more interested in finding out more about God’s Word. Not just in this Gospel, but throughout the rest of it.

Participant 11:

It gives you a connection to the author. I feel closer too...I don’t know if I’ll ever talk with Mark. But I feel closer to his writings. I feel closer to...it’s like I have a love for the Gospel of Mark and whoever the author was, whoever wrote it. I feel like I’ve invested more of myself in the writings. But it’s along the lines of it’s fun. When you read a novel, you enjoy a novel you get connected, you enjoy the author because of the novel. When you stick with the same book the whole time you get that connection with the author, I think.

Tim:

So Participant 11 let me question you a little bit deeper on that. I’m sure you’ve read Mark before; probably did a Bible study with Mark before. What is it about this type of approach that makes you feel so connected, as opposed to studying Mark at other times? Is there something about what happened in this group that gives you that insight?

Participant 11:

Well, I think, this time around I deliberately didn’t do anything else. I was just reading Mark the whole time. I didn’t want to be influenced by other things. I just wanted to stay with Mark. So maybe I just spent more time with Mark. But it seems like

other studies that we do, we are trying to constantly rectify with the other Gospels, or we're trying to understand if that piece of the Old Testament that were quoted really fits, you know and we're trying to understand that. Our scope is bigger.

Tim:

Okay.

Participant 11:

And I think in this case, keeping our scope just on the text, you feel a closer affinity to just this text. It's not something you're trying to dissect. You are trying to look at it and trying to understand why it is there like Participant 9 was saying. Sometimes there's a piece there that doesn't seem to make sense. But it was there for a reason. And it was in this particular place—it came after this and before this. Why is that important, you know? So anyway, by staying with that text I think you gain a closer feeling to the text and to the author. It just becomes more part of you. Like I said, I've come to really love Mark.

Participant 2:

I felt that way myself. It was like, it has become my favorite Gospel.

Participant 7:

It's funny because I sit and listen to Tim preach and I do what we do here as he's preaching. I'm going...

Tim:

You sleep? (laughter!)

Participant 7:

No, I'm going...I hear little things and I think out little things. Okay, he just said...I didn't see that before. Why did they put that in there? Why is that in there? And then you go about explaining pieces of it. And you may not explain that piece, but it brings me to look and see "Oh, that's why it was there, because this is happening." And it makes me...it's almost humorous as I sit back there and go "I know what he's doing here." So it makes me look at things differently. And when people discuss pieces of the Bible I tend to want to do that. I'll start asking questions. Well, why do you think they put that information in there? There's a reason for that to be where it's at. What is that? What is the reason for this? Why does it say this? And how come it's said? So I find myself getting into this no matter what I do.

Participant 5:

To pick up on Participant 11 and Participant 7 too, the more minutely you study Mark...and by the way I agree with Participant 2 too, Mark and John are now my two favorite Gospels (laughter). But as you study minutely, I think you get closer to understanding God's Word. And as you understand it at a sort of micro level all of a sudden it hits you in the face—"Oh this is also how it relates to everything else I've read or many of the things I've read." So by getting intimately aware of it and understanding it; it doesn't just bring you lower and closer as you get more minute, but it opens up the macro of the whole Bible too. So...

Tim:

Okay, what aspects of this experience of studying Mark in this manner were most meaningful to you?

Participant 2:

For me, I feel like I saw Jesus in a deeper, more meaningful light. More human? Yeah, I would say more human. It's like I connected more with his humanity than I ever have. And to see how he would handle those Pharisees; I just appreciated his wisdom in dealing with them. And I think the other thing is that when I came into this I thought "I really want to see the heart of Jesus" and I really feel like that's what happened. I saw Jesus' heart and that was really impactful. I mean beautiful to me, to see his heart.

Participant 7:

I never saw Jesus as a frustrated person before. But I tend to see places where I think he was frustrated. Frustrated with the Pharisees and with his disciples. It is like, "come on guys, have a clue." And, he didn't say it that way, but sometimes I felt that way.

Participant 2:

I think he just said "O ye of little faith." (laughter). Are you believing?

Participant 5:

I was struck by how much conflict drove the plot. And also how relevant the disciples experience was to my own. I was constantly asking myself the question, "This is what the disciples did, would you have done any better? How would you have reacted? What does this mean to you? And always in the back of my mind, conflict was there—conflict of God's story and the world around us. And how they are constantly going on at the same time in the world of the temporal and atemporal. And how

sometimes we get sucked into the purely temporal world. And sometimes we remember that that's not all there is to life.

Participant 10:

So one of the things that was brought up earlier with another question was the feeling of levelness...coming at this study on the same level. All fresh and you know just looking at what's in front of us without considering all the other things. And I think one of the great things to me about the study is that sense and that fact that I felt there was a lot of grace in the room for whatever thoughts and whatever may have come up. And feeling the sense that THIS is the kind of thing that I would love for it to be as we come together for a study. Everybody can share equally and not have the sense of "I don't want to say that because it might be the wrong thing" or whatever.

Tim:

So Participant 10, do you feel like that sense of grace has to do with the people in the room or the type of study or both?

Participant 10:

Both. I think it is both. But I think this type of study lends itself toward being that way.

Tim:

Why is that?

Participant 10:

I think it's the levelness. Let's just look and see what we see. We all have the same information.

Tim:

Okay.

Participant 2:

Yeah, and also the fact that somebody may see something and it's like "well I'm going to put that out there and see what everybody else might see. Did anybody else see this? Am I in like some la-la land or is this really something that I gleaned out of this and it's fresh and new in me and might bless somebody else. And I think that's part of what I hear from Participant 10, and I know I think I experienced that myself.

Participant 3:

I think one thing that's different is that, typically in a Bible study, there's some support material going along with questions. And so the goal is to answer the questions and the questions may or may not be leading but "were not going to talk about this over here because that's not the point. The point is this question." And in this study, there are no questions. The way that you kind of laid it out Tim is "these 5 verses, GO!" So you can't say anything that's invalid, not because we're trying to look for weird things but there's no lead.

Participant 6:

Mine kind of goes along with that and what Participant 10 was saying too. I felt like I really enjoyed the freedom to hear and be heard. You know, from the whole group. That was cool. And on a different note, I think about week two of studying the text. I began to appreciate Mark more. Like what you were saying Participant 11. And the Gospel itself, because before I felt like I treated Mark like "Oh, that's the little Gospel!" (Laughter). "I can find everything in there in the Synoptics and whatever. And so then I began to realize how brilliantly put together it is.

Participant 2:

Yes!

Participant 6:

You know the whole thing it's like WOW! He was smart! (Laughter). Like I give him way more credit than I used to. And how intriguing it is that he leaves so many stories open. That's another thing that hit me that I felt quite a bit. There's not very much that's all tied up.

Participant 8:

You say that with a smile on your face. That's the type of thing that drove me nuts!

Participant 6:

Well... (laughter!)

Participant 10:

I think something else that was already alluded to from Participant 2, and others was just being able to get inside the mind of the writer. Living more in the context. I mentioned the detail of the video and the detail of the "green grass." To me that was an

example of, I can totally see that—sitting down in the green grass. And so that’s why that keeps cropping up. But just feeling that I had a better sense of the context as a whole. I can put myself in what was happening.

Tim:

So, did you say living inside the narrative? Is that what you said Participant 10?

Participant 10:

Well, yeah, basically. I didn’t say it as nicely as that but (laughter).

Tim:

Okay, Talk about what it was like studying the Bible with this approach in a group compared to if you read about the Narrative Approach or were taught it in a class and then just did it in a private Bible study on your own.

Participant 8:

Well I think it’s very, very different. At least for me. Because, I’m a fairly literal, direct thinker. I don’t look at symbolism. I don’t look at thematic. It’s like “okay, we came here, we fed all these people, we got in a boat, we went to the other side of the lake. I don’t look at the symbolism of okay we had 12 baskets left over. 12 baskets mean that, refers to this. And you can look at it through these eyes. Having a bunch of perspectives around that say “Oh, look, the sons of Zebedee here are the brothers that Jesus called to look at this.” Never would have occurred to me—three guys, moving on! It’s a lot of literary contexts I would have missed because I tend to look at plot points.

Tim:

Okay.

Participant 4:

I don’t think I’d be successful doing it on my own. Listening to what everybody got from the text...I go through my notes and I’m just summarizing it or repeating what was said. I can look at the text and take it and I’m very task-oriented and read it and got it and move on. But everything everybody brought up and brought to the table, there is no way I would have gotten on my own. I would feel like I’d need more of a study guide or questions to prompt it or it’s hard for me to dig deeper and go beyond that myself. And in a group it was so successful. I learned so much more than when I just read it beforehand on my own.

Participant 8:

I agree. I mean we obviously went through and made our notes for each periscope, but probably 90% of what I'd say or come up with in the discussion wasn't written down. It was thinking off of what someone else in the group said.

Participant 9:

Absolutely!

Agreement all around.

Participant 9:

Absolutely. People's thoughts were cornerstones for thoughts to come. I mean there were some things that I would write down. I would take my initial notes in black ink and then whenever here in discussion I'd use blue ink. So I could always differentiate between what were thoughts that I either had before or that I heard or other people had here in the group. And it's interesting to sort of go back and look at the different tone between what I was thinking and what was later thought. And I wouldn't necessarily be able to do that without having so many springboards.

I mean, I've never been to Israel. I didn't know that answering a question with a question was a Rabbinical style of teaching. I didn't know that. I've never been there. I've never been able to see, you know, look at the Sea of Galilee. I would have no concept of distance. I can look at a map, but I have no scale of that map. And so being in the same room with other people who can throw out that kind of thing---everybody has their own back-story, their own perspective and hearing those different perspectives allows me to broaden my own and to build more thoughts off of them. In the same way if I just decided, "Hey! Let's try Literary Criticism or Narrative Criticism, as it applies to the Bible, it wouldn't work because thoughts and the method of approach were shaped by the discussion that went on here on Sunday nights. Participant 7 makes an interesting point about looking at it this way. I hadn't really thought about trying to look for more of the Old Testament references going on. So now I'm reading with a fresh set of eyes—"Hey, let's look a little more at that." So it's not just that thoughts would springboard, ways of looking would also springboard. So I don't think it would have been nearly as effective doing it on my own, or trying to implement it on my own.

Participant 11:

I also like the fact that—I think we all did that—I think we all—I know I did—same thing---I had my notes typed so my handwritten notes were the stuff that we talked about. But the thing I really liked about it was that we all had read the same text. And so we're all coming from our understanding of the same text. It's not like "well I have read these extra history books over here and so I can bring that to the table." Or you know, somebody else has done a cross Gospel comparison and they bring that to the table. And I'm not privy in knowing. Everything that people are talking about are things that I have

also read. I missed it when I read it but I've read the text so it adds to the enjoyment of it by being able to feed off of it because I've also read the text. "Oh, yeah, that piece you were talking about—well, there's also this piece that I saw" and so because we're all in the same text. I think that's the level playing field. That's the coming at it from the same investment of time in the text together, but yet seeing it from different perspectives.

Agreement all around.

Participant 7:

There's 24 eyes looking at the same stuff. Each night, each time we're here, there's 24 eyes, 12 minds, looking at this—think what's it saying. And we probably didn't all do it at the same time. We probably looked at it at different parts of the day or night or whenever. So there are all these different aspects that I would have never seen it if I had done it by myself. I would have never thought about it. "Yeah, really?" I never saw that! But here we get to hear all the stuff coming at us and it's like "Wow!" I want to go back and keep looking. I don't want to quit. I want to go back and do it again. And I want to share it with somebody else. I want to get this because I know there are other people that are going to see something else too.

Participant 6:

Yeah, I was thinking about it along those lines too. Okay there's 12 of us here and so, like my chunk of that is like at most what a little over 8%. So hearing it in the group is like, a completely different scale than me trying to get it on my own. It's so much more meaningful and enjoyable than me just trying to just get through it.

Participant 2:

And I would add that it was important for us to dig through it on our own because we came prepared with insights. But doing it in a group made it way more beneficial. I felt like I learned from the insights of others so much. I felt like my insights narratively were probably not as in-depth as some of the other folks in this room. But I felt like I interacted deeply with the text itself and tried to find the meaning in it. But I don't think I was really good at finding all those cool narrative things that you all found. But nevertheless I found it beneficial to hear. I still remember some of those moments when Participant 10 pointed out "the law and the prophets" or when Participant 6 talked about the left and the right and it's like "Wow! That's really cool!" And those were the sort of things I don't think I ever had. I felt like I didn't get that. But I still felt like my attempt to try to do it was very beneficial. But I know that it was multiplied by sharing it here with the group.

People were saying "I second it." "I third it." etc.

Participant 3:

I thought about the group approach as ah...it's a book club. There are books that exist. Why would you get together to discuss it. You've read the book. You already know what you saw. It's very interesting to see what other people see.

Participant 7:

I like that.

Participant 4:

I like that too.

Tim:

Anything else about that?

Participant 8:

One thing that's bouncing around my head. There's definitely times when I would read through and I would have nothing to add literarily. So it's nice when you get 12 people around you because somebody is going to have something. So I can just sit here and say nothing for a little while. Where I wouldn't be able to if I had to do it on my own.

Participant 4:

Or it was kind of nice on the ones where I put a giant question mark to hear others just as confused. It wasn't just me. (Laughter)

Participant 9:

Affirmation is a huge part of learning. Or at least for my learning style, I like to have that sort of shared experience so that I'm not over here on my own just sort of going through it alone. There's not really any um....

Participant 4:

Satisfaction?

Participant 9:

Well, it's not so much satisfaction, but there's less opportunity for that affirmation to come. I mean if I happen to come across something I hadn't noticed before or I do manage to make some sort of connection it's kind of like "hey that was kind of neat. Oh,

I'm on my own. I can't really...who do I share this with." I remember Participant 11, when we were talking about the rich young ruler. Most of the discussion had focused on sell your wealth kind of thing. Participant 11 piped up and said something along the lines of "how come most of the discussion as been on sell your stuff what about the come follow me part?" And it was like "YES! Someone else noticed the same thing."

It was just...it's a fantastic feeling knowing that there are other people that—there are people I deeply respect. Participant 11 and Participant 10 have been capstones in my life and to know that I noticed the same thing as him (Laughter!)...I actually feel pretty good about myself. It's not necessarily that it would go the other way but at least for me, I've known most of the people in this room. Participant 3 and Participant 4 and Participant 5 being the exceptions, I didn't know them as well. But I mean I've known you guys for years.

So to have some of the shared "I did notice some of the things as you guys" is a very...I'm going to go all social work on you guys...very empowering feeling and so that sort of affirmation is one of the things I loved about this approach. So not just getting to hear new ideas but also knowing that I shared some of the same ideas with other people. And people I really respect.

Participant 2:

Yeah like some of the weird things that I might have thought about something, somebody else thought the same weird thing! (Laughter) That's cool!

□ Tim:

Tim:

Okay. Let's talk about ways in which the Narrative Approach has affected the way you view the Gospel writings as a whole. So the purpose of the Gospel, the composition, the literary nature. How do you see that now after having gone through this experience?

Participant 4:

I feel like every detail has a purpose now. You know, the details that I would have overlooked. It kind of forces you to break it down and look at those things and realize it's all in there for a reason. Participant 3 always tells me when I watch movies "Did you notice that? Everything in a movie happens for a reason!" It's kind of the same with this even though it's the little things that you maybe wouldn't think are as significant. The author obviously put that in there for a purpose.

Participant 8:

It's not just that he put that in there for a purpose; it's trying to figure out what that purpose was, that was interesting for me. You can read a normal novel or book or whatever and at some level in the back of your head you tell yourself "okay why did he write this? Ok he wrote to make money and sell!" (Laughter). But that's not the case here, right. He's writing it either so he can spread the word and evangelize or make a

point or whatever it is. But looking for that purpose behind it gives a different perspective on it.

Participant 5:

I thought I would now really search for the voice of each one of the other Gospel narrators as I read through the other Gospels. Trying to see how the character of Jesus develops and how he relates to all the other characters and the settings and the motifs—would be a good way of looking at those Gospels.

And I'm very interested to see how the Holy Spirit works through each one of the Gospel narrators—how they complement each other. In other words how the 4 Gospels, with 4 different voices have an overreaching and overarching story to tell. I'm interested also—talking about how small groups spur something--Participant 8 remarked earlier about how Participant 6 liked the open ended questions and it drove him nuts. I think maybe that's one of the interesting things about 4 Gospels. Each one of these narrators finds a way to speak to different audiences and to motivate different people in different ways. Even though they all ask for the same thing, which is our reaction, our response to the Gospel story.

Participant 10:

So, just stepping back behind that question a little bit—I really appreciated the way you set it all up for us. For those, like myself, who really didn't know a lot about the approach—the whole—plot, theme, following all that through—the information that you gave us at the outset and walked us through and that we could go back to helped tremendously. Not that it was artificial in the sense that you had to do it this way or whatever, but it helped me to see those things once we got started. So having that background was, I think, key for me to be successful in this study.

Participant 5:

And if I may, I said this to Pastor Tim, in I think the second meeting—but um, as supposedly the literature guy here, it was an awesome set-up. I mean, he gave you everything you needed to know about the literary approach and the Narrative Approach. And it took me four years to learn—and I don't think I learned as much as what he put in there. It was a very, very good set up. It enabled us to use the Narrative Approach in a good way.

Tim:

So let me ask you this question. When you were invited to come to a Bible study on the Narrative Approach to the Gospel of Mark, is what we actually did similar to what you first envisioned or is it way off or...

Participant 10:

I didn't have an idea.

Tim:

You didn't have an idea?

Participant 8:

I thought, okay we're studying Mark. I had no clue what...

Tim:

Okay, did anybody have a preconceived idea that you can compare to what we actually did?

Participant 5:

I told Participant 10 earlier today that I didn't even think the Narrative Approach meant the Narrative Approach. I thought, this can't mean the same thing as what I studied in college. It's got to be some particular way of implementing something about the Bible. No, I didn't think it was this either.

Tim:

So is it close to the literary stuff you studied in college?

Participant 5:

It's exactly the same as the literary stuff I studied in college. The text is, ah...I would say one of the big differences is that with other literary texts, Shakespeare or whatever you want to talk about that's supposed to be a meaningful text—you have to really look hard for meaning in the text. What you tend to notice is the setting, the motif, all the sort of fancy littler things if you will. You notice those, and it's kind of like a buzz in your ear and you spend most of your time trying to show how clever you are by finding those things. But the message itself, when you get to it is often a letdown in a way. So Hamlet's about doubt, okay I got it. McBeth, guilty conscience, got that too.

And I don't mean to denigrate some of these great works but what I'm saying is that they in no way relate to the awesome message that's in the Gospels. And it's not just because we're believers. It's because of something you say quite often, Pastor Tim, "This text demands a response, whether you're a believer or not." It demands a response. You can read Shakespeare and forget it the next day if you want to. This demands a response and the literary approach is the exact same way, but the outcome is so totally different.

Participant 1:

Thinking of that too, when I was in high school you could take the Bible as literature classes. And I never thought much of them because I thought “well, they’re not really studying the Bible (laughter). Well, I’ve changed my tune on that (louder laughter). I don’t know how many of those teachers who were Christian teachers were able to utilize that. I don’t know if any of you went...

Participant 5:

I’m sorry to interrupt here, but I also took the Bible as Literature in college for a full year. I don’t remember much. I told this to Pastor Tim, too, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> class here. I don’t remember much of it and I think that’s because we got tied up in this word versus that word. It was a real deconstructive type of approach, you know. Basically it was tear it apart so much so you can decide what the message is and so you can still do the Bible as Literature and still not get much, if anything, out of it. I’ve never told this story before, I’ll make it quick. There was a young person who wanted to become a Pastor and he started screaming in the middle of class, like half way through, about how we were desecrating the Word. Even though the professor was a reverend. It struck, not just me, but many others, as something that the whole was much more than the sum of the parts in that class.

Tim:

Talk, Participant 5 or anybody, talk about how this approach approaches the sacredness of the text or not. Approaching it this way is probably not the norm. It’s not what we normally think about so that’s why I asked you “what was your preconceived notion on the literary approach or the narrative approach to the text?” So how did you feel this group treated the sacredness of it or the non sacredness of it or however we viewed it in this group? And what effect did this approach have on that?

Participant 2:

Well, one of the things that stands out to me is that we all come from the belief that this is inspired. Honestly, I think sometimes we may look at some verses and go “may be that’s not quite as inspired” (laughter). But in this approach, I felt like every one of us went—“Well, if it’s there it must be really important.” And I think those little details that we maybe glossed over because we wondered how really inspired they really were actually became more inspired, so to speak, in our eyes. In my eyes I felt like the esteem grew. Like I needed to give more weight to some of those things that maybe are hard for me to understand, but it doesn’t make them any less inspired. So I felt like when we came together, we all kind of came together with that mindset—that this is in here so it’s got to be important so what’s...why is it there? Why is that naked guy there, I mean... (Laughter). Everything took on a deeper weight than it would have if we weren’t using this approach.

Participant 9:

So, I went to the UW, very liberal type college. And one of the classes that was offered was The Bible as Literature. And I looked at that and went back and forth between “I’m tempted” and “Stay away.” “STAY AWAY, Participant 9” because I’m slightly opinionated, and when I have a difference of opinion with someone I’m not very good at keeping that to myself. I was trying to figure out, asking about preconceived notions about this, I wasn’t sure how it was going to go because so often this approach you’re looking for, like Participant 5 said, you’re looking for the meaning behind the sort of overall text. Well, here we sort of have, because of our shared faith, as Participant 2 said, we didn’t sort of knit pick as to whether or not, you know, this is actually a God inspired type thing, which I think probably would have come up in a slightly more secular version of this approach. And so I was trying to figure out exactly how to reconcile the stuff I did in High School looking at the literary stuff with looking at the Bible. I figured one of my teachers would just go ballistic at just the thought of looking at the Bible like this because to me the Narrative Approach was, you’re looking at fiction. You are looking at something that is not true. You are looking at something where the author is trying to get a specific message across and is pulling in all of these things from their minds, from their heart—all of these characters, all of these situations to try to get that message across.

Well, here we sort of have, you know, this is kind of the baseline of the message that will be—JESUS IS THE CHRIST and how it builds from there probably changes per Gospel. I mean it demands a response in Mark, sort of leaving it up to the reader/hearer/listener whatever. So it was not what I expected, but in a very good way. Because I expected a little bit more, trying to focus on some of the smaller things to, not necessarily prove you’re more clever than your classmates, which was totally the deal in High School, but you’re looking for, okay what can I find that has to do with the setting or that has to do with the omniscience of the narrator or that has to do with, you know, insert whatever piece of the criticism you want—it was more a, I’m trying to figure out how...I don’t want to say it was an inclusive approach in that it did include those things, but it always came from the base that this is a God-inspired work. And we know what it is trying to get across is that Jesus is the Christ. This is what he did when he was here. And this-is-what-he-did-for-you-kind-of-thing.

Tim:

Okay.

Participant 9:

So, it was not what I expected, but in a very good way.

Participant 5:

Yeah, and to follow up, some of the clever, clever things of the narrative if you will—sometimes again, with other literature, secular literature if you want to call it that,

that is sort of the end in itself. Here I took it to be that this is how God, through the Holy Spirit is trying to communicate to us, on our own level. He's telling a story. We...as you've said many times...that's how we think. We listen to stories. We relate to stories and he is using narrative techniques through the individual Gospel writer to motivate us and to communicate with us; to get us to relate to that setting; to get us to relate to those characters and to think about how it affects us.

Participant 7:

I looked at the letter. I have a red letter edition so everything Jesus said is in red letters and it amazes me how I look at what he said and how he said it now as compared to what I looked at before. Because I look at it with a different eye and it's like "WOW! He, God, speaking had some really great things..." I was just blown away. And I keep going back. Even as we discuss now, I keep going—it just strikes me. I want to see more of what's being said there.

Participant 11:

When I was in, I think it was early college, at our church, we had a professor who did a study on 1 Peter and he did the Narrative Approach. I didn't know what that meant at the time. And he didn't do any kind of elaborate set up like you did. But one of his biggest things, or at least one of the biggest things that I got out of it was you just stay in the book. You don't go across...When we were studying that people starting talking about a different theological point of view and he'd say: "No that's Paul from Romans, we're staying in Peter." And so, just that focus on the text and trying to understand what this particular text is telling us had a...it was a lot of fun for me. It was an interesting approach. I'd never encountered that before. And so when you talked about doing a similar thing this time around I was looking forward to it; maybe to have some of those same kinds of reactions to it. And I think we have in this study, had some of those same kinds of reactions. Of getting a deeper appreciation of the text itself.

Participant 7:

I think we didn't wander off.

Participant 8:

Or at least knowing when we did! (Laughter)

Tim:

You guys did. You really did. Anything else about the way this approach has affected the way you view the purpose of the Gospel, the composition, the way it's put together or the literary nature or anything like that?

Participant 3:

You had asked a question about what our thoughts were when you approached us with this study and I guess I kind of thought like: “Oh finally!” I think we do this too little. I think generally someone has a study guide by someone they really respect and I don’t know. I’m repeating myself, but I think sometimes we’re afraid to look at the Bible with critical eyes. And if we don’t do that I think we’re missing out on things because the Bible wasn’t...it was written for us, but it was also written for nonbelievers. And when we only approach it from the perspective of the believer I think we might be missing something that it’s trying to communicate.

Tim:

So, Participant 3, when you say we don’t do “this” often enough, what is the “this?”

Participant 3:

Just the open-ended question and just reading a passage and discussing it and I guess that’s actually the point of this. The point was the second someone said, “well, in this text over here” kind of leads us this direction. No, we’re not talking about that, we’re talking about what...um...we’re not taking our church’s mission statement and applying it to Mark’s Gospel; we’re reading Mark’s Gospel. I’m not saying one is good and one is bad. I think that we’re sometimes afraid to just step back and read it.

Participant 11:

So it can tell us things when we’re not trying to approach it with a preconceived viewpoint or a particular structure placed on it. We’re letting the text speak for itself better.

Participant 5:

Again, you get to respond to the text in front of you. You don’t have to worry about, “am I looking at it from a proper point of view?” You can just look at it and react, and I think that’s a great thing. That’s what we should be doing with the Gospel anyway—is looking at it and reacting to it and not trying to over-think it and not trying to over-analyze it. And as analytical as we got, I was certainly guilty of that looking at the text, but it was an immediate response every time. Not something where-like in some Bible study-where I’ve got to do a top-down analysis of this. This is what’s true and now we’ll make the text fit that—No! It was just read and react and listen to what everyone else has to say and you get more out of it.

Participant 3:

Agreed, we're often taking, as Participant 11 said, we're often taking our entire perspective of Paul's writings and applying it to this. I think sometimes it's almost as if, we're not letting the Bible...we don't trust the Bible. You know, it's not good enough—we need to take this addition over here and make sure you understand. Well, is that treating it sacred? I don't think so.

Participant 5:

Well said, if I may say so.

Tim:

Okay, so are there ways that this study has impacted your spiritual life, your own relationship with God or His Word?

Participant 11:

Well I like this particular study...maybe this isn't quite what you were asking there but—I like this study. It gave me, I feel, a glimpse of heaven. The idea of just being around, discussing, relating to people. You know, you can relate to a dog in some ways, but you can relate to people in terms of ideas, and like what Participant 9 was saying earlier about being encouraged---you didn't use the word encouraged—empowered? What was the word you used?

Participant 9:

Empowered. Affirmation.

Participant 11:

Affirmation. Those kind of things you can get from other people. I was just thinking that wrestling with the text—when we get to heaven we'll be with God—I'm sure there will be things that we can wrestle with and understand better and more fully and the connection of people. I don't know, I just kind of felt this was a glimpse of heaven.

Tim:

Wow! (Laughter)

Participant 7:

Fun learning

Participant 11:

Yeah, fun learning.

Participant 10:

Yes.

Participant 5:

This is like Jacob wrestling with God and us with the text.

Tim:

So talk more about “wrestling with the text.” In what sense is that what you think we were doing?

Participant 5:

I think, again, if you come to it with a fresh set of eyes, you’re forced to wrestle with it. You’re forced to what does it mean? And why, again, is this here and that there? What does it mean to me? What do I see of myself in this character or that character? Yeah, it forces you to question yourself and your relationship with God, if you come at it with a fresh set of eyes.

Tim:

Participant 10, you were going to say something?

Participant 10:

I felt like from the first night when we watched the DVD for the first time, that it was just cemented over and over that I felt like the writer had me drawn in. The whole...when it got to the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter, Peter’s proclamation: “You are the Christ!” I like “YES! Oh my goodness. Here is like instance after instance after instance after instance—it just so totally built throughout the book and I felt like that we always need that opportunity to reevaluate our faith and to re-decide—YES! This is why I believe this and this is why. And I felt like, going through, the author had me right where he wanted me because I just felt like his case was there all the way and I was with him. And I wanted to proclaim with Peter “You are the Christ!”

Tim:

So you felt like the author was building a case as he went through Mark? Did you feel that way before we started this study?

Participant 10:

I never really thought about it in those terms.

Tim:

Okay.

Participant 10:

But I definitely felt that way, like I said, after, beginning with the DVD, but definitely as we went step by step through the book.

Participant 9:

It can be so easy to look at the Gospel as just a collection of stories about the things that Jesus did while he was here on earth and not the idea of making the case-- I'm telling you at the beginning... This is the story of Jesus Christ the Son of God, kind of thing. And then as you're reading it, you do see that it is built as a case not just a collection of stories. And for me it's always been easy to sort of lump all of the Gospels together because you know they're the story of Jesus' life here.

But there is more to it than that. And I agree with Participant 10 in that you know, reading through this—and especially being able to talk about it with other people who are seeing the same thing—it's like “You know he's leading you...he's building this case. He wants you to come to a decision.” And preferably it's this decision, but if you want to say no than that's your own choice. But yeah it was a very different approach to things.

And one way that it impacted my relationship with the Word was it was so much easier to read myself into the characters. Like to look at the disciples. You hear the stories and it's “you guys are dummies.” Hindsight vision is 20/20. But taking it as it comes like saying “okay, so this is what just happened, put aside what I have been taught since I was knee-high to a grasshopper. Put myself with these guys. This is what I know of them—okay, let's be honest Participant 9, what would you do here? What would you say? What would you think?” This approach has made me slightly more aware that in some of the narrative/story-propelled books in here that I have more in common with certain characters than I had previously thought.

Participant 7:

I opened my Bible because I talk about how I look at Jesus differently and the first words out of Jesus' mouth in Mark are: “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel.” And I thought, just that statement right there...BOOM! BOOM! It's right there. I'd looked at it before, I read it, I heard it. But it never affected me like this did in this approach. I'm like “WOW that was a powerful message right off the top.” He proclaimed it right off the top.

Participant 5:

That...I'm sorry Participant 7

Participant 7:

Go, go.

Participant 5:

And that validates the Narrative Approach too, because it teaches us to pay attention. Usually the first words a character speaks—that's basically a clue as to what's going on. So again, the Holy Spirit through Mark is telling you right out of the gate what's important and again, is setting up for you to make your own decision.

Participant 11:

So what you're saying, in my slow mind, just to make sure I'm getting what you're saying...is that it was significant to you, because you read the words before, but you had the context that this was at the beginning of Mark. This was the first word out of Jesus' mouth and that, in itself, added more to the significance. The words themselves were tremendous, but the extra context, or reading it in context, in Mark, is what your emphasis was?

Participant 7:

This is what this is about. Here it is, folks.

Participant 11:

Right up front.

Participant 7:

Yeah, right up front. Here it is. And it's out of Jesus' mouth.

Participant 2:

I think that when I look at the major lessons, the major moments for me as I was studying—I really felt like I'd got to know Jesus' heart. But in that, what I noticed was his emphasis on teaching people. It was—in all but one case—it was the first thing that was recorded that Jesus did for the people—he saw them as sheep without a shepherd and taught them, or he sat down to teach them and I never really noticed that before.

And I think in part because whenever anyone talks about Jesus they always emphasize the miracles. I think I saw that his miracles were really secondary. It was his message that he really wanted people to get. The miracles were almost a distraction to his real message because if he healed somebody they were just going to die later. Nobody lived forever.

So I think what I saw was his emphasis on teaching. One huge point was the repentance factor. That was a word that he used. It was important that we repent and I don't think we see that in the church much today. Not that much emphasis on it. Forgiveness. Fasting. I think the other thing that stood out to me about Jesus was him asking powerful questions over and over and over. Something I need to learn a lot more about. The kingdom of God. That was always something that was being contrasted, discussed, and illustrated—always in the text. And that became like a huge thing for me. Seek God for God—not the goodies. Once again back to that point about the miracles almost being a distraction. I like that what I get out of this is “have faith in God.” That's something that has become something for me when I go through life as I'm driving down the road or something—and I'm thinking in a certain way—and I have to stop and say “have faith in God.” How he dealt strongly with sin in our lives. Our attachment to stuff. The emphasis on serving, over and over and over again. He talks about how if you want to be great in the kingdom of heaven you need to be the servant of all. His kingdom is just so upside down and I think that was the thing that—I mean I always knew that—but it just became so much more visually in focus during this study. Invest in people. You see that in how he invested in the disciples. How he trained them. How he taught them. How he encouraged them. How he gave them experience.

I was challenged to be uncomfortable in my relationship with Jesus and that's going to be a hard one for me. The humanity of Jesus, mentioned that earlier. I think that's the thing I came away with more than anything—how much I could identify. When he's in the garden and is falling beneath the emotional load, that just so touched my heart. That was really interesting to see that. The ripping of the veil, you know we talked about it being God removing the separation, but somebody else talked about the rending of the clothes that people would do in grief or when they were so distraught over something and it was something. How much the Gentile inclusion was foreshadowed in Mark. I never noticed that until that point. And then a phrase that I often say was the spirit of Jesus and the Holy Spirit and how those were so likened together. So I just felt like there were many moments in here and quite a number of them have changed...kind of set me on my head a little bit and changed how I view my walk with the Lord. So I basically felt like I got what I was hoping to get out of this study: to know Jesus' heart and to try to, it goes back to a scripture that I'm engaged with right now, First John “He who says he abides in him ought also himself to walk just as he walked.” So that was one of the reasons—I've been working on that one—to come to the Gospel of Mark and to see how Jesus walked. Because it wasn't that he put on fancy clothes or that he walked on water or did those sort of things—that's not it. That's why I wanted to know his heart. How did he do things? Because I can't gather, I think I told this to Pastor once, I can't gather a band of 12 men around me and disciple them—but I can disciple people. I can invest my life in people and to see these things in this, it just kind of drove home those points. So it helps me walk as Jesus walked.

Participant 5:

I think it's helped change me in my everyday life. The idea that Jesus is the suffering servant is a paradigm that I try to keep in front of me all the time. I don't do it nearly enough, but I'm doing it more than I was. The idea of conflict and how it's something that we have. It permeates the Gospel of Mark. It permeates our life. And we may as well embrace it for what it is. A second major point, and one that I thought Participant 2 and Participant 11 said more eloquently than I can, but just the vision of the weight of the world on Jesus in the Garden is a constant reminder with me—especially, if I may, with one of your points in your sermon last week, I believe, Jesus died for our sins and ransomed us and when I'm thinking of doing maybe a habitual thought or reaction I hear the words "what would you sell Jesus out for?" I think it helped me a few times this week to change things up. So I find good habits starting to replace old bad habits, and I think it's a direct result of this Bible study.

Participant 1:

I think one thing for me out of studying this was all the small details that are actually important details too, when we did this study. I was kind of like some of you said earlier, I would kind of gloss over certain things when we're reading it or maybe studying it—but there is actually importance in some of these small details. There is a reason Mark put that in there—that God inspired him to do that. It was good to have other minds pull that out and help me figure out how it makes sense. I think I understand now that there is a real reason why everything is in there.

Tim:

Participant 3 were you going to say something? Oh, Participant 6?

Participant 6:

I think I was really impacted, realizing time and again Jesus is the epitome of a round character. It makes me in awe of him even more. It's just like even to the very end. I think growing up and hearing the stories and what not, I kind of lose sight of just how upside down he really was. When you take a fresh look at it, it's like "Oh my!" — Like even not answering or you know everything. His prayer, "take this cup from me" when he knew he was going—Just the way he dealt with everybody. And so how that impacted me, was that it's caused me to expect that more often in my own life and those around me and not assume that I know or understand how he operates. Sometimes you think like, "yeah, I got Jesus...I understand he did this-da, da, da, da, and he's all about humility and service and da, da, da, and you lose sight of the fact that he can choose how

he gets there might be completely different than what you imagine. Give him the room to be...round! (Laughter)

Tim:

Amen!

Participant 3:

Yeah, just that kind of a parallel that something that we do well. Anyways, it seems that the Christian Church is very comfortable with being upset or frustrated with God. And I don't know if that's been around for 100 years or 200 years or 500 years? Or if that's something that's been around for 30 years, part of our culture? And it is an important thing. Be honest with God, he knows what's going on. And I think there's a parallel with being honest with the text. I think maybe part of what we're all going through here, we're looking at the Bible from...instead of picking it up like this Holy thing. Be careful, don't say the wrong thing or look at it the wrong way. There is the approved way of looking at it. NO! There's not! The last thing we want is to marginalize and pigeonhole how we pick up this sacred, incredible text.

Participant 4:

I think real practically the way that it's affected me is that I need to read my Bible more and it's made me realize that. Cause I mean I know all these stories. I've heard it all before, but I got so much more out of it this time. More than I ever have because we went through it so detailed. So just something I need to make more time for and kind of renew the importance of that.

Participant 8:

The literary approaches...there are definitely places it will work—like some of the other Gospels, some of the Old Testament stuff when you're looking at-like Kings and Chronicles-that are more stories. And there are certainly places where it doesn't, like Proverbs—it's absolutely useless (laughter). But there is still something you can grab out of it. You can still think, okay why was this written? Why is this here? Even though you can't exactly find the setting of Proverbs.

Participant 2:

Or even interacting with the text itself.

Participant 8:

Right.

Participant 2:

What does this text say? And like I said I was reading some of the prophets and many times when I'm reading the prophets I just push past the words because I don't get it. I don't understand what they're talking about. I don't know how it applies. So I don't even know what's being said because I won't engage with it. It's like what is the point of trying to engage with these prophets, but at the same time Jesus said "the Law and the Prophets" –everything you need to know is in the Law and the Prophets. I think back to Kurt's sermon. So to me the Narrative Approach is also engaging with the text regardless of whether or not there is a story. It's just "what is it saying?" Because that's part of the Narrative Approach. What does this teach? What is it saying? So in one of the prophets I was reading, I think it was Nahum 3. I would read a verse and I'd stop and I'd look at it and say "what is it saying?" Then I'd read Nahum 3:2 and I'd do that through the whole book. It was a little slower, but at the same time I didn't just read these words so I'd just get my chapter done. Anyway, engages you more.

Tim:

Okay. Let's ask this question. Are there elements of understanding the text that were particularly aided by this approach? And are there certain elements of understanding that are hindered by the Narrative Approach?

Participant 8:

There are definitely things that are hindered by it. It's almost like it hinders itself. You're kind of looking at the literary approach and trying to get all these aspects of all these different characters except there are many other aspects you'll see if you look at other books.

Tim:

Okay.

Participant 8:

So you gain and lose. You lose the extra characterization when you cut off the other books. So it obviously, I think Participant 2 mentioned this, in trying to pull it all together this way. I think we might gain something different out of it.

Participant 11:

I also, besides other books, I think that it would be nice to do a literary approach if I was a first century Galilean. So if I understood the culture, really well, of first century Galilee. Or maybe all of Israel or Judea, but you know Jesus was from Galilee and most of his teaching was from Galilee. If I really understood that culture, I think that by doing this kind of reading, I would gain some extra insight that I'm missing. So we

get some of that by reading other books, like other Gospels. Or we might get it by reading what other scholars have written about the first century and trying to understand that better. So that's the part I'm missing if I just read the text, I'm not necessarily reading it the way the author in this case wrote it because he wrote it in that time for that audience. Of course it transcends that, but there are things in there that we could pick up if we understood that culture.

Participant 2:

The one thing that you do gain is that you learn the details better. You learn from the details and you see the emphasis in the passage that you tend to gloss over. At least that's what happened for me. Stuff I used to gloss by I dealt with a little bit more; wrestled with, you might say. But the one limit is that by not comparing, sometimes you miss those clarifying insights from other testimony that is meant, I think, to help fill in the whole picture for us. It's not just Mark. It's John and Matthew and also stuff you read in the letters that can fill in those details that help us draw a more accurate conclusion. I think sometimes there, maybe, that if you don't include a text that you might draw a faulty conclusion. And that would be not a good thing.

Participant 11:

Would it be faulty or would it be just insufficient?

Participant 2:

Well I would say in some cases it could be faulty if you emphasize one thing to the exclusion of the other Gospels. I mean we see people who will take only one letter or they will take one little verse out of one little letter and they will make it into this huge doctrine and it leads them astray.

Participant 11:

Okay, you're saying if you build a doctrine based on...

Participant 2:

Yes.

Participant 11:

Because I'm saying that we've spent now 12 weeks learning and studying the Narrative Approach and we've just talked about all the advantages...

Participant 2:

Yes.

Participant 11:

...of that and now all of a sudden you we're almost contradicting that saying that, well if you don't have these others you're going to draw a wrong conclusion or could. And you weren't going there.

Participant 2:

No, I'm just saying that if all one person did was study...and it's not like you could go really wrong with what you read...

Participant 11:

That's what I was trying to say (laughter)

Participant 2:

But there may be some books that if you took that and you parked on one verse and didn't actually know the rest of the Bible you could probably draw....okay like I'll take 1 Cor. Where it talks about a woman must have her head covered and that's what you focus on instead of looking at everything.

Tim:

But we're not talking about focusing on a verse, we're talking about focusing on a whole book.

Participant 2:

Yes, exactly. I'm just saying that I think there could be insights, clarifying insights that might help you understand the text better, if you get those insights from the other books. But over all I found it very beneficial, because I dealt with the details, I dealt with the text. Yes, I liked it.

Participant 9:

I think it let me focus on the details without getting too weighted down by them. One thing that I said the first week was I was looking forward to this because when I am reading I can get so caught up in just like, okay, how exactly does this part right here make sense? Like I don't get it. I might try to cross reference it with other things, I might stew on it for a while, whatever. This approach helped a little bit with letting me notice and appreciate the details without getting weighed down. And part of it was the criticism approach and part of it was the group dynamic that we would discuss things.

I think the fluidity that I mentioned earlier weaving together all of the stories into the one large story was very enforced with this approach. I think sometimes, at least with this particular book, questions went unanswered with this. Because the Narrative Approach isn't necessarily out to answer all of the questions that may have been left by the text. It's about looking at the text and trying to figure out some of the "how" the text is saying, not necessarily "why" the text is saying. And so sometimes questions went unanswered because that "why" wasn't the particular goal. And that was occasionally annoying, but it's not a huge thing.

Tim:

Anybody else on ways that this approach aids your understanding of the text or hinders it?

Participant 1:

Yes, one I learned "pericope" (laughter). But that they weren't just randomly put in place. They actually had a purpose and a reason. Like, someone else said something about Fig Newtons...whatever you call that?

Participant 2:

Fig Tree Sandwich! (Laughter)

Participant 1:

So it's really cool, how that really came out through this. The only frustration was that once in a while you couldn't fill in some of the details because it wasn't in Mark. It didn't fit his purpose for how he was writing, but you know it doesn't hinder in the sense of trying to get what God is trying to tell us.

Participant 4:

It reminds me when I said Pilates instead of Pilate. (Laughter). Easy mistake.

Tim:

I know Pilate a lot better than I know Pilates. (Laughter).

Participant 10:

Just one small thing, I never really thought too much about symbolism in the text before this study and there is obviously a lot of symbolism in the text. Some of the

inherent meanings with the places—the Sea, the Wilderness—I mean I never really thought about that before. But it was interesting to note how some of those things really affected the text; the meaning of the text. So, I thought that was very helpful.

Participant 6:

Also, I think like Participant 1 mentioned, sandwiched texts in general were easy to identify with this approach, as are repetition of words. Things like that we look for are a lot easier when you're just concentrating on the one text. Like, for instance, the first time we watched the video, I couldn't believe how many times I heard the word "authority:" it just kept popping out like "Oh, that's an important word. He's saying it often."

Tim:

Anything from you Participant 5?

Participant 5:

I think that the overall approach, and the discussion tonight shows there's a ton of positives with this approach to the Bible. And I agree there are insufficiencies, but I'm not sure there are a ton of...I don't think it can steer you wrong in a lot of ways. I don't see a lot of hindrances with it. Yes, you will not get the full answer to every question, but will we ever in this life—I mean why do we expect that from this text any more than we should expect to have perfect knowledge of anything. What this does help us do, in a good way, is to relate to the text in a more direct, important and impactful way. That's why we have Bible Studies, and why we take any approach to the Bible, so that it will mean something to us and impact us. This way does it as well, and maybe arguably, better than most.

Tim:

As I said when we first started, this isn't the only way to do it and I don't want to say other ways are necessarily wrong or better or worse. It's just one way to do it and so there are advantages and disadvantages to every approach. So I appreciate you sharing how it impacted you. So the last question—the catch-all, is there anything else that you would like to say because this is wrapping it up—the conclusion here—anything about our group, the Narrative Approach. Anything I didn't ask that you wished I'd asked? Anything you want to say as we close out?

Participant 7:

I would like to learn how to teach this. Practicing it, it's great but to teach this way is something else and I would love to learn how to teach this way.

Participant 6:

Speaking of teaching this way, we used this approach in the Jr. High Sunday School Class as I was learning it here. I found that teaching the material was a lot less pressure because I didn't need...I didn't feel the need for an exhaustive study. I didn't have to know everything before you go into class, you know. Plus, all the teens could participate, whether they are Christian school students, or kids with minimal Bible knowledge. It makes everyone's comments valuable which we talked about already. And in some ways those with less Biblical exposure would have more to offer because they would be able to focus on just this text and not do as much filtering and perhaps recognize patterns more easily. Which is what the Narrative Approach is all about, so I kind of thought it was fun to go about it. One challenging part was that I was kind of trying to figure this approach out myself going into it, and I wasn't a very good communicator with my co-leader, so it didn't work when we're not on the same page. How to do it. Amazingly, I know you're shocked! (Laughter). But when you're working with your spouse that's generally the case. So that caught me off guard because in my mind it was like "Oh da, da, da, da, da, da. And I don't think he ever really caught the vision. And maybe it would have taken a lot because he is really concrete and really analytical and so I'm not just how...I guess I'm just trying to emphasize the importance of being on the same page if you're going to have multiple leaders with it.

Participant 1:

I think for me...I've struggled...I mean I've read the Bible, through the Bible...but really personal Bible study---I've led Bible Studies---mostly this type of Bible study, but actually to break it down personally---this actually really helps me know how to go. Because, honestly, I always have the thought of bringing out all these books and trying to go through a Bible study with a concordance, and this version, and that version and it just...by the time I got it all out I was tired (laughter). But this kind of approach I can actually sit down, I can actually focus on what is the Scripture saying. And if I need to, yeah, I can pull out my other books and pull them in. But this has really given me a direction now. For a couple of years I've tried to really figure that out. I've taken your challenge of reading through the Bible ever since you started that a few years ago I do fairly well with that...a few days I miss on weekends, but this really has helped me have another direction now in personal Bible study.

Participant 10:

Well, just to kind of go back to another question again where there was a lot of comment about the roundness of the character of Jesus or the heart of Jesus—I just felt like the character of Jesus really stood out to me—how fully focused, fully invested, fully righteous, fully aware of what was required in any situation. You know whether it was to be the tender and compassionate person or to be sternly reprimanding or the harshly faith teaching or the affirming and propelling—whatever it was—over and over again—there is so much that's like beyond comprehension of who he is and how he's portrayed

through the story and that's one thing, just in terms of, yes, Christ's words were hugely important, but it's seeing who he is in the story that really makes the impression, I think.

Participant 2:

I think I've talked about it a little bit, but I think I just felt like I saw Jesus in a deeper light. Similar to what Participant 10 is talking about. Like who he is and how he feels about things. How amazing he is. His deep relationship with his Father. How much we can learn about his heart from this. I think the other thing was, you know sometimes I read the stories about Jesus, but I don't engage with Jesus and I feel like this time I engaged with Jesus. Which I don't know if that makes any sense at all, but it is more like talking about Jesus but now it IS Jesus. I don't know if that makes sense but...

Participant 5:

It makes sense to me.

Participant 7:

You know you wanted people to read the Bible in a year. Looking at how fast we went through the pages. We were doing like four pages a week. So for our two hours it's like four pages and doing that much---if you did that every day it would take you a year doing this intense every day. That's a lot. Wow! So how much could you gain in that?

Participant 5:

It's sort of a potpourri of thoughts, but I'm definitely going to use this approach as the "go to" approach in every book of the Bible. Sometimes when you think of reading the Bible or studying the Bible, I can't speak for others, but sometimes it seems overwhelming. It's a big book and there's a lot in it. And so I like the literary approach because it sort of teaches you to take one small detail, one small part and try to understand it and study it, and then go on to one character or one book and just look at it as a whole and understand it and it will start to open up the rest of the book for you. So I'm going to do that. And if I may, I really thought, to second what was said earlier—I really thought your preparation was awesome and key in the beginning of how to employ the Narrative Approach. It was fantastic and I thought the group was the best group I've been in ever. Best Bible Study group. Best literature class, if you will, that I've ever been in and I saw a lot of growth and I certainly took more notes from what other people said here than I ever did before. I thought it was a great group and I thought we grew a lot.

Participant 9:

To build off what Participant 5 said in talking about you Tim. I really appreciate the way you approached the study. Not just the way you educated us as to what the

approach was, but the way that we did have a leader “quote unquote” (made quote sign motions in the air), sorry I forgot it’s recording—but you participated just like everybody else did. I mean there were certain things like “did anybody else notice that” or “yeah I noticed that too” I mean you made yourself a part of the group. I don’t want to say you were one of us, cause that just sounds kind of weird, but you did participate along with trying to guide us, you know, “okay does anyone else have anything more to say because we gotta move on.”

You kept us on schedule, but also sharing things that you noted and we knew that you were doing the same kind of thing as us. And I think that is a lot nicer than having a leader who is sort of standing back and taking notes or “just guiding” the discussion. So I appreciate the way that you approached the class.

Participant 2:

Yes.

Tim:

Thanks, I enjoyed being one of the group. I really did. Because I’ve never been in a Bible study that’s done this either so...Any last comments....

Participant 11:

I just wanted to say that I do appreciate everyone here and the chance of getting to know each of you a little bit better and it’s been a real privilege, so thank you!

Participant 7:

Ditto.

Ditto’s all around.

Tim:

Thank you all!

Participant 7:

Amen!

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE FINDINGS FROM THE DATA

This final chapter will identify and illustrate five major themes that come directly out of the data from the Long Interview conducted on the last night the group met together. Many minor themes could be discussed. However, the focus will be on five prominent and consistent conclusions that can easily be established from this data. These deductions will also be used to answer the primary research question that was asked at the beginning this project: “Does small group Bible study on the Gospel of Mark, using the Narrative Approach, increase the student’s excitement for the study of Scripture, and increase the student’s desire to study the text in deeper, more specific ways using these techniques?”

Before beginning the project, I wrote out some possible indicators of how I might determine the answer to the research question. I would know that the participants are more excited about the study of Scripture, and desire to study the text in deeper ways using this approach when I hear them say things like: “How exciting!” “I’ve never thought of Scripture in that way before!” “I love this approach.” “This is so fresh and rewarding.” “I can’t wait to try this narrative thing in other studies.” “I’m so glad I took this study.” “I understand Mark so much better now.” “I see the Bible (this Gospel) in a new way.” I was looking for those kinds of comments as I read through the data of the Long Interview and I was not disappointed.

In the process of looking for the answer to the overarching research question, the five major themes that were easily identified (and confirmed by triangulation) are as

follows: 1) The flow of the entire book is seen more clearly through the Narrative Approach; 2) The importance of the details of the text come to life with this approach; 3) The power of this method is magnified by doing this as a group study; 4) Bible study can be valid and beneficial with just the text alone; and 5) The participants felt like they were on level ground with the others in the group using this approach.

Each of these five major conclusions will now be illustrated and discussed. The examples given to validate each conclusion will be given in chronological order, as they were said the night of the Long Interview. They will not be broken down and grouped together by participant number. This is so the reader of this project might get a better sense of how the theme was expanded upon and reemphasized by other students in the natural flow of the conversation throughout the night. Also the underlining and bolding in the examples to follow are mine. This is to help the reader of the project to quickly identify the key words or phrases that corroborate the theme being presented. The citation at the end of each quote references the page number and participant number (i.e. 26/8 = page 26 of this dissertation, participant #8). This allows the project reader, if desired, to look up the quote in its entire context. Now the five themes that were discovered will be expanded upon.

### **1) The Flow of the Entire Book is Seen More Clearly Through the Narrative Approach**

This theme was prevalent throughout the Long Interview. Watching the DVD presentation of the Gospel of Mark at the beginning and ending of the focus group helped

the students see the Gospel as a whole. While some of their comments are in reference to that experience, the overall discipline of making our way through Mark's text, two chapters a night for eight consecutive evenings, also confirmed this conclusion. The following comments illustrate this premise.

"The second time (referring to the DVD viewing) I was focusing on the telling of it. His emphasis on things and how it all **flowed**, rather than the background information" (61/8).

"And I think the **fluidity** seemed more noticeable, more emphasized this time; just because the idea of everything **weaving together** instead of being individual little stories" (61/9).

"...learning more about the Narrative Approach, and looking at the book through the Narrative Approach, it's like, there is an **arrangement** to it. It all **goes together**. It's not individual little stories" (61/9).

"When you're reading or studying or particularly listening to a sermon, you get two or three verses here and you focus on just that periscope. But when you're looking at the whole thing you see much better 'okay **this follows this**'" (62/8).

"I thought that it **flowed** very well....but I thought that ultimately it **flowed** very well as a story of salvation and I thought it was very powerful too" (65/5).

"I don't ever remember another study where I had a clear view of the **author's purpose** and intent through the study....Oh my goodness that makes so much difference in just understanding the detail if you see what the **purpose** of the whole **flowing** through the narrative really is. So that was the big thing for me, and so it will definitely affect what studies I might do in the future, and how I might do them" (69/10).

"As you understand it as a sort of micro level all of a sudden it hits you in the face 'Oh this is also how **it relates to everything else** I've read or many things I've read....it opens up the **macro** of the whole Bible" (72/5).

"But just feeling that I had a better sense of the **context as a whole**. I can put myself in what was happening" (75/10).

"But looking for that **purpose behind it** gives a different perspective on it" (80/8).

"I thought I would now really search for **the voice of each one of the other Gospel narrators** as I read through the other Gospels" (80/5).

“...the writer had drawn me in...it just so **totally built throughout the book** and I felt that we always need that opportunity to re-evaluate our faith and re-decide— Yes! This is why I believe this and this is why” (82/10).

“...it’s like—‘you know **he’s leading you, he’s building this case**” (88/9).

“I opened my Bible because I talk about how I look at Jesus differently and the first words out of Jesus’ mouth in Mark are ‘The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the Gospel.’ And I thought, just that statement right there...**BOOM! It’s right there.** I’d looked at it before, I read it. I heard it. But it never affected me like this did in this approach. I’m like ‘WOW that was a powerful message right off the top.’ He proclaimed it right off the top” (88/7).

“I think the **fluidity** that I mentioned earlier, weaving together all the stories into **one large story** was very enforced with this approach” (95/9).

“Yes, one I learned ‘pericope.’ But that they **weren’t just randomly put in place**” (96/1).

Six of the eleven participants made comments that substantiate this first major theme. Four of the six spoke on this topic more than once. This theme also helps answer the overarching research question in a very exciting way. Not only did the students better see the overall theme of the gospel through the Narrative Approach; this method also increased their desire to study and their excitement towards the text. This is evident in comments like: “you see much better,” “very powerful,” “I don’t ever remember another study,” “makes so much difference,” “will definitely affect what studies I might do in the future,” “opens up...the whole Bible,” “I would now search for,” “drawn me in,” and “It never affected me like it did in this approach.”

The participants seemed to have found, in this method of Bible study, a fresh technique to tie the entire text of the Gospel together in ways they had not previously seen. That insight produced excitement and desire for more of the same. So often, Bible studies or sermons delve into a passage without linking it to the entire body of work in

which it is found. The Narrative Approach enables the students to spend time seeing the big picture. I believe this is, in part, because they are not allowed to compare and contrast with other Bible books or commentaries. They “lived in” the text alone. The Bible student is freed from the pressure to “find” the big story anywhere other than the book they are studying. Even though we studied two chapters a night, usually discussing one pericope at a time—we felt free to compare and contrast within the safe confines of Mark’s Gospel alone. We asked how this particular event fits the bigger story? We sought to grasp how including this one incident in Jesus’ life furthered Mark’s purpose set out in Mark 1:1. The big picture was always in view.

## 2) The Importance of the Details of the Text Come Alive with this Approach

Nine of the eleven student participants make reference to this theme in sixteen different comments. The word “detail” was used fifteen times, with synonyms for “detail” abounding as well. They did not just notice the details; the details took on great importance for them.

“I would have just flown past that **detail**, but since we’ve talked about everything so broken down—I caught stuff like that the second time around” (61/4).

“...I was listening for **specific things** like the **detail** or in some cases the lack of **detail** in the different parts of the video. Cause that’s one thing that stood out to me as we were going through, where he’s used **detail**...” (63/10).

“So while we studied the Narrative Approach slowly, you see **little things**; you notice **little things**” (63/3).

“One of the things I feel like is that it helped me give proper emphasis to the text and the **details** became more interesting. Instead of ‘hurry up, get past those’ they gave me more...it just kind of clarified some things. The **details** became more

important....But instead of going ‘oh this **detail**, I just don’t get it,’ it made me stop and look at those **details** a little more closely” (68/2).

“No, it **does have significance**, even if I can’t puzzle it out on my own” (69/9).

“And having been introduced to the Narrative Criticism—It’s Biblical....It’s like ‘no, this is **significant**. I may not understand its significance, but it is here for a reason” (70/9).

“I didn’t want to be influenced by other things. I just wanted to stay with Mark....Sometimes there’s a **piece** there that doesn’t seem to make sense. But it was there for a reason” (70/11).

“I hear **little things** and I think out **little things**. Okay, he just said...I didn’t see that before. Why did they put that in there? Why is that in here? So it makes me look at things differently” (71/7).

“I feel like every **detail** has a purpose now” (79/4).

“But in this approach, I felt like every one of us went—‘well, if it’s there it must be really important.’ And I think those **little details** that we maybe glossed over because we wondered how really inspired they really were actually got more inspired” (82/2).

“**Everything** took on a deeper weight than it would have if we weren’t using this approach” (82/2).

“...it teaches us to **pay attention**” (89/5).

“I think one thing for me out of studying this was all the **small details** that are actually **important details** too when we did this study” (91/1).

“The one thing that you do gain is that you **learn the details better**. You learn from the **details** and you see the emphasis in the passage that you tend to gloss over. At least that’s what happened for me. Stuff I used to gloss by, I dealt with a little bit more; wrestled with, you might say” (94/2).

“I think it let me focus on the **details** without getting too weighted down by them” (95/9).

“So I like the literary approach because it sort of teaches you to take **one small detail, one small part** and try to understand it and study it and then go on to one character or one book and just look at it as a whole and understand it and it will start to open up the rest of the book for you” (99/5).

The theme of attention to and the importance of details, stood out throughout the Long Interview. All but two of the participants emphasized this idea in the Long Interview. As it relates to the overarching research question, this theme once again indicates an increased level of excitement and desire toward Bible study using this method. Statements like: “It helps give me proper emphasis,” “The details became more interesting,” “It kind of help clarify some things,” and “It’s Biblical” show the positive impact of the Narrative Approach.

Notice also the use of words that demonstrate change in the way the participants see the Bible or want to study it in the future: “I would have....” “You notice....” “I don’t want to be influenced by other things.” “It makes me look at things differently.” “Every detail has purpose now.” “...got more inspired.” “...took on deeper weight.” “It teaches us to pay attention.” “I like the Literary Approach because....” Comments like these seem to point to a change in future behavior, and direction in Bible study. Many students spoke in terms of “I used to” or “I would have,” but “now I” or “I will” kind of statements. This is very encouraging in considering the use of the Narrative Approach in the future. There is an old saying “the Devil’s in the details.” These students found just the opposite to be true—“God is in the details,” and that thrilled and motivated them!

### **3) The Power of This Method is Magnified by Doing This as a Group Study.**

All of the participants took time to stress the great value of experiencing the Narrative Approach in a group setting as opposed to an individual study. The following comments bear this out:

“I’m looking at this thinking, ‘WOW!’ He talked about the diamond; the **70 facet jewel**. You look at it. You turn it and you see another facet. **You see something different** and different. But 70 times and the light is different, so you do it again. You see something different all over. **And that’s what I see doing this type of study**. Every time you do it you’re going to see something different....What participant 5 said struck me, and I’m going ‘Wow! I never thought about that. Oh, participant 11 said this about this, and I’ve never thought about that either.’ So it changes how I see what the book is saying to me. What the story is saying to me. It’s different. It’s new. It’s exciting. Each Sunday I’ve been excited to be here. It’s just like ‘what am I going to see next?’” (67/7).

“As you read, you know, there were times where in a periscope it’s like ‘I have no clue what that’s trying to say.’ I just wrote a question mark in my notes. **And then we come here and talk about it** and it’s like ‘OH! It actually DID mean something. It’s significant” (69/9).

“...somebody may see something and it’s like ‘well I’m going to put that out there, and **see what everybody might see**. Did anybody else see this? Am I in like some la-la land or is this really something that I gleaned out of this and it’s fresh and new in me and **might bless somebody else**” (73/2).

“I felt like I really enjoyed the freedom to **hear and be heard**. You know, from the whole group. That was cool” (74/6).

“Well I think it’s very, very different....Having a **bunch of perspectives** around that say ‘Oh, look, the sons of Zebedee here are the brothers that Jesus called to look at this.’ **Never would have occurred to me**—three guys, moving on! It’s a lot of literary contexts **I would have missed**... (75/8).

“**I don’t think I would be successful doing it on my own**. Listening to what everybody got from the text...I go through the notes and I’m just summarizing it or repeating what was said....But everything everybody brought up and brought to the table, there is **no way I would have gotten on my own**....And in a group it was so successful. I learned so much more than when I just read it before hand on my own” (75/4).

“I agree. I mean we obviously went through and made our notes for each periscope, but probably 90% of what I’d say or come up with in the discussion wasn’t written down. It was **thinking off of what someone else in the group said**” (76/8).

“Absolutely” (76/9) This followed the previous comment and was reinforced with spontaneous, enthusiastic agreement around the room.

“Absolutely. **People’s thoughts were cornerstones for thoughts to come**” (76/9).

“There’s **24 eyes** looking at the same stuff” (77/7).

“So there are **all these different aspects** that I would have never seen if I had done it by myself....But here we get to hear ‘Wow!’ **I want to share it with somebody else**. I want to get this because I know there are other people that are going to see something else too” (77/7).

“It’s so **much more meaningful and enjoyable than me just trying to get through it**” (77/6).

“I thought about the group approach as ah—it’s a **book club**. There are books that exist. Why would you get together to discuss it? You’ve read the book. You already know what you saw. It’s **very interesting to see what other people see**” (78/3).

“**Affirmation** is a huge part of learning....I like to have that sort of **shared experience** so that I’m not over here on my own just sort of going through it alone” (78/9).

“Yeah, like some of the weird things that I might have thought about something—somebody else thought the same weird thing! ‘That’s cool’” (79/2).

“**Affirmation**. Those kind of things you get from other people” (86/11).

“...and especially being able to talk about it with other people...” (88/9).

“I saw a lot of growth and I certainly took more **notes from what other people said here** than I ever did before. I thought it was a great group and I thought we grew a lot” (99/5).

After having organized, lead, and analyzed this group experience, the influence of the group on the process cannot be overstated. The line that best makes this point is, “People’s thoughts were cornerstones for thoughts to come” (71/9). That truth was lived out every night of the study, without exception. The major strength of this project was the group factor. The class did not have commentaries, or word studies, or background history or any other aids to give insight. All they had was the text and one another—and the thrilling conclusion is—that is enough! All those other aids, as wonderful and

valuable as they may be, are NOT necessary for a strong, dynamic Bible study. The community and the text together provided the energy in the room. Every night we struggled to “get through” our assigned chapters. People came eager and anxious to share the insights they found. Then when others started describing what they gleaned from the text—the room was filled with synergy. A student would use the comments of another student as a springboard for their own instant understanding.

Take note of the positive words used to characterize the group experience: “Wow!” “Seventy facet jewel.” “New,” “Different,” “Exciting,” “What am I going to see next?” “Would never have occurred to me,” “Would have missed it,” “I want to share with somebody,” and “Book club.” I hope in just reading the transcript, you get a sense of the real energy associated with this study. This was not like any Bible study I have ever conducted in decades of ministry. People were genuinely eager to come, ready to share, and time flew by.

It should also be pointed out that the group dynamic, using this method, contributed more than Bible knowledge. Notice the language of affirmation that is repeated frequently in the above examples. People felt like there was grace in the room. Their ideas were heard, and they wanted to hear the ideas of the others. Even when a text was hard to understand, and they didn’t get much out of it privately, the group experience was positive for them. Sometimes the text was seen by others as difficult. This affirmed the student that his/her struggles with the pericope was not an aberration. Other times, another student would offer fresh insights on the text not seen by the struggling student. On every occasion, the struggling student did not feel shut down or inferior to others, but only amazed and open to the insights presented.

I would highly encourage that the Narrative Approach be experienced in a group setting. The important elements of group dynamics cannot be ignored. It takes people willing to be part of a group, rather than dominate the group. It takes a facilitator to keep the group somewhat in the bounds of the text. It takes time to allow the group to “chew the cud” on the text before them. It takes commitment to individually prepare before coming to the meeting. However, all that being said, the group approach is the most effective way to use this method for Bible Study.

#### 4) Bible Study Can Be Valid and Beneficial With Just The Text Alone

Sometimes Christians do not study the Bible because they do not believe they are qualified. They do not know the original language. They haven't been to Bible College. They do not own or understand all the study aids (commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias, word studies, etc.) that others own and refer to often. Even if they do possess some of these resources, are they the “right” ones? Do they give the “correct” theology that is approved and accepted by their church or peers? Part of the overarching research question was to determine if the Narrative Approach would cause the students to increase their love, excitement and confidence of further Bible study. The results, in this regard, are resoundingly positive. Here are the student's own words:

“I think it makes sense because the Bible is a sacred text and all you're doing with the Narrative Approach is **treating the text as sacred**. You're saying the text means something. You **don't have to go beyond the text** to get meaning from it. Look at what's in front of you” (66/5).

“...**as long as you can read—that’s the requirement** you have to have, or to be able to listen to someone else read. You don’t have to have a big theological degree or a PhD in something. You don’t know even the other books of the Bible per se. So it’s **self-contained** in that regard. And what Participant 7 was saying, it’s amazing what you can extract out of the text **without going beyond the text**. And so, there is insight in just the text...” (66/11).

“...it makes study much **simpler and straight forward** because **everything you need is right there in front of you**” (67/8).

“I don’t know if I’ll ever talk with Mark, but I feel closer to his writings. I feel closer to...it’s like I have a love for the Gospel of Mark, and whoever the author was, whoever wrote it. I feel I like **I have invested more of myself in the writings**. But it’s along the lines of ‘it’s fun’” (70/11).

“So it can tell us things when we’re not trying to approach it with a preconceived viewpoint or a particular structure placed on it. We’re **letting the text speak for itself** better” (65/11).

“...we’re often taking our entire perspective of Paul’s writings and applying it to this. I think **sometimes it’s almost as if, we’re not letting the Bible...we don’t trust the Bible**. You know, it’s not good enough—we need to take this addition over here and make sure you understand. Well, is that treating it sacred? I don’t think so” (86/3).

“...this actually helps me know how to go. Because honestly I always have the thought of bringing out all these books and trying to go through a Bible study with a concordance and this version and that version and it just...by the time I got it all out I was tired (laughter). **But this kind of approach, I can actually sit down, I can actually focus on what is the Scripture saying**. And if I need to, yeah, I can pull out my other books and pull them in” (98/1).

Let me be clear, the use of Bible study resource should be encouraged. There are limitations, and even possible dangers in studying “just the text” without understanding some of the historical context, etc. However, it is wonderful to see that the Bible itself provides believers with life-changing insights. Students of the Holy text should broaden their understanding with any and all appropriate resources. However, those resources, are not necessary for believers to engage in successful group or individual study. One final theme must be mentioned.

### 5) The Participants Felt They Were on Level Ground with the Others in the Group

The mix of the focus group was diverse. Some participants were relatively new believers, and others had been in the faith for decades. Some were new to Highline Christian Church, and others were born into that church community. The advantage of this kind of diversity helps clarify the possible positive or negative impacts of this method. There were those in the group who would have had some difficulty finding their way around the Bible, and others with well-worn pages in their own copy of the text. How comfortable would the new believers be in sharing their “insights” in a group that included well-seasoned saints? Would “just studying the text” inhibit their confidence and limit their participation? The results were nothing short of amazing. Not only did this approach encourage sharing, it also empowered the students in ways they had not experienced before.

This final major theme is the most gratifying of them all. If nothing else is learned from the doctoral project, this one conclusion should not be missed. This conclusion points to a primary and significant way the Narrative Approach is set apart from all of the traditional methods of Bible study being done today. I will quote, at length, the strong statements freely given on that final night to validate this finding.

“I’m probably the newest Christian and it can be, from my point of view, daunting to be in the room with people that you know know the Bible better than you....**And yet the Narrative Approach allows me to be on the same footing as everybody else** and to derive meaning from what’s in front of me. And that’s a good thing too as a student” (67/5).

“I feel like **I can enjoy the study more because I’m not so stressed** about trying to find or remember what everything is about and feeling inferior because I don’t know what the connections are or what the other Gospels say or all like that. It’s like ‘**it’s fresh!**’ You can enjoy it and **not stress about what you don’t know**” (67/6).

“I second that! (67/9).

“I agree (67/4).

Talking about listening to others discuss the text—“And that’s what I see doing this type of study. **Every time you do it you’re going to see something different**” (67/7).

“So one of the things that was brought up earlier with another question was **the feeling of levelness...coming at this study on the same level**. All fresh and you know just looking at what’s in front of us without considering other things. And I think one of the great things to me about the study is that sense and that fact that I felt there was **a lot of grace in the room for whatever thoughts and whatever may have come up**. And feeling the sense that **THIS is the kind of thing I would love for it to be as we come together for a study**. Everybody can **share equally** and not have a sense of ‘I don’t want to say that because it might be the wrong thing’ or whatever” (73/10).

“I think it’s the **levelness**. Let’s just look and see what we see. We all have the same information” (73/10).

“And in this study, there are no questions. The way that you kind of laid it out Tim is ‘these 5 verses, GO!’ **So you can’t say anything that’s invalid**, not because we’re trying to look for weird things but there’s no lead” (speaking of written questions you must answer) (74/3).

“But the thing I really like about it was that **we all had the same text**. And so we’re all coming from our understanding of the same text. It’s not like ‘well I have read these extra history books over there so I can bring that to the table.’ Or you know, somebody else has done a cross Gospel comparison and they bring that to the table. And I’m not privy in knowing. **Everything that people are talking about are things I have also read...I think that’s the level playing field**” (76/11).

“It was just...it’s a fantastic feeling knowing that there are other people that—there are people I deeply respect. Participant 11 and Participant 10 have been capstones in my life and to know that I noticed the same thing as him (laughter!)...**I actually feel pretty good about myself...very empowering**”

**feeling and so that sort of affirmation is one of the things I loved about this approach...** knowing that I shared some of the same ideas with other people. And people I really respect” (779/9).

**“You don’t have to worry** about am I looking at it from a proper point of view.” You can just look at it and react and I think that’s a great thing. That’s the way we should be doing the Gospel anyway...” (85/5).

“Speaking of teaching this way, we used this approach in the Junior High Sunday School Class as I was learning it here. I found that teaching the material was **a lot less pressure** because I didn’t need...I didn’t feel the need for an exhaustive study. **I didn’t have to know everything** before you go into class, you know. Plus, **all the teens could participate, whether they are Christian school students, or kids with minimal Bible knowledge. It makes everyone’s comments valuable...**And in some ways those with less Biblical exposure would have more to offer because they would be able to focus on just this text and not do as much filtering and perhaps recognize patterns more easily. Which is what the Narrative Approach is all about, so I kind of thought it was fun to go about it” (98/6).

The long-term value of this method of study can be seen in this final conclusion alone. It has always been the desire of ministers of the Word to see people participate in a study where grace and truth permeate the room. Both of those qualities were present in this study. The “level playing field” of studying “just the text” causes the shy ones, the less Biblically-educated ones, to share as much as the more-respected Bible scholars in the room. It was gratifying for me to see one particular student openly talk about her respect for another couple in the room. She has known them all her life. In this study, she felt as if her contributions were as valuable and important as theirs because we were all simply looking at the same material. I do not believe she would have spoken up as open and freely had our study of Mark been open to resources outside the narrative text itself.

In the final quote above, Participant 6 mentioned teaching this to the Junior High Class. Before our focus group began, Participant 6 told me that she and her husband

would be teaching the Sunday School Class. She asked permission to attempt to apply to their class, in real time, the Narrative Approach. I told her it was a wonderful idea. She and her husband (who was not in the focus group) would be trying to emulate the basic principles of this method to teens who have never been exposed to it before. As she mentioned above, the results for her and their students were positive. For Participant 6, she felt qualified to teach without the stress of knowing enough background information. The students, who come from a varied spiritual background, could likewise equally share in the class because they all had only the text of Mark to examine together. The unbelieving seeker was on level ground with the Christian School student who was born and raised in the church, and is supposed to know all the answers.

## Conclusion

The journey began by asking this question, “Does small group Bible study on the Gospel of Mark, using the Narrative Approach, increase the student’s excitement for the study of Scripture, and increase the student’s desire to study the text in deeper, more specific ways using these techniques?” Before facilitating this Doctor of Ministry focus group, I had never led a Bible study using this method. It was in a Doctor of Ministry class on current trends in New Testament study that the seed of excitement began to germinate for this type of gathering. After learning the basics of Narrative Criticism in an academic setting, my desire was to find out if this type of group study would be beneficial to the church. Would this concept translate from the academic world to the local church level in ways that make a positive difference? The experience exceeded all my expectations. The group itself was inspiring, rejuvenating and exciting. The findings were equally encouraging. The answer was a resounding “YES” to the research question.

However, it is crucial to point out that the focus group was not unaware of the limitations of this method. As with any approach, the strengths also bring along weaknesses. The participants know that comparing one Gospel to another, or looking at what great scholars have said about a pericope can be highly beneficial. Understanding the culture and history of the people to which the writings were first given, helps the student of the Bible put the words of the text in proper context. All of those disciplines have their place in the realm of the study of the Bible. The Narrative Approach, however, also should have a seat at the table. This often neglected or unknown technique, can be highly effective in bringing people together around the Sacred text. It

breaks down barriers other methods put up. It enhances relationships within the community of faith because all are on “level ground” as they approach the stories of the Gospel. It creates an atmosphere of affirmation and grace. It shines the light of importance on details often overlooked when a study guide is probing for a specific answer. Yet even as the small details take on more importance, the big story is always in view with this method. While the Narrative Approach is not realistic with a didactic epistle, for example, it can and should be used with other story genres in the Bible.

I would like to end this project by letting the participants speak for themselves. The quotes to follow are all previously recorded in the Long Interview. Other than being in the body of the Long Interview, they have not been referenced to this point. They are once again presented in the chronological order in which they were said during the Long Interview. Here they have been collected to show the power of the Narrative Approach. This summary includes at least one comment from each of the eleven participants. Let these honest reflections summarize the positive answer to the overarching research question:

“So I really like the Narrative Approach” (63/3).

“I thought it was very encouraging to me and it’s probably going to be my operative approach as I go forward with the Gospels. Fancy way of saying this is pretty much how I’ll start looking at the Gospels. I think it makes sense because the Bible is a sacred text and all you’re doing with the Narrative Approach is treating the text as sacred” (66/5).

“You’re going to see with a new light” (68/7).

“It’s a whole different perspective now....but in my general reading it’s changed” (68/1).

“It’s also a lot more fun too...It’s like a detective story...Which of course makes it more interesting, and makes you more engaged and more interested in finding out more about God’s Word. Not just in this Gospel but throughout the rest of it” (70/5).

“I’ve come to really love Mark” (71/11).

“...it has become my favorite Gospel” (71/2).

“So it makes me look at things differently” (71/7).

“Mark and John are now my two favorite Gospels” (Highline has just spent three years listening to sermons on the Gospel of John) (72/5).

“For me, I feel like I saw Jesus in a deeper, more meaningful light....I saw Jesus heart and that was really impactful” (72/2).

“I began to appreciate Mark more....because before I felt like I treated Mark like ‘Oh, that’s the little Gospel!’ And so then I began to realize how brilliantly put together it is” (74/6).

“So now I’m reading with a fresh set of eyes” (76/9).

“...when I was in high school you could take the Bible as literature classes. And I never thought much of them because I thought ‘well, they’re not really studying the Bible.’ Well, I’ve changed my tune on that” (82/1).

“So, it was not what I expected, but in a good way” (83/9).

“...it amazes me how I look at what he said and how he said it now as compared to what I looked at before. Because I look at it with a different eye...” (84/7).

“...it was a lot of fun for me. It was an interesting approach” (84/11).

“I think we do this too little” (85/3).

“Well I like this particular study....It gave me, I feel, a glimpse of heaven. The idea of just being around, discussing, relating to people” (86/11).

“Fun learning” (86/7).

“This was like Jacob wrestling with God, and us with the text” (87/5).

“So I basically felt like I got what I was hoping to get out of this study” (90/2).

“I think it’s helped change me in my everyday life....So I find good habits starting to replace old bad habits, and I think it’s a direct result of this Bible study” (91/5).

“I think real practically the way that it’s affected me is that I need to read my Bible more, and it’s made me realize that” (92/4).

“The literary approaches...there are definitely places it will work” (92/8).

“Stuff I used to gloss by I dealt with a little bit more, wrestled with you might say” (94/2).

“What this does help us do, in a good way, is to relate to the text in a more direct, important and impactful way” (97/5).

“I would like to learn how to teach this” (97/7).

“...this actually really helps me know how to go” (98/1).

“I just felt like the character of Jesus really stood out to me—how fully focused, fully invested, fully righteous, fully aware of what was required in any situation” (98/10).

“I’m definitely going to use this approach as the ‘go to’ approach in every book of the Bible....It was fantastic and I thought the group was the best group I’ve been in ever. Best Bible study group....I saw a lot of growth and I certainly took more notes from what other people said here than I ever did before. I thought it was a great group and I thought we grew a lot” (93/5).

It would be my earnest hope and desire that others would use the Narrative Approach to small group Bible study. The Narrative Approach should be added to the basket of Bible study methods used by the family of God. It can be a non-threatening means of welcoming people of all spiritual backgrounds to the table. It is a method for everyone. It breaks down many of the natural barriers that come with group Bible study. The seeker, the new believer, and the seasoned saint can all sit side by side “on level ground” and discuss God’s Word together. Each person can feel affirmed and valued.

The Narrative Approach is a journey in mutual exploration of the text in front of us. So each one, potentially, has something to share.

It is affordable. To do this type of study, the Church doesn't have to invest in an expensive DVD video series or study guides or the like. If everyone has a Bible, and is open to share, this method will work. The facilitator of such a group should be him/herself grounded as a believer. At the same time, a person can lead this type of group without feeling ill-prepared do to a lack of extensive background knowledge.

This Doctor of Ministry project is designed to be used by others. It explains the nuts and bolts of making this type of study a reality. Information from setting up a group, to teaching the basics of the Narrative Approach, to the actual study of the Gospel itself are found in this project. The Appendix includes all of the handouts, teaching materials, pericope worksheets, and more. My fervent hope is that other ministers of the Word would have the joy of seeing people renewed in their excitement of studying the Bible. Let us trust the story of the Gospel, in the text itself, to continue to challenge, encourage, and point people to Jesus.

# Appendix A

(A personal invitation given to potential participants prior to the study)

## A Special Invitation...

I would like to personally invite you to participate in a small group Bible Study on the Gospel of Mark.

This focus group is by invitation only and will be the material used for my final Doctor of Ministry project for Emmanuel Christian Seminary.

The participants will number between a half a dozen and a dozen.

This is no ordinary Bible Study. We will be looking at the text primarily through the Narrative Approach.

We will gather on Sunday nights, 6-8 pm, beginning on January 13<sup>th</sup> and finishing up on March 24<sup>th</sup>. This will end the class before Easter.

To be involved you DON'T need any special knowledge of the Bible or special training! You just need to be willing to come faithfully and share verbally as we explore the text together.

While no one can "promise" to not miss a night; to be a part of this group it's important to be reasonably sure you can commit to being present at most, if not all, of our weeks together.

I would love to speak with you further about this opportunity. Your prayerful consideration would be appreciated.

Enclosed is a response form. I would appreciate you handing it back to me in the next couple of weeks. If I don't hear from you sooner I'll be contacting you in the next few weeks to see if you'd be willing to join us on this adventure.

Thankful for you,

Tim Knight

# Appendix B

(An agreement signed and initialed by those who agreed to participate in the study)

## A Narrative Approach To The Gospel Of Mark

(A focus group Bible Study)

\_\_\_\_\_ Thanks for the invitation but I will NOT be able to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to be part of this special Bible Study. My initials on each line below indicate my understanding and commitment to this project:

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand the Bible Study will take place each Sunday night from January 6<sup>th</sup>—March 24<sup>th</sup> from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

\_\_\_\_\_ I will plan to be on time and in attendance for each session, missing only when absolutely necessary.

\_\_\_\_\_ I will openly share in the group, respecting each person's opinions and views.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand I will be given a "test" at the beginning and end of the Bible Study. The purpose is solely for research in the D-Min project.

\_\_\_\_\_ By my signature below, I give Tim Knight permission to use my data in the writing of this project with the full understanding that names will be withheld.

---

Your Name

---

Date

# **Appendix C**

(The front cover of the participants' 3-ring binders that held their notes)

# **The Story of God!**

## **The Narrative Approach to the Gospel of Mark**

A focus group project for the Doctor of Ministry degree

Emmanuel Christian Seminary

January 6, 2013-March 24, 2013

Highline Christian Church

Tim Knight, Facilitator

# Appendix D

(A welcome letter given the first night of the group study)

\_\_\_\_\_

WELCOME! Thank you so much for being a part of my final project for the Doctor of Ministry degree from Emmanuel Christian Seminary. Your presence and participation will make our time together even more enriching.

I want to be clear about the schedule and expectations:

- ✓ We will meet every Sunday evening January 6<sup>th</sup>-March 24<sup>th</sup> from 6-8 p.m.
- ✓ Please feel free to begin arriving between 5:30 and 6 so that we can begin on time.
- ✓ Should the weather prohibit our gathering, I will notify you via cell phone.
- ✓ If you are unable to attend any given week please text or call me (206-\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_\_) so that we aren't waiting for you to arrive.
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have graciously agreed to host our focus group. Their address is: \_\_\_\_\_. We will meet at their home each week (unless they will be out of town, in which case other arrangements will be announced in advance).
- ✓ It is imperative that you are honest in your interactions with the text and with me as facilitator. I don't get extra points if you say "the right things" or get marked down if you don't. The success of this focus group depends solely on your truthful, open contribution.

- ✓ The bulk of our time together will be looking directly and solely at the TEXT of Mark's Gospel. I encourage you NOT to do extra commentary work. I DO encourage you to read the chapters of Mark to be discussed with an eye to Narrative Criticism. Feel free to write down insights from the text itself that you want to share with the group!

Thankful for YOU!

Tim

# Appendix E

(The group's schedule of dates and topics)

## Tentative Schedule of Focus Group Meetings

January 6 <sup>th</sup>	Guidelines and Ground Rules Pre-Class "Test" Mark the Movie
January 13 <sup>th</sup>	The Notebook The Narrative Approach—The Basics (IMPORTANT FOUNDATION FOR REST OF GROUP SESSIONS)
January 20 <sup>th</sup>	Mark 1-2
January 27 <sup>th</sup>	Mark 3-4
February 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Mark 5-6
February 10 <sup>th</sup>	Mark 7-8
February 17 <sup>th</sup>	Mark 9-10
February 24 <sup>th</sup>	Mark 11-12
March 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Mark 13-14
March 10 <sup>th</sup>	March 15-16
March 17 <sup>th</sup>	Mark the Movie Revisited
March 24 <sup>th</sup>	Post-Class Discussion (THIS IS CRITICAL FOR MY PROJECT!!!!!! PLEASE PLAN TO ATTEND THIS SESSION!)

# Appendix F

(1<sup>st</sup> night's guidelines and ground rules)

## Focus Group First Night

- ✚ I'm so thankful you've chosen to participate in this adventure. Each of you was handpicked for this project and it's an honor to complete my D-Min with you!
- ✚ My desire it that our time together will do more than help complete an academic project. I pray it will enhance your walk with God as you study His Word and strengthen relations with one another in His Body.
- ✚ I've never done this before. So I'm not "the expert" but rather the facilitator. What YOU bring to the table is equally important! We're on this mission together—I will try to keep us on track!
- ✚ We will be using ONLY the text of the Gospel of Mark. That is, we will not be doing any commentary work or word studies, etc. Feel free to use whatever translation of the text you normally use. I ask that it be a translation rather than a paraphrase (The Message, The Living Bible, etc.)
- ✚ Next week I'll lay the foundation for narrative study. Then for the next 8 weeks we'll consider 2 chapters of Mark's Gospel each evening. We probably won't get to every verse or maybe event every section of those two chapters. We'll go with the flow, as they say.
- ✚ You will read the two chapters beforehand and write down insights, thoughts, questions, etc. based on your reading of the text through the narrative lens. Don't be a slave to the sheet. You don't have to come up with a gem for each pericope. Go with what God gives you!
- ✚ Each night we'll asked—"What is one thought, idea or insight that stood out to you from our study tonight?"

- ✦ **I am NOT saying this is the ONLY valid approach to studying the Gospels. I am NOT saying looking at commentaries or historical background is bad or wrong. The purpose of this focus group is to see IF there is value in looking at scripture from this perspective.**
  
- ✦ **Looking at the Gospel of Mark through the literary lens is not in any way intended to demean or discount the inspiration of the Holy Spirit or the authority of the text. In fact, just the opposite—The narrative approach says God INTENTIONALLY put together the text in a certain way—using these literary features to do it—Why?**
  
- ✦ **So let the adventure begin!**

# Appendix G

(A contact list for the facilitator to communicate any schedule changes)

**The Best Way To Contact Me Fast Is.....**

**(text, email, FB, call, etc.)**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ -- \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix H

(A questionnaire of basic background for the facilitator to better understand who is in the group)

## Focus Group General Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been a Christian? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been coming to Highline? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been the regular leader for a group Bible Study? \_\_\_\_\_

How would you describe your knowledge of Mark's Gospel prior to this study?

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How would you describe your knowledge of Mark's Gospel after this study?

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Finish the sentence: Mark's Gospel is \_\_\_\_\_

---

Did anything surprise you about Mark's Gospel? If so what? \_\_\_\_\_

---

Do you think you'd ever want to be involved in another "narrative study" at some point in your life? \_\_\_\_\_

How comfortable would you feel leading a Bible Study using this approach?

---

# Appendix I

(This questionnaire was given at the beginning and end of the study for comparison purposes)

## Pre-Class Interview

1. I read my Bible
  - a. Every day
  - b. Several times a week
  - c. Once a week
  - d. Occasionally
  - e. Never
  
2. I am involved in a regular Bible Study group.
  - a. Daily
  - b. Weekly
  - c. A few times a year
  - d. Rarely
  - e. Never
  
3. What is your level of excitement in personal Bible Study (in general, not referring to this focus group)?
  - a. Very Excited
  - b. Excited
  - c. Routine
  - d. A Little Boring
  - e. Dry as Dust
  - f. Non-existent
  
4. I need to find an approach to the Bible that will give me new zeal for Bible Study. I'm feeling kind of dry.
  - a. Strongly Agree

- b. Agree
- c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

5. The Bible can be approached the same way you would approach literature in general.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

6. I prefer to study the Bible in a group.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

7. It is hard to figure out what the Bible is trying to say. I get confused easily and sometimes I think I miss the main point.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

8. I need commentaries, sermons, study aids, and other Bible tools. Just using the Bible alone isn't very effective for me.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree

e. Strongly disagree

9. It is easy for me to see how the stories of the gospels fit together.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

10. I think I'm equipped enough to just read the Bible and get much out of it.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

11. When I read the Gospels it's easy to see the way the story is written to elicit a certain response from the reader.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

12. The Gospels contain a collection of stories about Jesus. To be honest the stories seem to be randomly arranged with little intentional connection and flow.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

13. The stories of the Gospels are important but the real focus needs to be on what Jesus actually said (like the Sermon on the Mount and the Great Commission).

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

14. Dominant themes stand out to me clearly as I read through a Gospel.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

15. I've read through the Gospel or heard sermons on it so many times that it's hard to find it fresh and exciting anymore.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

16. A Gospel (such as Mark's Gospel) was written to give us an objective look at the life of Jesus.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

17. To look at a Gospel through the lens of literature (characters, plot, setting, etc.) seems somehow wrong or not very spiritual.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree

e. Strongly disagree

18. When I read a gospel story I usually just try to understand the story as a whole. I don't find the details all that enlightening.

a. Strongly agree

b. Agree

c. Neither agree nor disagree

d. Disagree

e. Strongly disagree

19. I have confidence when I read the Bible that I can get new insights that strengthen my faith.

a. Strongly agree

b. Agree

c. Neither agree nor disagree

d. Disagree

e. Strongly disagree

20. I usually find group Bible Study a little boring and predictable.

a. Strongly agree

b. Agree

c. Neither agree nor disagree

d. Disagree

e. Strongly Disagree

# Appendix J

(Handout given the 2nd night to teach the basics of the Narrative Approach)

## The Narrative Approach To The Gospel Of Mark

“**Criticism**” --A general term that refers to \_\_\_\_\_ of the Bible

“**Biblical Criticism**”—A term used loosely to describe all the \_\_\_\_\_ applied to the study of Biblical Texts

Definitions from: [http://www.theopedia.com/Biblical\\_criticism](http://www.theopedia.com/Biblical_criticism)

### **Historical criticism**

Historical Criticism seeks to find the particular historical setting--which includes its \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of composition, the circumstances in which it was produced or written, its \_\_\_\_\_ or authors, \_\_\_\_\_ it came to be written, and the \_\_\_\_\_(s) to which it was addressed.

### **Source criticism**

One aspect of *historical criticism*, Source criticism is particularly concerned with identifying potential sources and \_\_\_\_\_ of the text we have now.

### **Form criticism**

Form Criticism, a hybrid of *historical* and *literary criticism*, is concerned with what \_\_\_\_\_ precursors are discernible behind the text.

### **Tradition criticism**

Tradition Criticism, often seen as part of *Source criticism*, seeks to postulate the \_\_\_\_\_ by which religious tradition was passed down and changed through the time-history of the biblical writings.

### **Redaction criticism**

Redaction Criticism is concerned with when and by what process (of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_) did a particular section or book of the Bible reach its final literary form.

## **Textual criticism, or Lower criticism**

Sometimes *textual criticism* is referred to as "lower criticism," as opposed to other fields of inquiry concerning the text, called "higher criticism."

It is "lower" not because it is less important but because it is the discipline and study of the actual \_\_\_\_\_ of Scripture, as opposed to the study of the sources and literary methods employed by the biblical authors.

The purpose of textual criticism is to establish the \_\_\_\_\_ wording or form of the biblical text as penned in the autographs, so far as this is possible.

## **Literary criticism**

This involves identifying the type and use of the various literary \_\_\_\_\_ such as narrative, poetic, apocalyptic, oratorical, wisdom, epistolary, etc.

It includes evaluating the language of a text, looking at the \_\_\_\_\_ and their various meanings or shades of meaning and the \_\_\_\_\_ of meaning ranging from phrases to sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and sections.

**Narrative Criticism is a form of \_\_\_\_\_ Criticism.**

**Most approaches want to get \_\_\_\_\_ the text (historical, cultural, redaction, etc).**

**The Narrative Approach wants to look at the text \_\_\_\_\_.**

## **What Is Narrative Criticism?**

Narrative Criticism sees the \_\_\_\_\_ text as God has given it to us.

“A number of ingredients make up this new approach to the Bible:

- a concern with the literary genres of the Bible;
- a new willingness to treat biblical texts as FINISHED WHOLES instead of as a patchwork of fragments;
- a focus on the Bible as it NOW STANDS instead of conducting excavations in the redaction (editing) process behind the text;
- an inclination to use literary instead of traditional theological terms to discuss the stories and poems of the Bible.” Ryken p. 11

+**Narrative assumes it knows what the important events are**--the narrator represents conditions for his own benefit and benefit of hearers/readers

+The Gospel is communicated to us IN \_\_\_\_\_!

+The Gospel writers didn't produce volumes of \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ --THEY TOLD STORIES!

We should also hear the caution of Peter Kreeft in **Christianity for the Modern Pagan**:  
“Christ is our God. Experience is not our God. Yet we need to experience Christ, meet Christ, touch Christ, not just believe correct theology about Christ. What we need is not experience without Christ, nor Christ without experience; not psychology, or theology, but lived relationship.” p. 325.

+Through stories Jesus becomes present. Jesus tells his story through evangelists, then to and thru us (Boonbrink, 20-21)

+To judge a story, must FIRST \_\_\_\_\_ to it attentively to understand what the story is saying on its own terms (Rhoads, 147)

+In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century you had a much more \_\_\_\_\_ culture. Some estimate only about 5% were literate. That makes STORY more important. (Rhoads xii)

+The Narrative Approach to the Gospel of Mark is All about THE \_\_\_\_\_ ITSELF—not the sources, the history, the redaction—but the text itself. (Anderson, 54-55)

+It's about getting you and me as readers INTO the text—so that as the story is told and heard WE FEEL EMOTION, WE ARE DRAWN IN, WE RELATE.

+Literature \_\_\_\_\_ human experience instead of \_\_\_\_\_ about it. It is incarnational. It enacts rather than states! Instead of giving us abstract propositions about virtue and vice, the Biblical literature presents stories of good and evil characters in actions—in relation to God and others. (Ryken, 14)

+Narratives are \_\_\_\_\_ because they tell truth by stories (Tambling, 93)

Lit is TRUE--we absorb it, not just intellectually, we grasp it. Literature involves us in what's happening. It invites us to share an experience with characters in the story

+The Narrative Approach teaches that it is impossible to separate WHAT is being said from HOW it is said

+The Narrative Approach doesn't ask—

- “What DOES it mean?”
- Or “What DID it mean?”
- But it asks “HOW does it mean?” (Malbon, 1-2)

+“HOW” has been sacrificed for “WHAT”

+Narrative stories point beyond itself

+It's like difference between a Photo and a Portrait. A photo is virtually objective. It shows every detail as it appears to the eye. A painted portrait is more selective in its details, highlights, etc. It shows what the painter wants the viewer to see. (Ryken, 133)

### **The Author**

+The Narrative Approach believes, at its core, that the authors of the Gospels were \_\_\_\_\_ storytellers who knew what they were doing (Boomershine, 30)

+Textual markers are clues to the reader that the storyteller is up to something—it could be a summary statement or a critical comment on what just happened (Mark 1:14-15; 39, 45b; 3:7-12; 4:33-34; 6:6b; 53-56, 9:30-31, 10:1). (Molony, 47-48)

+The author has told the story in order to \_\_\_\_\_ the reader, to \_\_\_\_\_ the reader as to the Gospel and bring about the rule of God. (Rhoads, 1)

+Suggestions as to Mark's author include John Mark, an interpreter of \_\_\_\_\_ who wrote down the traditions of Jesus from Peter's account. This would place Mark in the late 60's—some 30 years after the death of Jesus and shortly before Peter's execution. (Rhoads, 2)

+Others say it was an \_\_\_\_\_ author and Peter who wrote during or just after the Roman-Judean War of 66-70 A.D. (Rhoads, 2)

### **The Narrator**

+ “Narrator” refers to the \_\_\_\_\_ the story gets told—the voice of the storyteller, point of view,

the overarching beliefs and ethical norms of the narrative, the manner of address and tone of the narrative, as well as the storytelling techniques in the narrative.” –Rhoads p. 6

+ We are usually not aware of the narrator any more than you are of a movie camera while watching a film—because the \_\_\_\_\_ is not the narrator.

+The narrator manifests the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the story (Rhoads, 7)

+Narrators can have different levels of Omniscience:

- Those with “\_\_\_\_\_ omniscience” tell only what can be seen and heard
- Those with “\_\_\_\_\_ omniscience” tells thoughts and feelings but only those in the mind of the protagonist.
- Those with “\_\_\_\_\_ omniscience” tell anything about the story—what’s happening or in the mind of any character any time, any place. (Rhoads, 39-40)

+The Gospel narrator is an unlimited omniscient, omnipresent narrator. He knows the past, present, future, inner thoughts, feelings. (Rhoads, 40)

+Seeing story from narrator’s perspective gives the reader \_\_\_\_\_ over characters (Rhoads, 41)

+The Narrator helps readers feel \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ from certain characters (Rhoads, 43)

+Regarding the \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus, readers NOT at an advantage, learn with disciples (Rhoads, 43)

## **The Setting**

+Def--The setting is the \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, or social circumstances in which the characters act. (Kingsbury, 3)

+Setting may be minimal or highly \_\_\_\_\_ (Kingsbury, 3)

+Setting provides possibilities and limitations (Rhoads, 7)

+Description of meaning of the setting in Mark--Mtn, Dessert, Sea, etc.

- Jesus went “up the mountain” (3:13) to appoint the 12. The author and reader knows the “the mountain” is where God comes to \_\_\_\_\_ leaders of his people.
- The “sea” is where God manifests divine \_\_\_\_\_
- The “wilderness” is where God manifests divine \_\_\_\_\_ in miraculously feeding the people of God. (Anderson, 37)

+Settings are NOT \_\_\_\_\_ BACKDROPS. They generate atmosphere, provide occasion for a conflict, reveal traits in characters, and evoke association of culture of audience (Rhoads, 63)

+Jerusalem vs. Galilee

- The 1<sup>st</sup> half of the story depicts travel throughout Galilee and Gentile territory
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> half focuses on Jerusalem in 3 stages
  - 1<sup>st</sup> the pilgrimage to Jerusalem
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Jesus’ actions and teachings in Jerusalem
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> The story of the crucifixion and the empty tomb (Rhoads, 66)

+In Mark, Jesus changes setting more than \_\_\_\_\_ times (Rhoads, 66-67)

## **The Plot**

+Plot has to do with \_\_\_\_\_: how they are arranged, how they are connected, and what they reveal. Events are actions or happenings that bring about change. (Rhoads, 73)

+\_\_\_\_\_ is key to the Markan plot. (Malbon, 17)

+Story is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the narrative (events, characters, settings). Discourse is the \_\_\_\_\_ (rhetoric, the way the story is told). (Malbon, 6)

+For Mark—\_\_\_\_\_ drives the whole plot from prophetic words to Isaiah to the empty tomb.

+Mark's plot centers around Jesus' struggle to establish the rule of God in the face of obstacles and opposition.

+In Mark's story--Jesus drives the plot in a Kaleidoscopic variety of scenes, events, dialogues, encounters—all revolving around \_\_\_\_\_ (Ryken, 133)

+You \_\_\_\_\_ - that the storyteller has included every detail for a \_\_\_\_\_, and do not hesitate to reflect on how the story is affected by the inclusion of a detail, as compared with the effect if the detail as compared with the effect if the detail were omitted.

+Plot is always about salvation history in a Gospel Narrative

+Natural events are portrayed as supernatural; not so that you that you will take historical reality less seriously but more seriously. (Ryken, 181)

- In most literature what is portrayed as a purely natural occurrence—birth of baby, storm, etc. is portrayed in the Gospel as being rooted in \_\_\_\_\_ REALITY. (Ryken, 180-181)
- There is the continual \_\_\_\_\_ of supernatural into the earthly order. (Kingsbury, 1-2)
  - God's voice sounds
  - Spirit descends
  - Satan tempts
  - Demons shout
  - Jesus overrides nature

+\_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus death NOT from Mark but other NT writings. What is crucial to Mark is that Jesus was crucified and then raised. (Rhoads, 112-113)

### **Point of View**

+Watch a movie --the viewer sees the world through the eyes of the camera, the characters, and the dialogue, and make judgments as the WRITER/Director wants you to see it.

+When you read or hear the Gospel or Mark you form opinions, feelings, make judgments based on what Mark tells you.

+The narrator is not \_\_\_\_\_. We see the story from his \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (Rhoads, 43-44)

+Ask: "who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?" (Genette 10)

## **The Element of Time**

+An event may be narrated AFTER its logical order (analepsis) or BEFORE (prolepsis). (Malbon, 16)

+For Mark, time is marked more by key \_\_\_\_\_ and opportune times than by hours and days. (Rhoads, 65)

+For Mark, " \_\_\_\_\_ " "and" give a tone of urgency

+Tempo refers to the relation between the theoretical time it would take for an event to occur in the story world ( \_\_\_\_\_ -time) and the time it takes to tell about it ( \_\_\_\_\_ -time). (Rhoads, 46-47)

+Tempo changes in Mark, slowing from days to hours as \_\_\_\_\_ narrative nears.

## **Rhetoric**

+Rhetoric is the art of \_\_\_\_\_. By the way the story is told, the implied author persuades the implied reader first to understand, and then to share and extend, the story's levels of meaning." (Malbon, 18)

- Repetition of words, phrases (i.e. "...tax collector and sinners") are \_\_\_\_\_ (Rhoads, 48)
- Foreshowing ( \_\_\_\_\_ future events) "Make you fishers of men" "the one who will betray him"
- Retrospection ( \_\_\_\_\_ earlier events)
- Type scenes----Coming to Jesus, Making a Request, Overcoming an obstacle; touching/speaking, healing, reaction of person/crowd
- \_\_\_\_\_ episodes (Jairus' daughter, woman with blood, Jairus' daughter or Peter in courtyard)
- Series of 3's (Jesus prayers 3 times in garden; Peter denies Jesus 3 times; Pilate asks 3 questions; crucifixion in 3 hour intervals; etc.)

- Questions, Riddles, Quotes, Irony (“King of the Jews” or blind who ‘see’ Jesus and sighted people who don’t) , Parables, Analogies
- In Mark 22 explicit quotations from "the writings" (Rhoads, 50-54)

+Examples of figures of speech i.e. "The Bible tells me how to live" vs. "Thy Word is a lamp to my feet"

## **Major Characters**

+Definition: Characters are the actors in the story--their identity and place in society, their motives and drives, their traits and ways of relating to each other, etc. (Rhoads, 7)

+The traits of the Jesus character--unconventional, strong-willed, independent, etc.

+4 Major characters --Jesus, Religious Authorities, Disciples, Crowd

+No character derives meaning in isolation from other characters

+Mark's characters are mostly \_\_\_\_\_ Followers--a reader will identify with characters who share the reader's situation. (Malbon, 42)

+Readers are invited to admire, judge, identify with characters (Malbon, 9)

+A character can be known by what she says or does; by what other characters say about her and by what they do in relation to, or because of, her (Anderson, 34).

+Flat and Round Characters (Kingsbury, 5)

### ➤ FLAT

- Simple and Consistent
- Some appear once other often
- Actions/words predictable

### ➤ ROUND

- Complex
- Dynamic
- Reveal new aspects of themselves
- Change

Flat and Round NOT the same as \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Flat and Round NOT the same as \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Only \_\_\_\_\_ is ROUND and POSITIVE.

The flatness or roundness of characters DOES affect the readers' response in praise, judgment, or identification (Malbon, 11)

## JESUS

+Jesus always \_\_\_\_\_ character even when not central focus--ALL OTHER CHARACTERS are portrayed in relation to him

+Jesus is protagonist (leading character)--ALWAYS views \_\_\_\_\_ --what's good/bad true/false--the way God does. (Kingsbury, 5)

+Jesus' identity \_\_\_\_\_ apparent to characters in story. (Kingsbury, 5)

+Mark's narrator \_\_\_\_\_ recognition of Jesus by a human character until cross, then by outsiders like women and a Roman Centurion. (Kingsbury, 6)

- Narrator tells us who Jesus is 1:1
- Unclean Spirits 3:11
- Centurion 15:37,39

## AUTHORITIES

+Jesus is the protagonist—the authorities are the antagonists.

+ \_\_\_\_\_ at root of authorities quest—fear of losing their positions with Judean/Roman patrons; fear of losing face with peers; fear of losing power and wealth. (Rhoads, 121)

+Scribes and Conflict accounts:

- Healing and Forgiving the paralytic 2:6
- Eating with tax collectors and sinners 2:16
- Beelzebul 3:22
- Eating with defiled hands 7:1,5

+Mark depicts Jewish leaders, not Jewish people as enemies. (Malbon, 195-196)

+Struggling fallibility is forgiven by Jesus--not arrogance and pride. (Malbon, 200)

+Can we view authorities sympathetically?

- Keep in mind they have no access to the private vision of his baptism, his confrontations with Satan, or his private teachings.
- We can base our evaluation of the authorities in the story only on what they observe of Jesus or apparently hear about him.
- In this light the Markan authorities can be viewed sympathetically in terms of the culture of the time. (Rhoads, 87)

## DISCIPLES

+Though a group --The disciples stand out as single character. (Kingsbury, 9)

+The author's tendency is to identify with the disciples to speak indirectly to the reader through the disciple's story. (Malbon, 43)

+Yet the reader feels a tension between \_\_\_\_\_ with and \_\_\_\_\_ of the disciples. (Malbon, 43)

+As readers our \_\_\_\_\_ is that of the disciples but our \_\_\_\_\_ is that of Jesus. (Malbon, 43)

+Disciples possess conflicting traits—unlike the authorities who \_\_\_\_\_ to understand; the disciples \_\_\_\_\_ to understand but often don't. (Rhoads, 123)

+When disciples \_\_\_\_\_ to Jesus they are successful; when \_\_\_\_\_, they are usually off course. (Malbon, 92)

+Except for Judas, disciples don't greatly influence plot. (Kingsbury, 8)

## CROWD

+Difference between the authorities and the crowd and the disciples.

- Unlike the authorities, the crowd is not the inveterate \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus: Jesus ministers to it and it eagerly searches him out. (Kingsbury, 21)
- Unlike the disciples, the crowd never \_\_\_\_\_ itself to Jesus as followers committed to his cause.
- On the contrary, at Jesus' arrest it unites with the authorities to bring about his death. (Kingsbury, 21)

+Crowds \_\_\_\_\_ to Jesus, DISCIPLES \_\_\_\_\_ with Jesus. (Malbon, 79)

+One expects disciples to be exemplary; their fallibility is \_\_\_\_\_. One expects little of crowd; their fellowship is \_\_\_\_\_. (Malbon, 97)

+Disciples and Crowd are more complementary than competing—together they compose a composite of \_\_\_\_\_ of follower. (Malbon, 70-71)

+Jesus teaches the disciples about his coming \_\_\_\_\_, not the crowd. (Malbon, 85)

+Jesus responds to characters: (Malbon, 151)

- To those who \_\_\_\_\_ from authority Jesus argues from higher one;
- To those who \_\_\_\_\_, Jesus speaks;

➤ To those who \_\_\_\_\_ questions Jesus dialogues

When the disciples respond to Jesus' request for assistance on their own, they are often successful; when the volunteer assistance on their own, they are usually off course. (Malbon, 92)

### **Minor Characters**

+Mark punctuates the greater part of his story with a string of minor characters all of whom do evince great \_\_\_\_\_ in Jesus. (Kingsbury, 25)

+The first half of Mark conflicts with \_\_\_\_\_ forces predominate; the 2<sup>nd</sup> half conflicts with \_\_\_\_\_ predominate. (Rhoads, 84)

+Def of "Minor Character"--do not play ongoing role--make brief cameo then disappear. Not a group character since they have no connection to each other. Brevity of appearance doesn't diminish their \_\_\_\_\_. (Rhoads, 129)

- The Gerasene demoniac,
- The Syrophenician woman
- The Anointing woman
- The leper
- Etc.

+Minor Characters can be anonymous or named. Frequently "\_\_\_\_\_"

+Tend to present \_\_\_\_\_ on the plot rather than contribute to its movement. (Malbon, 192)

+Def--"A minor character is one who lacks a continuing or recurrent presence in the story as narrated. For the most part they appear only once." (Malbon, 192)

+Minor characters are presented as exemplars. \_\_\_\_\_ of attitudes and behaviors appropriate for major characters and implied readers. (Malbon, 198)

+Women characters in Mark at almost exclusively good and positive. The value of a character is not determined by gender or status but by the character's relationship with Jesus (Malbon, 67)

+Minor characters are often portrayed as \_\_\_\_\_; “foils” or contrasts to major characters (Kingsbury, 25)

- Jesus and minor characters for the most part embody what \_\_\_\_\_ wants for people.
- The authorities embody what \_\_\_\_\_ want for themselves and
- The disciples \_\_\_\_\_ between the two (Rhoads, 101)

+Their purpose in Mark 1) extend the continuum of potential responses to Jesus 2) mark where reader is to pause, reflect, connect--that is they often provide the \_\_\_\_\_. (Malbon, 193-194)

+For Mark the minor characters are of MAJOR importance.

### **The Readers**

+The story invites us to be there in all the immediacy of each of the senses. (Boomershine, 51)

+IN the end (of Mark) the role is left to the \_\_\_\_\_! (Rhoads, 134)

+Can the reader see the rule of God breaking in through Jesus’ words and actions? Can the reader trust in the power of God in the present? Can the reader love God with his/her whole life and neighbor as self? This is what Mark is calling the reader to do. (Rhoads, 136)

+Overall, Mark seeks to create readers who will----- \_\_\_\_\_ the Rule of God with faith and \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus. (Rhoads, 138)

+The narrator NEVER lets \_\_\_\_\_ out of his sight, allowing the reader always to be invisibly present with Jesus--hearing his words, seeing his actions. (Rhoads, 138)

+There is always more than one way to tell a story--the story is designed, ordered to get a certain \_\_\_\_\_ from the reader. (Ryken, 63)

+We are not free to assume the text can mean \_\_\_\_\_ just because it can mean \_\_\_\_\_ things. (Malbon, 186)

+The HEART, HEAD and BOWELS of the Reader. We are to \_\_\_\_\_ it in our heads, \_\_\_\_\_ it in our hearts and let the \_\_\_\_\_ happen in our bowels (nice image, huh?) (Boomershine, 44)

+ \_\_\_\_\_ THE STORY--The stories of God, when told faithfully out of a commitment to understand and internalize them deeply, have their own power and life. (Boomershine, 195)

+In the Narrative tradition--Jesus tells his own story first TO and then THROUGH us. (Bommershine, 197)

+Distance between the text and the reader is too obvious to miss--strange language, remote places, unfamiliar names, and ancient times. (Craddock, 49)

- The problem is the reader might NOT see the \_\_\_\_\_ to experience and life now
- These stories are MEANT to connect to our experience—the sights, sounds, tastes, touches, smells are in emerge in us (Boomershine, 51)

+The text has not just a past but a \_\_\_\_\_, and that future is toward the reader/listener. (Craddock, 63)

+Thrust of the text is to learn from failure of disciples--what will you do when confronted with the death of Jesus and the empty tomb. (Rhoads, 129)

### **The Distinctive Features of Mark**

+Unsigned, undated--no attesting to location of writing etc. (Rhoads, 1)

+What type of Literature is Mark--Ancient Bio? Apocalypse? GOSPEL! (Rhoads, 2-3)

+WHOLE CLOTH--consistent view, plot, events, characters. (Rhoads, 3)

+For purposes of this study we will view Mark independent from the other gospels.

+Be careful about your assumptions of Jesus, Disciples, Pharisees

+Mark is a gospel of swift action and high drama. Only twice, in chapters 4 and 5 does Jesus pause to deliver extended discourses.

*The Narrative Approach is NOT the only approach.*

*This is not intended to negate the other approaches.*

*This is ANOTHER approach--and for some of us a FRESH way to Study God's Word.*

*We will TRY to stay within the bounds of the Narrative without trying to get behind the text.*

*I will not be lecturing you except for this first night when I teach you the basics of Narrative Criticism.*

*Together we will be discovering what insights the text wants to reveal from the literature itself.*

*I will be more of a facilitator to keep us on track and moving in the right direction. –*

*It's important that you feel free to share your thoughts as it relates to N.A. Don't dominate, but not be silent either.*

I encourage you to read the next couple of chapters in Mark and come with your own insights to share about what the TEXT itself tells us about Jesus.

# Appendix K

(Reference Questions for a student's private use only to help in preparation with the study of the assigned periscopes for each evening)

## Reading Reference Sheet

### General Questions:

- ❖ Ask "HOW" does the text say, instead of "WHAT" does the text say.
- ❖ Stay with the text itself, instead of trying to get "behind" it.
- ❖ Ask how each pericope fits into the WHOLE of Mark and the sections just before and after.
- ❖ Assume the narrator knows what the important events are and he has chosen to reveal them in a certain order and certain way to the reader.
- ❖ Ask yourself how the STORY impacts you as you hear it/read it.
- ❖ Ask what the story tells us about the Father, the Son, ourselves, our world, etc.

### Questions about the Narrator:

- ❖ Ask how the narrator reveals the beliefs and values of the story in each pericope
- ❖ Look for the narrator's omniscience by what is written
- ❖ What does the narrator tell the reader that the characters at the time didn't know?
- ❖ In each story who does the narrator want you to feel close to, to feel distant from, to identify with?

### Questions about the Setting:

- ❖ How important is the setting in this pericope?
- ❖ Does the setting affect the emotional impact of the encounter?
- ❖ Is the mention of the setting a communication to the reader by the narrator?

### **Questions about the Plot:**

- ❖ Around whom does the plot center?
- ❖ Is there conflict to notice in this pericope?
- ❖ Why do you think this event was included?
- ❖ Are there subtle details included that are likely often missed?

### **Questions about the Point of View:**

- ❖ What is the "camera angle" given to us by the gospel writer? Why is that significant?
- ❖ What other camera angles were available? How would another "angle" have changed the meaning of the story?
- ❖ What does the author want you to think, feel, see, and conclude based on this point of view?

### **Questions about The Element of Time:**

- ❖ What comes right before/after this pericope? Is that significant in any way to you?
- ❖ How fast is the narrative moving? Is the narrator attempting to speed up (summarized events) or slow down (analyze events)?
- ❖ If events are "slowing down" ....why? What does the narrator want us to notice?
- ❖ If events are "speeding up" ....why? What general conclusion does the narrator want us to make?

### **Questions about Rhetoric:**

- ❖ What "means of persuasion" does the narrator use here?
- ❖ Any repetition of words or phrases?
- ❖ Foreshadowing? (Anticipating future events) Why?
- ❖ Recollection? (Looking back on past events) Why?
- ❖ Any sandwiched events?
- ❖ Figures of Speech?

- ❖ Questions? Riddles? Quotes? Irony? Parables?

### **Questions about the Major Characters:**

- ❖ Who are the major and minor characters in this pericope?
- ❖ Who are you drawn to and why? Who are you put off by? Why?
- ❖ Are the characters "Flat" or "Round"
- ❖ How are the 4 Major Characters (Jesus, Religious Authorities, Disciples, Crowd) interacting here?
- ❖ What is Jesus teaching us about God, the Kingdom, etc.?
- ❖ What is motivating the antagonism of the authorities? Fear? Power? Other?
- ❖ How is the author speaking to the reader through the disciples' story?
- ❖ How do the disciples in the text parallel disciples in every age?
- ❖ How does the "crowd" function in the story plot?

### **Questions about the Minor Characters:**

- ❖ Are there any "minor" characters in the pericope?
- ❖ How is the minor character acting as an exemplar?

### **Questions about The Narrative Approach:**

- ❖ Has looking at the text through the "narrative lens" helped you see it in a new light?
- ❖ Have you noticed any insights that you gained that might have been missed without this approach?

# Appendix L

(Sample Pericope Worksheet where participants could write in their own comments to share with the group)

**What has God revealed to us by the various literary features in the Mark narrative?**

**1:1-8 John The Baptist Prepares the Way**

**1:9-11 The Baptism of Jesus**

**1:12-13 The Temptation of Jesus**

**1:14-15 Jesus begins His Ministry**

**1:16-20 Jesus Calls the First Disciples**

**1:21-28 Jesus Heals a Man with an Unclean Spirit**

**1:29-34 Jesus Heals Many**

**1:35-39 Jesus Preaches in Galilee**

**1:40-45 Jesus Cleanses a Leper**

**2:1-12 Jesus Heals a Paralytic**

**2:13-17 Jesus Calls Levi**

**2:18-22 A Question About Fasting**

**2:23-27 Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath**

# Appendix M

(The facilitator's introductory comments on the final night—leading into the Long Interview)

## **Introduction to Final Focus Group Discussion**

First let me thank you all so, so much for the investment of your time in this D-Min Focus group. I appreciate, beyond words, the dedication, preparation and insights you've given to our time together these past dozen Sunday nights.

Our goal tonight is to simply talk openly about what we've experienced together. There are no right or wrong answers. I am not going to be graded on you giving the quote unquote correct response.

The desire is to honestly share what it was like to look at the Gospel of Mark through the lens of Narrative Criticism in our group. We want to hear from you your honest response to this adventure.

We are taping this tonight so I can use it in my dissertation. When it is transcribed you will be given a participant number so that you can remain anonymous in the printed material.

My role will be to keep us on topic. Whatever you want to share, as it regards our journey through Mark together using the Narrative Approach I want to hear. So thank you in advance for your candid responses.

Also if after this session you want to send any other comments or feedback feel free to email me at your convenience. You all know how to find me.

So let's begin....

# Appendix N

(The open-ended discussion starters for the Long Interview Session)

## **The Narrative Approach To The Gospel Of Mark**

Emmanuel Christian Seminary  
D-Min Project by: Timothy Knight  
Post-Group Interview

1. After looking at the Gospel of Mark through the narrative lens, discuss your observations of the DVD oral presentation the 2<sup>nd</sup> time you watched it.
2. Will you talk about how the narrative study of Mark has (or will) influence your future study of the Gospels?
3. What aspects of this experience of studying Mark in this manner were the most meaningful to you?
4. Talk about what it was like studying the Bible with this approach in a group as compared to what it would have been like alone.
5. Talk about ways in which the narrative approach has affected the way you view the Gospel writings as a whole (their purpose, composition, literary nature, etc.)
6. Are there ways this study has impacted your spiritual life, your relationship with God or His Word?

7. Are there elements of understanding the text that are particularly aided by this approach? Are there elements of understanding that are hindered by this approach?
  
8. Is there anything else that stands out for you in this experience that you'd like to share?

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