

How God Made Me a Bible Reader

Just this once, there is no Bible text. I will give you a part of my testimony. I want to tell you how God made me a Bible reader. I'm telling you now because this month, March 2026, is an anniversary. A turning point happened 50 years ago this month. This winter I turned 71, and I will tell you what began the winter I turned 21.

There's nothing special about my testimony. We all have stories of how the Lord made us what he wanted us to be. This happens to be my story. I think it will explain how I got to be the way I am, and why I teach as I do. I would like you to know these things about me. I would like to be known.

One more thing. This is not a sermon on why you should all read your Bibles more. I have never preached that you should read your Bibles more, and I'm not doing that today. This is about something God did in my life. That's it.

I will cover four episodes in my life. None of these seemed that big at the time. Only looking back can I see how they changed me. They all shaped me more than I thought at the time.

1 Come Teach the Bible for a Year

In high school, I loved metal work, the metals shop courses. And I loved physics. So, based on what guidance counsellors told us, I was suitable to pursue engineering after high school. I did not have a particular energy for that, but you have to do something, and engineering made sense.

But I wanted a better foundation for my Christian faith, so I decided to go to Bible School for one year first. I enjoyed my first year of Bible school a lot, and I wanted another year. The second year was also good, and after that I thought, "If I come one more year, I've completed the program." I like to finish what I start, so I came back for my third year and graduated.

On graduation week, I was completely lost about what to do next. Engineering had faded a bit each year, and it seemed a long way away. Also, I had an unhappy suspicion that the Lord wanted me in what we called "full time ministry." I feared that the Lord wanted me to be a pastor or a missionary or something like that. I wondered if he was nudging me in that direction.

At the time, I could not imagine a drearier life. I could not imagine a less satisfying life. I don't know where I got that, but it ran pretty deep. If the Lord wanted me in that, then I'd see what I could do. But it was just a suspicion. So at graduation I was lost.

Gene Parkins came to our graduation. He was director of a small Bible school and high school for first nations students. This school was perhaps 60 kilometers from my home. Mr. Parkins had been in our church, and I had been out to the school. He and his family had been in our home.

Gene Parkins said to me, “Ed, I want you to come and teach Bible at our school for one year.” I said, “I just graduated. I’m not ready to teach!” Gene Parkins said, “Teach at the level you can teach. Teach what you can teach. You can do it, Ed.”

One year. In those days, short term missions meant one year or two years. There was no such thing as two-week short-term missions. I said “yes” to Gene Parkins, for two reasons. One, this was right in front of me and to me there was nothing else at all. Two, I said to myself, “I’ll find out if serving the Lord this way is as miserable as I think it is. I can stand it for a year. I need to find out.” So I said yes.

The main part of my job was to teach the Bible to eight or nine Bible school students for 75 minutes every morning, Monday to Friday. From September to Christmas I was to teach Matthew, and from January to May I was to teach Romans.

I had a small desk in my bedroom. For five evenings a week, I would go to that desk about 7:30, and I would open my Bible, and start reading the verses I needed to cover the next morning. I figured out how much of Matthew I needed to cover every week to get through it, about how much to cover in class, and I would see what I could put together.

I had no resources. I had taken a good course in Bible school on Matthew, and another on Romans. But I had made no notes, it never crossed my mind to make notes, and I remembered little. It had never crossed my mind, even remotely, to be a Bible teacher. I had one big book called “Notes on the New Testament,” and had a study Bible. That’s it. I remember feeling desperate sometimes, trying to figure out what to tell the students about these verses. I read those verses over so many times.

This school was remote. There was no electricity out there. The school had a big diesel generator that they started up at 7 in the morning, and shut down at 11 in the evening. At ten minutes before 11 they would flick the lights, so that we knew that power was going off in ten minutes.

My parents had a 2 mantle coleman white gas lantern. It stood on my desk. When they flicked the lights, I would pump it up and light it up so I could keep working when the electricity was off. I was never finished at 11. I think I usually worked to around 12:30, until I thought I was ready or until I just could not stay awake any longer. My bed was 2 meters away. I would turn off the lantern and crawl into bed and sleep. I still have that lantern in our garage.

Breakfast was at 8, and my class began every day at 9. I taught from 9 to 10:15. Then we had chapel, and then I was done. And I was really done. Brain dead. I had some light duties during the day, but it took until after supper for me to recover from the preparation and the class.

I don’t remember strong feelings at the time about whether I liked this or not. It was just what I was doing. I was also dorm parent for 6 or 8 first nations high school boys. That was a hoot. They were like younger brothers. By 7:30 in the evening, I would go to my desk and start again.

This carried on. After Christmas, in February and March, I began to think about what I would do next year. This was a one-year position. What was I going to do next year? I started to wonder about that.

Some time that March, March of '76, I said to myself, "This is the most satisfying thing I have ever done." I talk to myself all the time, always have. Once in a while I surprise myself. Did I just say that? Is that really what I think? I was surprised to hear myself say, "this is the most satisfying thing I have ever done." But I had said it. I thought about that, and I knew it was true.

This basic rhythm, first climb into a part of Scripture, try to enter the writer's mind, and then tell God's people what I saw, was the thing for me. What I said to myself was bigger than I realized. All I was wanted was to sort out next year. If this was satisfying, then I would go back to school to learn more about the Bible. I just wanted to sort out next year. But fifty years later, that is still true. It was a big change in life direction. But I needed to learn more.

2 The Bible Corrects the Preachers

In fall I enrolled at what was then Winnipeg Bible Collete. It is now Providence College. I was in the college there for two years. While I was there, I had a couple of Bible teachers who would say to the class, "the preachers say this, but the Bible doesn't say this. The Bible says that."

When the teacher said, "the preachers say this," the teacher was right. I had heard preachers say this. And then the teacher would take us through a paragraph of Scripture, and show us that the Bible did not agree with the preachers. The Bible was saying something else.

Wow, I thought, the Bible could correct the preachers! If we read Scripture thoughtfully, we could see that it was saying something different. Until then, for me the preachers had been the authoritative voice of what the Bible was saying. They always quoted some Scripture, so what they said was what that Scripture said. Now I found out that was not the whole story.

I was excited. I was pumped. I liked that. Keep in mind that I was also young and naïve and arrogant. All of those, for sure. You can't rush growing up. Most of the time the preachers are right on. But that eye-opening moment has stayed with me. The Bible can correct the preachers.

What I'm really talking about here is how important that seemed to me at the time. It moved me. Although I was young and naïve and arrogant, I became resolved to know what the Bible said and not just repeat what I heard others say. Other things as well moved me at the time, but they faded, and this did not.

3 Why Didn't I See That? I Need Others

After college I went straight into seminary to take a masters degree. In a masters program you learn how to do research. That meant, when I was studying one part of the Bible, I learned how to find scholars who had read that part of the Bible carefully, and had written down what they learned. I learned how to find those books and to find out what they said.

In those days, when a church in this area needed someone to preach for one Sunday, they would phone the seminary secretary, and she would put a notice on the seminary student bulletin board. The note said this church would like a student to come and preach on this particular Sunday. If a student can do this, please call the following phone number.

I often did that when I was a seminary student. I saw the note and called that church number and went and spoke there on that Sunday. For my message, I would pick some part of Scripture that I knew and understand and enjoyed, and I would preach on that. I picked some Scripture where I thought I was already half way prepared.

But I was a masters student now, so I would read a couple of commentaries on that Scripture. By then I knew which were the reliable commentaries. And when I read the commentary, I found out that my understanding of that Scripture was sometimes not very good, because I had not read the Bible carefully. I thought I knew what it said, but I had not actually read that Scripture patiently, paying attention to everything it said.

This happened several times. I really disliked that. I scolded myself. Why had I not read this Scripture more carefully? Why had I not seen that? The commentary noticed things that I had not seen, even though I had read it over. I wanted that to stop. It still happens sometimes, and I still dislike it, though I am not so surprised anymore.

I learned two things from this. One, "Edmund, read it carefully. Read it so no one can say, 'why did you not notice this?'" Make sure I know what it actually says. I disciplined myself to read carefully, though I still miss things.

The other thing I learned was, "I need help." I cannot do this by myself. God's people have been reading the Bible carefully and writing about it for 1900 years. I need them. If I am going to do this well, I need to learn from the important Bible readers in the past. This third episode taught me that I was missing things in the Bible, and that I needed others.

4 I Feel Like I Know You

I'm telling you four episodes in my young life that God used to make me a Bible reader. Three down, here is the fourth. My seminary education lasted two years. My particular masters degree required that I write a thesis on a part of the Bible. A thesis is a long paper, about a hundred pages like the ones I'm holding here. My thesis was on a section of Mark 13.

I thought that just studying one part of Mark did not make sense. If I was going to study a part of Mark 13, I need to know the whole Gospel. So in September of my second year of seminary, I decided that I would read through the entire Gospel of Mark three times every week. Monday and Wednesday and Friday mornings I had no classes. I was only taking a couple of courses because I was mostly working on my long paper.

So on those three days I would have breakfast at about 8 and then at around 9 I would go to the library with my Bible and read through the Gospel of Mark. It took me about an hour and a half to read through Mark. I did not read devotionally, I did not read prayerfully. I did not read to become a better person. I read curiously. I wanted to know what this book was about. When I had finished reading, I closed my Bible and did the next thing.

I had a teacher who told us that we were in seminary to learn to love God with our minds. When Moses gave the great command, he said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Heart and soul and might. When Jesus gave the great command, he added "mind." "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your might." "Keep loving God with your heart," this teacher told us, "but you're in seminary to love God with your mind."

I was young and enthusiastic and I liked this. My own heart was fickle, and other people's hearts took them all over the place, so the discipline of loving God with my mind appealed to me. So I read Mark three times a week. I did not miss many. It was never drudgery. It was almost restful. I don't ever remember having to push myself, or missing because I did not feel like it that day.

A semester goes from September to December. It normally has 12 weeks. If I read three times a week I would have read Mark 36 times in 12 weeks. I know I missed a few because I was sick, or because I was gone for a long weekend. I did not count or keep track, but I'm sure I read through Mark 30 times.

It was my habit in those days to go for a walk in the evening. I would leave the library about 9:30 and walk onto the Otterburne road. I would go west and around the corner to the south, walking across the bridge into town. This was not exercise. I did that in the morning. This was to think about the day, to talk to myself and to pray. Those things happen best for me if I can walk outside and speak out loud. Marilyn would be happy to tell you stories about me talking to myself.

One evening in the second half of that semester, I was walking and thinking and praying, I heard myself say to the Lord: "Jesus, you used to be a theological 'it', but now I feel like I know you." I said this out loud. I immediately thought to myself, "did I just say that? Is that true?" I was totally surprised to hear that come out of my mouth. Where did that come from? I didn't know that was going on in my head. But thought about it as I walked, and it was true.

“You used to be a theological it.” I had known that Jesus was the Christ, he was the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, he was the way and the truth and the life, he was our great high priest, he was the Son of God, he was the Good Shepherd, and all those things.

But reading Mark repeatedly was like getting in a time machine and travelling back to first century Palestine, and spending two or three weeks following behind Jesus every day and every night. I had watched everything he did and I had heard everything he said. Mark is an earthy picture of both Jesus and his disciples. I had spent two weeks beside a man, Jesus of Nazareth.

He got up early to pray, he walked by the sea, he called people to follow, he taught in the synagogue, he taught on the shore and in a boat beside the shore. He ate with sinners and he ate with Pharisees. He cast out demons and healed many people and raised a girl from the dead. He was frustrated with his disciples and angry with his enemies and often gentle with them.

He predicted his death again and again, and he begged his Father for help. He had a hard call on his life, and he gave a hard call to his followers. There was a real man behind all that, and God had given me a clear sense that I had seen and watched and listened to that man. That’s what God gave me. And now that Man was seated at the right hand of God. I was praying to him, and at that moment I looked at that Man and said, “I know you! You’re not just those wonderful things put together. I know you.”

Like the other three episodes, I did not realize at the time how important this was, or how long it would shape me. At the time, what changed mostly was my praying. I prayed to that Man I had met in Mark, who was now seated at the right hand of God.

That story is why Mark is my first love among books of the Bible. I have called this, *How God made me a Bible reader*. These four stages all still shape me. But I could also call this, “*How God showed me Jesus*.” I have never had a vision of Jesus, or seen Jesus in a dream. But I did receive something like that.

I was not asking for this, it never crossed my mind. I just read Mark to get a better foundation for my thesis. That’s all I wanted. I got much more than that. And that’s another part God shaping me. Reading the Bible can work in mysterious ways.

So, people, that’s how I got to be like this. These four episodes all happened between 20 and 25 years of age, and they just never let go of me. If we follow Jesus, he makes us what we should be. This is how he shaped me, and you all have stories of how he has shaped you. Amen.

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for this. In those years I often thought you were not leading or guiding me at all. I was disappointed in you. But now I see your hand clearly. Thank you.

BENEDICTION: May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. Go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.