

THE UNKNOWN GOD MADE KNOWN: REFLECTIONS ON MINISTERING TO THE
BIBLICALLY ILLITERATE FROM PAUL'S MINISTRY IN ATHENS

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to make pastors and their congregations aware of the problem of biblical illiteracy and what they can do in order to better reach out to such people. It will begin with a review of why evangelism and Bible study are so important, not just for personal growth in knowledge and faith, but also for growth in the desire to share the good news of Jesus, the central message of Scripture, with others.

The paper will next attempt to give a comprehensive definition of biblical illiteracy, based on the information garnered from multiple literature sources. It will then proceed to give the reader a brief commentary on Paul's ministry in the city of Athens in Acts 17 as a guide for how to minister to the biblically illiterate. Finally, it will give tips on how to minister to them on three different levels: pre-evangelism (interacting with the community and vice-versa), evangelism (God has served us by freely giving us forgiveness and life), and post-evangelism (how to minister to them from the pulpit and the classroom).

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Why do we evangelize? Because it is the work and command of our God.

Imagine what it must have felt like to be *them*. Feel the overwhelming fear and guilt as you run and hide in shame, knowing that *he* is coming. Drink in the horror of having to confront the one who has been so good to you and has showered you with abundant blessings, only to have utterly failed by disobeying a direct command he gave to you. Contemplate the shame of having let him down and what he is going to do when he finds you and demands an accounting of what has just transpired. You try to run away. You try to hide from him and hope he just “goes away.” But you know that it will be in vain, for eventually, you will have to stand before him and give an account of your actions.

Adam and Eve had disobeyed God’s command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There was simply no getting around the fact that the deed had been done and there was no changing it. By their direct disobedience to God’s command, sin found its way into the world, thereby plaguing both themselves and all of their future descendants with its cataclysmic consequences. One consequence was that feelings of peace and contentment were now replaced by feelings of fear and guilt, knowing that God’s sentences for sin would now be carried out against them, and they would not be pleasant. They would have to endure new hardships and struggles such as the pain of childbirth and the misery of hard and sometimes fruitless labor. But worst of all, they would have to face God’s most dreadful sentence for eating from the tree which they were commanded not to eat. Because of their act of rebellion against the holy God, they would one day surely die.

Those consequences of sin continue on to the present day. They can be readily seen in daily experiences, or when someone sits down to watch the television or when he picks up a newspaper. It can also be heard about from friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Sooner or later, there will be news of something very tragic or discouraging. How often is it that the news will eventually speak of someone who has been in a horrible accident, or of the sad downfall of one who must leave their profession in disgrace as they has been outed for being involved in some sort of reprehensible scandal? Other times it can very well be the news that a person held in high esteem or a dear loved one has passed away, either due to old age or after a terrible battle with a long-term illness or condition. Whatever the case may be, no matter who it may happen to, be it an acquaintance, a friend, a family member, or even some random stranger who is not known personally, these painful consequences of disasters (both natural and man-made), moral failures,

and even death continue to torment mankind to this very day. They continue to stand as reminders of what the fall into sin has wrought upon creation and upon every single human being.

But in great mercy, the Lord did not leave mankind to wallow in their despair and perish in their sinfulness. Going back to that dismal garden scene, the words he spoke that day also carried with them a message which Adam and Eve did not expect to hear. They heard words which were not intended to relate fear or despair, but rather hope. The Lord himself spoke these words, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15).¹ In unfathomable love, the Lord gave what could be considered the first evangelism speech in history that day by communicating to his fallen creatures good news. This message was meant to inspire them and they in turn could share it with their descendants after them. Even in the midst of the coming toils and sorrows against which they and their children would battle, the fallen human race could still draw comfort from these words of hope and put their trust in God that he would provide them with their greatest need of all. They would be given salvation from sin and death which had now corrupted them and their world! In his great wisdom, God promised to bring about this salvation through a special descendant of the woman, a descendant who would crush the Devil and his stranglehold on fallen mankind.

So it was throughout the course of history the Lord saw to it that this good news of a Savior from sin was revealed to Adam and Eve’s descendants, expounded on in further detail, preserved against every threat against it, and finally fulfilled when the time was just right. Since there was no completed Bible like what is present today back in the early days of the Old Testament, it was necessary for God to reveal his Word to people in different ways. Sometimes, it was done by means of direct revelation, such as his conversations with Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and others. Other times, God spoke to his people by means of the prophets such as Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others.

But even during the Old Testament, it was also a part of God’s plan to have his revealed Word recorded in writing. Eventually, the time came when God began to have his Word put down in written form, beginning with the first five books written by Moses, and continuing throughout the coming centuries, such as David writing many of the Psalms and the prophets

¹ All Scripture references are taken from the NIV 1984 version.

who wrote down their prophecies. In this way the people of God could always have a permanent record of his words and actions throughout the ages. In times of turmoil and even upheaval (and there would be plenty of them!), the people could look to these writings and be reminded of God's anger toward sin but especially his desire to save his people. They could read and reflect on those amazing stories of forgiveness and deliverance from danger such as God making the promise of the Savior to Adam and Eve, the saving of Noah and his family from the flood, God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and God preserving the Israelites during all their travels in the wilderness. Through reflection on this written Word, the people could then draw comfort and hope in their times of sorrow and despair. Their trust in God would grow and flourish, much like the tree when planted by streams of water (Psalm 1:3) and as a result, they would learn to give thanks and praise to God for his awesome acts of providence and salvation (cf. Psalms 119 and 136 for examples of such meditation and thanksgiving).

As the Word of God was made known to mankind over the centuries through direct revelation and writing, God also continued to elaborate on that promise which he originally made back in the garden of Eden. He described the manner and circumstances of this special Savior's life and death and the universal implications they would carry. When God told Abraham to go to the land of Canaan, he motivated him with the promise that through his seed all nations on earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). When God placed King David on the throne of Israel, he also promised to establish the kingdom of his unique descendant for all time (2 Samuel 7). The prophet Micah spoke of the location of the Savior's birth in the small town of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The prophet Isaiah prophesied about the circumstances of this Savior who would come into the world. He spoke first of the special manner of his birth (Isaiah 7:14), the good news he would proclaim to people (Isaiah 61:1-2), and the miracles he would perform for the sick and injured (Isaiah 53:4 as quoted by Matthew in the New Testament). The same prophet would also speak about the Savior's immense humiliation and brutal death in order to bring about healing for sinful men and peace with God (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). But though this Savior would die, King David looked ahead to his bodily resurrection from the dead when he wrote in the Psalms, "Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay" (Psalm 16:10).

But it would be some time before this promise of salvation would come to pass. In order for it to be fulfilled, it was necessary for God to protect the family line through which that Savior

would come. There were definitely many times throughout the course of history where the family line (and therefore, the promise itself) would have been threatened, whether by outside forces or even by the wickedness of the family line itself. But through it all, God kept those people and the promise safe and made sure they both endured throughout the ages. To that end, he was always there to protect his people when dangers rose up against them. He rescued Noah and his family when the floodwaters came upon the earth (Genesis 6-9). When the Israelites were slaves in Egypt and cried out for a deliverer, he raised up Moses to lead them out to settle them in the land of Canaan (Exodus 14:5-31). Years later, when the Israelites faced oppression from neighboring countries, God raised up judges and kings in order to fend off these threats and deliver them (Judges 2:16, 1 Samuel 11:1-14). Even when they people sinned so greatly that they were carried off into exile (2 Kings 17, Jeremiah 52), the Lord did not forsake his people forever, for the promise of the Savior still had to be fulfilled. As a result, God continued to be with his faithful remnant and rescue them from all their foes during their years in captivity (Esther 3-8, Daniel 1-6) and finally brought them safely back to their homeland (Ezra 1:1-4). Thus, the promise of the Savior did not fade away into obscurity, but was still able to come to pass at just the right time.

Eventually, the time did come for that promise made all the way back in the garden of Eden to be fulfilled. When circumstances were just right, a virgin mother did indeed give birth to a baby boy named Jesus (Luke 2:1-8). The boy grew up in wisdom and stature, and in favor before both God and men (Luke 2:52). As foretold, he would go on to share many wonderful teachings and parables with the people and perform many miracles with filled the people with awe and amazement. While the people marveled at his words and actions, Jesus was ever mindful of his ultimate goal while on earth. It was not merely to be a great moral teacher, nor was it to become an earthly king that many of the people expected him to be. From the start, his mission was always clear: He himself declared that he did not come to be served like an earthly king, but instead, to serve humanity. He would do so by giving up his very life in order to ransom them from the captivity of sin and death (Mark 10:45).

Thus, when the time came for Jesus to lay down his life, he was not hesitant for even a moment (Luke 9:51), but willingly walked down the road which led to the rugged cross at Calvary. In the end, just as was prophesied would happen centuries beforehand, he was betrayed by one his own, delivered into the hands of the Roman authorities, and brutally executed by

means of crucifixion. But three days later, another prophecy from the Scriptures was fulfilled. He arose from the grave, conquering the power of death and making a number of appearances to his disciples, who would become eyewitnesses of everything they had seen and heard (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20-21).

All of this happened, certainly not by any random chance or human plotting, but only according to the will and plan of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Jesus himself knew this, telling the people on one occasion, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39). After he rose, he was careful to point his disciples back to the Scriptures by reminding them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44).

Jesus had a mission and he carried it out. Through his death on the cross, he accomplished what no other person possibly could. He fulfilled the promise given to Adam and Eve to free mankind from the grasp of sin and Satan’s control and reconcile mankind to God. Such wonderful news could not go on unheard, nor would Jesus allow its sweet message to disappear from the earth. So before ascending into heaven, he gave his disciples the great commands to “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15), and “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). Since the good news of Jesus and his work of salvation is the central message of all Scripture, this means that the disciples’ mission could be boiled down to one simple phrase: “Proclaim Jesus and his gift of salvation to everyone.”

So the disciples went forth, sharing Jesus with Jews and Gentiles alike. Some of them, inspired by Holy Spirit, would write a number of letters of instruction and encouragement to those who came to faith, both Jews and Gentiles. In these letters, they were careful to frequently express the fact that Jesus’ work of salvation extended not just to a few, but to the many, even to them! Paul, for example, rejoices in this wonderful truth (Romans 1:16-17) and encourages his listeners to do the same. While he proclaims that all have fallen short of the glory which God demands, he goes on in that same sentence, “and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). Another of those disciples, the apostle

John, also speaks of free and universal atonement when he says “He [Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

In this way, the mission of the church was given and established: God, moved by love for every sinner, has freely served sinful mankind. He has done so by promising forgiveness of sins and eternal life, protecting that promise throughout the course of history, and has at last, brought it to completion through Jesus (John 19:30). Therefore, the remaining days of this world’s history are not focused on the power, achievements, or wisdom of man, but rather on God and his great work to lead people to the knowledge of salvation in Christ and gather them safely to his fold. Jesus’ work of salvation was meant for all, so all must hear about this amazing story. It is to be withheld from no one! This will remain the church’s mission until the end of time, and it is a mission which must not be taken lightly, for Jesus’ work to acquire forgiveness of sins and eternal life did not come cheaply. Indeed, he desires that none be lost, but everyone to come to repentance and take part in the salvation he has won (2 Peter 3:9). But the time to do so is short, as soon the “day of the Lord”, that is Judgment day, is approaching and will come “like a thief” (2 Peter 3:10).

The days are not long before Christ returns to this world (Revelation 22:12). When it finally does happen, everyone will be called to stand before God and give an account of their actions. Those who have trusted in Christ for their salvation will have eternal life as their inheritance. Those who have not trusted in Christ will have everlasting punishment in hell as their reward (Matthew 25:31-46). With that in mind, Christian evangelists clearly demonstrate an urgency to “get the message out” as quickly and efficiently as possible. Paul himself expresses concern for unevangelized people everywhere when he writes, “How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14). Bottom line: God has made it abundantly clear that universal redemption from sin and death demands universal evangelism.

Why do we evangelize? Because it is a joy to bring good news to people!

In his book, *Friendship Evangelism: The Caring Way To Share Your Faith*, author Arthur McPhee tells the story of a rather troubling health condition which almost forced him into early retirement from the pastoral ministry. It started out during a flight to a preaching mission with

what was considered to be an oddity in his hearing. Whenever he spoke, it sounded like he was “speaking into a barrel” and it seemed to him like he needed to speak more softly. His breathing and heartbeat were also a lot more noticeable than usual. At first, he didn’t pay it too much mind, assuming that it was just a cold symptom and eventually, the problem would just take care of itself. However days, weeks, even months passed, and the problem continued to persist. No matter what he tried, the abnormal hearing just wouldn’t go away. Eventually, the problem became so serious that he would actually have to argue himself out of not going into the pulpit on Sundays!

He finally went to a doctor to try and figure out what was wrong and, more importantly, if the problem could be fixed. At this point, the doctors had good news and bad news for him. The good news was that they knew what the problem was. It turned out that one of McPhee’s ears had an odd condition where an Eustachian tube stayed abnormally open. The bad news however, was that there was no known cure for the problem. Much to his dismay, the doctors informed McPhee that he was just going to have to learn to live with this unusual hearing ailment. No doubt that to McPhee, these must have been devastating words. There was a problem, but there was nothing he or anyone else could do in order to fix it. Naturally, this put him in a state of depression for some time.

But thankfully, McPhee wouldn’t have to live with this condition for the rest of his life. Several months after speaking with his doctors, there came a report from some medical experts in Japan who eagerly declared that they had found a cure to this particular problem. They had thoroughly tested their cure multiple times on multiple subjects and found it to be 100% effective. To most people, news like this wouldn’t have seemed like something that was very noteworthy at all. The average person might hear about it and think, “Well, that’s all well and good, but I don’t have any problem with my ears. So why should I care so much about it?” But to someone like McPhee, who was suffering terribly from his ear affliction, such news was incredibly exciting. Why? Because it answered a great need he had! This news of an effective “ear cure” told McPhee that he need no longer live with his nearly intolerable form of hearing. There was a way to be free of it once and for all.²

² McPhee, Arthur G, *Friendship Evangelism: The Caring Way To Share Your Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 18-19.

This story is used as an example to illustrate an important point about good news. In what can seem like an endless parade of drudgery, disappointment, and loss throughout life, people have a longing to hear good news which gives relief from the different kinds of troubles they face. They have a need to hear about something which gives them confidence for the future and makes life worth living and work worth doing. But for news to truly be “good”, it needs to speak to a specific need or problem with which a specific person have. Otherwise, it really isn’t that “good” at all.

In the same way, the Christian, when brought to faith through the Word, is overjoyed to hear the good news that a Savior from sin has come and has won forgiveness and eternal life. He is overjoyed because this message answers needs which not only he but all people have. In the midst of the pain, failure, guilt, and loneliness life inflicts upon people, the Savior himself has brought relief from them all and has filled the Christian’s heart with happiness and hope for the future. Going back to McPhee’s book on evangelism, he highlights several key needs which are fulfilled by Jesus’ life and death:

Believers have freedom from their guilt. People will inevitably fall into sin. There is no escaping that fact. With sin comes bitter guilt which does not go away, but continues to torture consciences with the fact that the person cannot make it disappear and he stands a condemned sinner before God. But with Jesus’ triumph on the cross, sinners are given complete assurance that their guilt has been removed forever. No more do people have to be weighed down by consciences burdened with the weight of wrongdoing and failure. In Jesus, all their sins are completely covered over and they no longer stand condemned in the eyes of God.

Believers have freedom from their loneliness. As men and women who struggle to make their way in the world and especially in a country which prides itself on rugged individualism, believers know that they are never truly alone in this life. They have the comfort of knowing that they have a God who promises to never leave them nor forsake them (Hebrews 13:5). Furthermore, they have the assurance of knowing that they share a common faith and fellowship with other believers, who are comforted with the same knowledge of salvation!

Believers can have the certainty of knowing that eternal life is theirs, free of charge. No more do believers have to live with feelings of inadequacy or uncertainty, wondering if they have done enough to earn God’s favor or even despairing because they know they can’t possibly earn it. Instead, they have the peace and security of knowing that they are truly precious in their

Savior's eyes, since he was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for them. As a result, eternal life is their sure possession, and no force in heaven or on earth can possibly snatch it away from them (Romans 8:38-39).³

With such wonderful news having been revealed, is it any wonder that Jesus commands his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations? The disciples had been filled with peace and joy at the triumph of their Savior from sin and death, and with the Holy Spirit empowering them at Pentecost (Acts 2), they were more than eager to share the message of the triumphant Savior with everyone they could, beginning with those gathered at Jerusalem and continuing to the ends of the known world. That same mission and the desire to carry it out continue right up to the present time, as Christians today have the same responsibility and privilege of sharing the best news of all with people everywhere.

During his vicar year, the author of this paper had the opportunity to work with God's people in the mid-Michigan area. One of his fondest memories of the year was working with the shut-ins and those who were hospitalized. Sometimes, those who were visited relayed to this young man the troubles and problems they were going through, such as physical pain or loneliness, and that they really appreciated visits from their called workers. It especially made an impact on the author when he shared the message of the gospel in Word and Sacrament with these people that their countenance significantly changed after they had received these means of grace. Smiles appeared on their faces, and they always expressed their sincere gratitude that someone could bring the Word of God to them and comfort them with the hope of the gospel. While the task of telling others about the promised Savior is a great and urgent responsibility, it is also the most exciting and enjoyable work that a person could ever have the privilege to undertake.

Where is the source of this good news and motivation? *Sola Scriptura!*

One might hear about this exciting news of forgiveness and eternal life and wonder if all of this seems too good to be true. But the best part about this wonderful revelation is that it is not! Christians today need not have any fear of the good news in which they rejoice and which they share with others is a lie or is inaccurate, because the Lord has seen fit to personally reveal this good news of salvation himself. As noted earlier, he has done this in different ways

³ McPhee, Arthur, 18

throughout history. In the past, he did it by means of direct revelation and his servants, the prophets. But in the present time, he reveals it to people in the pages of the what we have today as the Bible. Believers can have no doubt that the words they read in Scripture are truly God's Word to them. A number of passages within Scripture reveal this truth plainly (2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:21 are just a couple of examples).⁴

Scripture is also clear as to its central figure and its ultimate goal for those who read it. Jesus plainly says that he is the central figure to which all of Scripture points (John 5:39). As to Scripture's main purpose, John writes near the end of his gospel, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). Paul echoes this goal of God's Word and the importance of careful and lifelong study of it when he writes to Timothy, "*From infancy* you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:15-17). Study of Scripture naturally ties in with every aspect of the Christian faith and life, including the mission of making disciples of all nations.

This is why constant, lifelong study of God's Word is so imperative for believers. Even in the Old Testament, reading and studying God's Word was given a high priority among the Israelites. At the end of their travels through the wilderness, the people were commanded, "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home or when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 11:18-19). Centuries later, when King Josiah and his men found the book of the law in the temple, they shared it with the people, so they could be reminded of all of all that God had spoken and done for his people and they in turn, could be reminded of their obligations to follow the LORD's commands (2 Kings 23:1-3). When the people of Judah returned from the exile under Ezra, they were instructed in the commands of the Lord by Ezra. He was not only himself a devout student of the Word (Ezra 7:10), but also took the time to share the Word with the people who had gathered to hear it (Nehemiah 8:2-3).

⁴ Consider also how many of the books of the Old Testament prophets begin. "The Word of the LORD came to...", and how many prophetic messages end with the words "Declares the LORD." These men were not just making up the content of their books, but it was revealed to them by God himself for them to share with his people.

In the New Testament, reading and searching the Scriptures was also highly encouraged. When Peter and the other Apostles spoke and wrote about of the good news of Jesus, they were always careful to point their readers back to Scripture and how the prophecies concerning the Messiah matched up with the events and actions of Jesus' life (Acts 2:14-35, 13:26-41). When Paul presented the gospel to the Bereans, they not only received the message with joy, but were also eager to thoroughly search the Scriptures for themselves, so they could confirm for themselves that the good news they heard from Paul was the truth (Acts 17:11). Finally, Paul encourages Timothy and fellow Christians to devote themselves to the reading, preaching and teaching of Scripture (1 Timothy 4:13) and especially instruction in the Word to the next generation by the previous one. He exhorts Christian parents, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). There can be no question that Bible study is not something which can be taken lightly, but must be done faithfully, carefully, and constantly by all of God's people.

Biblical illiteracy: A growing trend in this country!

The work of sharing Jesus and encouraging study of the Word with all nations, while a great privilege, always comes with its unique challenges with each new group of people it reaches. The American nation today, is no exception to that rule. Whenever someone becomes a prospect and the opportunity to evangelize him or her is present, there will sometimes be certain obstacles which must be overcome. While some might be more troublesome than others, one obstacle in particular, the obstacle of biblical illiteracy, can prove to be especially challenging to the evangelizing Christian in America today.

One thing which WELS Lutherans take great pride in is their educational system. God has blessed the synod with an abundance of Lutheran elementary schools and area Lutheran high schools which can be found in multiple locations all over the country, as well as four worker training schools in the Midwest. Such schools take great care in giving their students a complete and comprehensive study of Bible history and doctrine. They are careful to make sure their students enter the world armed with a working knowledge of the Bible, not just with respect to people and places, but especially with respect to its ultimate purpose. While this is excellent knowledge for young men and women to be equipped with for the rest of their lives, it is the

author's opinion that it can also set them up for a something of a surprise when they attempt to share their faith and the Word with others.

An article in the November 2009 edition of *Christian Century* cites a 2002 Gallup poll which proclaims a rather encouraging, yet baffling find. Over 90% of Americans own at least one copy of the Bible in their homes.⁵ Naturally, believers would take this to be wonderful news and it is. In fact, such news speaks volumes to the fact that numerous English translations of the Bible are available both in hard copy and even electronically. Indeed, the Bible today is so widespread and readily available that all a person has to do is go to a website like biblegateway.com, type in a book, chapter, verse, and translation, and they can begin reading. With such availability of Scripture both in written form and electronically, no one could legitimately complain about a lack of access to the Bible in this part of the world. What a wonderful blessing God has given to this country!

However, the baffling part comes when one discovers just how little Americans know about what is actually in the Bibles they own. In an article on the Reverend Albert Mohler's website, he cites several surveys which reveal just how little about the Bible that people actually understand, and what sorts of consequences have befallen the average American as result of that lack of knowledge. According to these surveys,

- Fewer than half of all adults could name the four gospels.
- Many Christians are unable to identify even two or three of the disciples.
- 60% of Americans are unable to name even five of the ten commandments.
- 82% of Americans believe the phrase "God helps those who help themselves" is found in the Bible.
- 12% of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife.
- 50% of high school seniors believed that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.

⁵ Swenson, Kristin, "Biblically Challenged: Overcoming Scriptural Illiteracy," *Christian Century*, Nov 3, 2009. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=b1045d95-86f1-4830-94be5df210bfd273%40sessionmgr12&vid=2&hid=11>, accessed 5 September 2012.

- A considerable number of respondents to one other poll believed that the one who preached the sermon on the mount was Billy Graham!⁶

As if this lack of Bible knowledge among the common man wasn't troubling enough, it seems that it is present even among the non-laity too. In a recent article by Richard Gurgel for the WELS publication *Preach The Word*, he mentions a conversation he once had with another Seminary's academic dean. Every year, this Seminary gave out a test on basic biblical literacy simply to see what areas of Bible history students might need help with during their time at that Seminary. However, in recent years, the sad report came out that an overwhelming majority of the students *failed the entire exam* on *basic* biblical literacy! In other words, these weren't just laypeople whose ignorance of the Bible was revealed, but rather, the ignorance of young men who were aspiring for the pastoral ministry!⁷

What exactly is “biblical illiteracy?”

Clearly, one can discern from these alarming statistics that reading, teaching, and especially meditating on the words of the Bible seem to have fallen to the wayside among many Americans. Even though many of them own a copy of the Bible and claim to hold it in high regard, they don't seem to want to actually open them up and read them! Citing George Gallup and Jim Castelli, Mohler confirms this sad conclusion for his readers, “Americans revere the Bible—but by and large, they don't read it.”⁸ It is obvious that these surveys and statistics reveal a dangerous trend in this country: The problem of biblical illiteracy!

Now what does someone mean when he cites the term “biblical illiteracy?” The answer is more complex than one might realize. Certainly, an answer which many will give right away is that it entails the simple lack of knowledge of the who, what, where, when, and how of Scripture. But is that the *only* aspect of biblical illiteracy? Is there not more to it than simply being unaware of facts and dates of the Bible? In other words, is it possible to know the stories and characters of the Bible, and yet still be biblically illiterate?

⁶ Mohler, Albert, “The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy: It's Our Problem,” October 15, 2005. <http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/10/14/the-scandal-of-biblical-illiteracy-its-our-problem>, accessed 26 November 2012

⁷ Gurgel, Richard, “Dealing With Growing Biblical Illiteracy,” *Preach The Word*, vol. 15, no. 2 (November/December 2011): 4.

⁸ Mohler, Albert, “The Scandal Of Biblical Illiteracy: It's Our Problem.” October 15, 2005.

Mohler believes so. He sees it as more than simply a lack of knowledge of the stories of the Bible, but rather a lack of how all the pieces fit together to tell the grandest of narratives. He writes to those who strive to be preachers to God's people,

“The tendency to isolate our sermons to one tiny piece of biblical text is a major problem, and it also explains why so much evangelical preaching is moralistic. It is easy to pick out a familiar story, make a few points from it about what people should and should not do, and then be done with it. But that kind of preaching will leave a church weak and starving, because the Christians who sit under it never find themselves in the big story of God's work in the world... That is what our people need to understand—that the Bible is not just a compendium of good short stories, but a grand, life-encompassing metanarrative of God's word of redemption in the world.”⁹

To use a biblical example, Mohler cites the story of Jesus speaking with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Certainly, these disciples were men who were familiar with the facts of the Old Testament Scriptures, but they still didn't completely understand how it all pointed to Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection for all people. Because of this, when Jesus died, they thought that that was the end of him! Not even reports of his resurrection were able to jostle them from their depression. No wonder then, Jesus had to scold them for their lack of understanding! So he took them through the grand narrative of Scripture, from Genesis all the way through Malachi, and explained how these many stories and prophecies all fit together to tell the story of God fulfilling his promise to send mankind salvation from sin.

In another article seeking to define the scope of what it means to be biblically illiterate, Charles Nichols cites two passages from the Old Testament: Isaiah 5:13 and Hosea 4:6. In these passages, the Lord laments that his people face destruction and death because of their lack of knowledge of what he has done for them. But how could that be? Were not the Israelites fully aware of everything God had done for them and their forefathers? Did they not have the written law of Moses, available for their use? Did they not familiarize themselves with everything which was recorded in the law?

Nichols puts forth the idea that it was not lack of *cognitive awareness* which doomed the Israelites, but rather *functional knowledge*. In other words, when God revealed his Word to the people, it was meant to bring about an active change in their lives. They were to take his words

⁹ Mohler, Albert, *He Is Not Silent: Preaching In A Postmodern World*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008), 89-90, 96

to heart and live them out, rather than just compartmentalize them and acted as though they never heard it. To Nichols, biblical literacy is both *knowing and doing* what God's Word says.¹⁰ To be biblically literate means that a great change must take place in the recipient's life and actions. He is to both know the Bible and live out such knowledge in his everyday life.

So far, there have been several different ideas given which contribute to what biblical illiteracy is. The author of this paper would like to try and "put it all together", and come up with a composite definition of biblically illiteracy. It may or may not be the most elegantly worded definition, but it is one which the author believes will be useful for the purposes of this paper. *Biblical illiteracy is a person's inability to understand what God's Word means for their life and future, which comes from a lack of biblical knowledge and an inability to recognize the grand metanarrative of God's Word.*

What does this mean for future ministry?

With the American society heading in this direction, what does it mean for those who aspire to be and are shepherds of God's flock? Certainly, if such alarming statistics of biblical illiteracy are found among such a large number of average Americans (and even among theologians-to-be!) it would be prudent to assume that members of their churches and communities have not escaped this problem unscathed.

What can be done in order to reach out to the unevangelized and support congregational members who have the handicap of being biblically illiterate, especially when it comes to the central message of Scripture? In light of this growing problem in the country, pastors must learn to focus more on preaching, teaching, and evangelism which makes more of an effort to tie in the complete story of salvation with the texts they work with on a given Sunday. More and more, this means that ministry must be conducted on a less "assumptive" manner when it comes to biblical content. When a pastor serves his people and the people of the community in conducting evangelism calls, worship services, and Bible classes, he cannot simply cite Bible stories and passages, some of which he himself may have learned as early on as a child, and expect his hearers to immediately understand the context and points he is trying to draw from them. It also means that there is going to have to be much more admonishment and encouragement on the

¹⁰ Nichols, Charles, "Communicating To A Biblically Illiterate World," *Didaskalia* 4 no 2 April 1, 1993. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=1573fb45-0132-486a-924a-955204fc68ce%40sessionmgr111&vid=2&hid=118>

pastor's part to his members and prospects to conduct daily and careful reading and study of the Bible.

To do this, they must be willing to conduct a sort of ministry to people which seeks to clearly project that main message of all Scripture, that is, how every part of Scripture points people back to Christ, what he has done, and how it meets the spiritual needs which all people have. This entails ministering to prospects in their evangelism presentations by advocating a type of "service evangelism", which points out the many wonderful things which God does for people everywhere, especially how he has answered their greatest need for forgiveness and spiritual peace. As for biblically illiterate people who are or who will become members of congregations, pastors must also continue to minister to them by being mindful of some that this lack of Bible knowledge doesn't just disappear as soon as they are converted. This means they must put a greater emphasis on exposition and establishing the historical context of biblical texts in preaching and teaching and making a more conscious encouragement for the people to do their own reading and meditation on the Scriptures.

How did Paul minister to the biblically illiterate? His ministry in Athens

As a man called to share the gospel with Jews and Gentiles, Paul was no stranger to people who were both literate and illiterate when it came to Scripture. Whenever he preached Christ to Jews and Jewish converts within the synagogues, he was always made it a point to refer them back to the Old Testament and prove from its writings that Jesus was, in fact, the long-awaited Messiah. Through this mode of preaching and teaching, Luke recounts the wonderful results of how many people did come to believe in Jesus as their Savior from sin and join the growing fellowship of believers (Acts 13:26-41 for an example of this).

However, Luke also records a couple of accounts there where Paul came across those who were purely illiterate when it came to Scripture. They not only did not know the complete story which Scripture had to share but they had absolutely no knowledge of Bible facts or dates. The two groups of people who normally come to mind in this regard are the people of Lystra in Acts 14 and the people of Athens in Acts 17. In such cases, it is noteworthy that Paul not once makes any direct Scripture quotations when he spoke with these people. Why? Because the people to whom he speaks would have had no idea what Paul was talking about. The people of Athens in particular would have been bored, confused, and even insulted that he, a Jew, was

trying to convert them to a different—and in their minds—inferior, way of life.¹¹ So the question is, how could Paul reach out to these people if he couldn't use God's Word in a direct fashion? The fact is, he couldn't without using the Word in some way, which is why Paul uses a different method of evangelism, one which points out to people the basic teachings of Christianity, as well as speaks to the spiritual needs which they had.

Perhaps the most well-known example of this type of evangelism is his ministry in the city of Athens. In order to understand why Paul did the things he did in the account, one must first understand what kind of city Athens was. In his book *He Is Not Silent*, Mohler gives this assessment of the city,

In Acts 17:16-34,...we find Paul standing at the center of apologetic ministry in the first century—Athens. Athens was the most intellectually sophisticated culture in the ancient world, and even in Paul's day it basked in its retreating glory. Though Rome held political and military preeminence, Athens stood supreme in terms of cultural and intellectual influence.¹²

In another article, Robert Dunham says this concerning Athens,

Athens was arguably several centuries past its prime when the apostle Paul arrived, but it still afforded its visitors and tourists quite an impressive array of Hellenistic treasures—art, poetry, drama, and lively philosophical and religious conversation. In short, Athens was a thriving cultural marketplace.”¹³

So Paul found himself in a civilization one could say was very much like America today. It was a society full of different ideas, philosophies and religions. Also, like American culture, these Athenians did not have a working knowledge of the Scriptures. But unlike America, the Scriptures were not something to which the people would have had immediate access.

It is no wonder then, that the section of Scripture speaking of Paul's time in Athens begins with sense of great urgency. Verse 16 states, “While Paul was waiting for them [Silas and Timothy] in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.” Paul is quite sad and troubled to see a people and a society that seemed to be worshipping anything and

¹¹ Rutschow, Paul. “Evangelism In The Book Of Acts,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File*, February 14, 1997 <http://www.wlsessays.net/files/RutschowActs.pdf>

¹² Mohler, Albert, p. 124

¹³ Dunham, Robert E. “Acts 17:16-34.” *Interpretation* 60 no 2 April 1, 2006 <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=3e99c6b9-8a65-4f06-826a-bc0c038f2fce%40sessionmgr15&vid=2&hid=24>

everything but the true God! It is also important to note that in Paul's distress, we see not so much an intellectual snobbery or arrogance, but rather a deep, genuine concern for souls. These people had a need for Savior and the absolute certainty of sins forgiven and life eternal. But they were never going to find it in this sea of idols and philosophical ideas to which they so closely adhered. Something had to be done if these people were going to avoid the fires of hell!

With the burning desire to bring the message of salvation to lost souls, Paul went right to work. Verses 17 and 21 tell us, "So he reasoned in the Synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there... (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas)." With evangelistic zeal, Paul jumps right into the culture and environment of Athens. He observed the marketplace and its contents and dialogued with the people who happened to pass by. He sought to understand why they worship these idols or advance the ideas that they do, and in turn, shared his faith with them. In the book *Graceful Evangelism*, Frances Adeney gives a rather intriguing assessment of Paul's "pre-evangelism" work in Athens,

When he arrived in Athens, Paul didn't immediately begin to preach or reach out to others. Instead, he put himself into learning mode. He visited the markets and began talking with people. He listened to the philosophers and dialogued with them. He visited the temples to the many gods of the Greek pantheon. And he went even further. He studied the ancient texts of the Greeks, thoroughly familiarizing himself with their thought.¹⁴

Eventually, Paul's work and words with the Athenians began to be noticed, especially by the intellectual leaders of the city. Luke continues in verse 18, "A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, 'What is this babbler trying to say?' Others remarked, 'He seems to be advocating foreign gods.'" The more Paul talked and worked in the city, the more he began to stand out with the people there. Finally, a grand opportunity opened up for Paul. The people, overcome by the curiosity to get a complete understanding of this newcomer and his strange, new teaching, extend an invitation to Paul in verse 19, "Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said

¹⁴ Adeney, Frances S. *Graceful Evangelism: Christian Witness In A Complex World*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: 2010), 137

to him, ‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.’”

To most people, such an invitation would have been most intimidating indeed. But to Paul, this was the golden opportunity for which he had waited most patiently. For a brief time, the good news of Jesus, the central message of the Bible itself, would now become the center of attention for these Athenian intellectuals. As for Paul, who had both a strong desire to evangelize and a working knowledge of the people and culture of Athens, he was determined to make the most of this opportunity which had been given to him.

So Paul begins his speech, not so much with a breath of condescension to the Athenian’s idolatrous ways, but rather with a compliment to their religiosity. Luke continues the account in verses 22 and 23, “Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.” With the beginning of his speech, Paul wishes to make a connection with the people of Athens by finding common ground with them. That common factor was that both he and the Athenians were interested in the topic of religion. They were interested in their relationship to the divine and how a proper relationship could be obtained.

However, that was where the similarity ended. The true God that Paul knew and in whom he could find absolute comfort and certainty was virtually non-existent in the world of the Athenians. In fact, the only mention of him at all was a lone altar with a simple inscription (if one could count that as a mention!). But even that lone altar had no information on who he was or why he was worth worshipping. Based on this simple altar, it was clear that the Athenians were drowning in a sea of uncertainty and frantic idol worship, even going so far as to “hedge their bets” so they wouldn’t offend anyone’s unknown deity. They clearly had a need for certainty and peace with God, but they could not find it, because the knowledge of the Savior and what he had done for them was absent. But Paul was about to fill in that gap for the Athenians. He was about to reveal not only the many reasons why this “unknown God” should not only be known, but also why he and he alone was worthy of their worship.

Since these people had no knowledge of Scripture and quoting it directly would only have confused and perhaps even angered them, Paul decides to begin with a knowledge that all

people have. Whether people have read the Scriptures or not, all people are gifted with the natural knowledge of God as evidenced by both creation and conscience. He speaks in verses 24-25 and later on in verse 29, “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of Heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything... Therefore... we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design or skill.” With these verses, Paul speaks of an important point about the true God as opposed to the numerous idols contained within the city. That point is simply this: The true God is not and has never been dependent on the things that his creatures do. He does not require prayers, sacrifices, or offerings because he needs them in order to ensure his own survival. Neither is he so small and comprehensible that he is able to be contained or compartmentalized, either in a building made by man or even within the mind of man. In all honesty, if the true God was that finite, easy to understand, and perhaps one might say, even petty, is that really a god worth worshipping?

Instead, Paul goes on to emphasize the exact opposite truth about the true God: *People are dependent upon him for everything.* Paul goes on in verses 25-27, “...because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.” The first major thing that the true God does for his people is that he creates them. He give them a life to live on the earth and even blesses them with common physical and mental capabilities, as well as their own unique powers. In addition to giving them life, the true God also continues to provide for them and their descendants, by giving them places to live and the things they need in order to survive and prosper in their set times and places.¹⁵ All of this he does so that people have the desire to seek him out and be give thanks to him for all they have during their time on earth.

To further establish a connection with his audience by showing that what he has said is not a foreign concept to them, Paul makes use of some quotes from well-known Greek authors named Epimenides and Aratus in verse 28, “For in him we live and move and have our being.’ ... ‘We are his offspring,’” It might seem strange for Paul to quote from poets who were

¹⁵ At this point, it should again be emphasized that Paul is not quoting Scripture at all, but is rather expounding on biblical teachings. He is beginning to teach them the grand narrative of Scripture, with its first parts being creation and settling the nations of the earth. Essentially, he is telling them the story of Genesis 1-11.

writing in praise to a false god, but here Paul uses them here to summarize what he has said up this point and to further strengthen his connection with his hearers. The Athenians could tell that Paul did his homework and was no stranger to their learning and ideas.¹⁶

Up to this point, the Athenians were tolerant of Paul's speech. But Paul's closing statements were probably where a few scholars started feeling uncomfortable and perhaps even outraged. Paul continues in verses 29-31, "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed." With great urgency, the apostle proclaims that the true God is not only he who deserves to be worshipped, but he even demands it from his creatures. He is even so bold as to demand it exclusively, so that no worship of anyone or anything else can be allowed. With this statement, Paul speaks a message of tough law to the Athenians. God has been patient with them in their spiritual blindness, but he will not tolerate their idol worship forever. Unless they turned from it and worshiped him alone, they would surely be condemned.

Yet in his closing words, Paul also gives words of hope, words which were meant to point to the most important way the true God has served mankind. Paul says in verse 31, "He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." Though God's judgment of the world will come and come soon, there was one other interesting aspect of this judgment. Paul didn't get the chance to go into detail at this point, but that phrase "raising him from the dead" was meant to be a beacon of hope. Had Paul gone on further in his speech, he would most certainly had elaborated on this man who was raised from the dead. He would have spoken about that man, Jesus Christ, and his life and death to forgive the sins of all people, including the sins of these dear people of Athens.

But sadly, he would not be given the chance to speak about this man who was raised from the dead. The Athenian audience was willing to listen to Paul's "strange new ideas" up to this point, but this is where they drew the line. To them, the idea of a bodily resurrection was utter nonsense to them, and they had no use for it in their worldview. Their philosophy of the Greek

¹⁶ Lenski, R.C.H. *Interpretation Of The Acts Of The Apostles*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House: 1934), p. 733

world taught an immortality of the soul, to be sure, but not an immortality of the body.¹⁷ Their reaction to Paul's words is heard in verses 32 and 33, "When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, 'We want to hear you again on this subject. At that, Paul left the council.'"

One might look upon this negative reaction and think that Paul's attempt at evangelism was a lost cause. In spite of all his zeal to save souls, all his efforts to make connections with them, and even in spite of his courageous message at the Areopagus, the Athenians ultimately rejected Paul. In doing so, they also rejected their Lord and Savior. While most turned down the precious good news which was offered to them, Luke concludes this section of Acts with a silver lining in verse 34, "A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others."

Paul's speech to the Athenians is a unique one, to say the least. Not only does it quote no Scripture, but it only makes one indirect reference to Jesus. Did Paul do something incorrect in his ministry to these people? Not at all. Faced with this biblically illiterate audience, Paul had no choice but to do two things. First, since directly reciting Scripture passages would have gotten him nowhere, he had to make a connections with the people through their interests. He had to go to where they were and "set up shop" there, so to speak. Second, with no prior knowledge of Scripture, Paul had to expound on biblical teaching via their natural knowledge of God and go from there. However, even operating on this knowledge, the exposition of scriptural teaching he gave was sound, and did seek to answer important questions and needs which all people have. If one could sum up the key points of Paul's speech, it might go something like this,

1. Since God was powerful enough to make everything we see including ourselves, it is obvious that he is greater than the mere buildings or idols man constructs. He does not *need* to be served by them as if he depended upon them for his own existence.
2. Instead, it's the other way around: God serves man by giving him his life, mind, abilities, land, home and everything else which he is fortunate to call his own.
3. Though these are wonderful blessings, they also pique a curiosity in man to search for the true God, to give thanks to him and worship him. He does not tolerate idolatry forever and someday he will call men to account for what they have done with their lives!

¹⁷ Lenski, R.C.H. p. 740

4. However, even then, God has still served all people by giving them a Savior from that coming judgment. We know he is the one who can save because he is the one who has risen from the dead.

What are some pre-evangelism tips we can take from Paul's ministry in Athens?

Paul faced some unique challenges in reaching out to a people and a culture that had no knowledge of Scripture. Based on the findings from earlier on, it is safe to say that pastors, to some degree, will have that same challenge with many of the prospects and members they have. While the degree of biblical illiteracy might not be as extreme as it was with the Athenians, it is still out there, as the surveys from earlier show. As a result, people today have an inadequate knowledge of what the Bible truly teaches about God and what he has done for us. But with the aid of the Holy Spirit, any challenge to gospel ministry can be overcome, even the obstacle of biblical illiteracy.

One important lesson which can be taken from Paul's work among the people of Athens is, like him, to cultivate a zeal to save souls. But this can be a difficult task, one that would in fact, be too great for any called worker to attain by himself. However, the pastor knows that he must look to the Holy Spirit to give him a spirit of patience not to become discouraged or upset when confronted with the biblically illiterate, but to work with them and help them overcome it. He himself must make sure he is staying in Scripture and garnering all of the counsel which God sets before him. Finally, he must also pray that the Holy Spirit would instill in him the eagerness to bring the wonderful news of Scripture, that is the gospel, to the people of his church and community, who so desperately need to hear it like everyone else.

Since many people do not have a working knowledge of Scripture today, and also since it doesn't appear that the trend of biblical illiteracy is going to turn around in the foreseeable future, it would seem to indicate that people have their interests focused on other things, things they find important to them. Such interests could be family, work-related matters, community activities, local sports events, national and global issues, and the like. Now this is not to say that such interests are wrong by any means. It simply means that, like Paul, the pastor and his congregation need to go to where the action is. They must have some kind of presence at these activities and events which the community celebrates.

In order to do this, a pastor and his congregation too, need to go into “learning mode.” They must find out what are the activities, events, and issues which concern people and their community in general. For example, it would be wise to find out what the primary age groups of the town are, learn about the economic conditions of the neighborhoods, discover the main activities and events which a town likes to celebrate. Are there annual festivals or celebrations such as a county fair in the town or at least in the general area? Is there a particular kind of sports in which the kids and their parents might have an interest? Is there an active community theater group which puts on theater performances? The list of questions could certainly go on and on, but whatever the circumstances, the activities and celebrations of a community are where a Christian presence could prove beneficial. It would not at all be a waste of a pastor’s time to make an appearance at such events. He may not necessarily be specifically sharing the gospel with people in those exact moments, but he would simply be introducing himself, meeting new people, and finding out about them and what their interests are.

As an example of this sort of work, the author of this paper would like to re-visit his vicar year experience in mid-Michigan. The town in which he served wasn’t necessarily a big one, but it did have a few events which drew in large crowds from both outside the town and from its citizens. One such event was a candlelight walk where the entire downtown area was closed off to traffic so people could walk freely on Main street and on the sidewalks which were lit up by candles in paper bags. Naturally, this event also featured many information booths from businesses, social groups, and especially churches. The church where this vicar served had a booth set up in a prime location which included a roulette game for the kids, souvenir items for kids and adults, such as pencils, erasers, candy, etc., and a door prize for a Bible.

In the end, a congregation reaches out to a community, not in a vain effort to make themselves look better than other congregations or churches, nor because they believe that they can add something to the gospel which they strive to profess. The point of reaching out is to build a rapport with individuals and the community at large. The point is to break down any barriers which might impede a curious person from following through on an interest to learn more about the good news which the congregation is offering to them. In an evangelism book *50 Ways You Can Share Your Faith*, its two authors really sum up this important purpose of the work of “pre-evangelism”,

Too often we cherish the stereotype that people who don't have a personal knowledge of Christ don't care about the world's ills; they just care about themselves. Interestingly enough, others often apply that stereotype to Christians—those people will live with their heads in the clouds, have no concern for the things of this world...Jesus asks us to do our good works in such a way that people will be prompted to glorify the Lord in Heaven. No big glitz or glory—just the quiet witness that the words we use to convey the gospel are not only valuable in themselves but are backed up with deeds.¹⁸

So the pastor and his congregation faithfully go about the work of knowing and understanding the interests of their community, just as Paul did in Athens. Eventually, just like the people of Athens, the Holy Spirit will bless a church with people who become interested or even curious about them. When that time comes, will the congregation be the kind that seems friendly, well-kept, and inviting? Or will it be the kind that is known for cold reception, confusing directions, or out-of-date appliances and technology? One can gather much information on a person or organization simply by observing the upkeep of their residency or place of business. The same rule also applies to a church and its members. In an evangelism paper in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary essay file, Jeff Samelson offers the following points of consideration when it comes to a church's exterior and interior maintenance,

Perhaps the first and easiest aspect of outreach to consider is public image—how do non-members see our congregation? This can be determined by speaking to prospects, visitors, and various people “around town,” but can often be evaluated simply by putting oneself in the shoes of “Unchurched Harry” (or Mary) and asking some pointed questions. First, consider the church property itself. Is the lawn mowed? Are the hedges trimmed? Is the paint peeling? Has the snow been shoveled off the walk? Does it look like someone really cares about the appearance of the church? Inside, ask similar questions. What kind of shape are the floors and walls in? Is the lighting outside the sanctuary good enough to see by, and does the sound system work well? If someone has to get up to visit the restroom, is it easy to find? How about the nursery, or the Sunday School rooms, or the church office?...If our church has an adjustable sign, is the message changed every week, or are the Lenten services still advertised in the middle of June?...Similar concerns apply to a church web site—are the pages regularly updated, or is “last week's sermon” really from last year?...Are we settling for mediocrity, isolation, or anonymity, or are we making a quality effort to promote our church as a place to hear the message of law and gospel?¹⁹

¹⁸ Campolo, Tony and Aeschliman, Gordon. *50 Ways You Can Share Your Faith*. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992), p. 67, 69

¹⁹ Samelson, Jeff. “A Manner Worthy of the Gospel: The Question of Quality in Our Work of Evangelism,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File*, April 18, 2000 <http://www.wlsessays.net/files/SamelsonEvangelism.pdf>

To sum up this point of “pre-evangelism”, the pastor, with the help of his congregation becomes involved with community activities and events in order to demonstrate that they are interested in meeting people and showing a genuine concern for their well-being. Again, these seemingly “minor” issues are emphasized rather abundantly not in order to make the gospel more effective, but to eliminate possible stereotypes people may have and to remove potential barriers which might drive a prospect away from the church and sadly, from the gospel. Also, as was the case with Paul, as the pastor and his congregation get to know their community and vice-versa, they put their trust in the Holy Spirit that he will lead a curious or even distraught soul to come forth and give attention to the message of the gospel.

What are some evangelism tips we can take from Paul’s ministry in Athens?

Eventually, the Holy Spirit will lead a curious prospect to ask more about what is taught and believed by the pastor and his people. Like the philosophers who were overcome by curiosity over Paul’s mission work in Athens, people too, will start to think, “These people show genuine interest in me. Perhaps I should find out more about them and what they teach!” Thank God when this time arrives for the gospel message to take center stage in the pastor’s discussion with this prospect!

Most WELS pastors, when conducting evangelism calls with prospects, are quite familiar with and make use of a presentation known as *God’s Great Exchange*. This simple presentation has the theme of Jesus getting our sin and man getting his righteousness, hence the title. At the beginning of the booklet, it speaks of how to make the transition from the secular to the religious by talking about *relationships*, or connections that people make between others and especially with God.²⁰

Perhaps instead of speaking of relationships, another way to bridge the secular and sacred could be employed. In his speech to the Athenians, one major theme Paul focused on was the idea of *service*. The true God is not so much served by humans as he serves them. With that idea in mind, instead of speaking about relationships in order to connect people to the sacred, one might choose to speak about the many ways which the true God has blessed people, both physically and spiritually.

²⁰ Valleskey, David J. *The Great Exchange: One Way To Tell A Friend About The Savior*. (Milwaukee: WI, Northwestern Publishing House, 1995), 5.

The pastor (or whoever is doing the presentation) could choose to start out by speaking about the different kinds of services which people perform on behalf of one another. A possible way to conduct the presentation might go something like this: When one performs the duties of his or her daily occupation, such as a doctor treating patients, a teacher instructing students, an electrician providing power to homes and offices, a homemaker who maintains the house for their family, or some other type of job, they are doing things which are very valuable for people. This is because each of these occupations and so many others satisfy needs which sometimes cannot be met by the average person himself. As such, those who serve people in these ways are usually held in high regard, because they faithfully and selflessly tend to needs which people have.²¹

In a similar fashion, there is another who has served all people faithfully, in fact, in multiple ways. God serves us by granting us some very amazing blessings. One such blessing can be readily taken in with our five senses. As we observe the beauty and wonder of the world around us, the morning sunrise or the stars in the night sky, the majesty of nature, and the diversity of life and each creature's unique characteristics, it becomes obvious that we have a very powerful and loving God who made the world and all that is in it. Not only did God create this world, but he has also created you and me. It is he who guided your formation in the womb, your entry into the world, and has gifted you with all your talents and abilities. Indeed, the complexity and capabilities of the human body and mind speak volumes to the magnitude of God's service to man in this regard.

In addition to giving men and women their life and abilities, God has also served them by sustaining their lives with everything that they need in order to thrive and prosper their well-being, as well as providing them with the ability to produce these blessings. From food and clothes, to home and property, to family and friends, God has seen fit to bless people everywhere with many material blessings. Especially in this country today, one would be hard-pressed to think of anyone who has not enjoyed at least some of these things!

However, though the true God has blessed mankind in these diverse ways, there is another need which all people have. To understand what this need is, a person must look to another special gift which mankind has given. God has gifted every person with a conscience, a

²¹ In the "small talk" session before the presentation, it is definitely a good idea to ask what the person's occupation is. Perhaps that occupation could be utilized in order to connect secular and sacred!

voice inside of them which speaks to them about what is right and what is wrong. While it can commend people for the good they do, it especially condemns them for the wrong they do. This second point is emphasized more because the problem which every person faces is the fact that there is a need to be right before God. Conscience is what tells someone that the true God does not tolerate wickedness on the part of his creatures.

When a person honestly stops to examine themselves, they realize that such a demand is hard, even impossible to carry out, because there have been many times in life where things were done which should not have done. Perhaps it was simply a little white lie which was told to get out of having to be disciplined by mom and dad. Maybe as a child, the temptation to sneak a candy bar out of the store was too inviting and so it was done. Perhaps it was a fight which was gotten into with a fellow co-worker where in the “heat of the moment” something was said or done which was regretted later on. Maybe it was nothing said or done openly, but rather it was simply a malicious thought against someone or something. All of these different kinds of wrongdoing condemn us as sinners before the true God. Moreover, someday God will call people to account for all the things they have done in life, both good and bad. Even worse, there is no way for people to discover how to get right with God on their own, because every way conceived by man to try and get right with God ends at dead-ends of work-righteousness and despair!

But even then, God has still served mankind by providing them with an important message of how to escape this dreadful judgment. He has given us this message through what we know today as the Bible. This is the main story and purpose of the Bible. Essentially, the Bible is the story of the true God and how he loved sinful humanity enough to give them forgiveness for their sins by means of a special Savior. A person who reads the Bible will find out about how God carried out this plan of forgiveness by protecting this promise of a Savior from all threats against it and then, when the time was just right, he fulfilled that promise by sending Son, Jesus into the world.

Once he arrived, the Bible tells us that throughout his entire life, Jesus never thought, said, or did anything which was sinful or wrong. He is the one who lived an absolutely perfect life in man’s place. Then he was hung on a cross, a punishment which was supposed to be reserved for criminals, but not because he had done anything wrong. He hung there so that he could take all the sins of the world upon himself and credit sinful people with his perfect life.

Now, when people stand before God and have to give an account for their lives, they can point to Jesus' perfect life and can be counted as worthy of heaven, not hell.

How can people know that their forgiveness is certain? Because something very wonderful happened three days after Jesus was crucified. He rose from the dead, thereby proving his mastery over all things, even death itself. As a result, there can be no doubt that God's plan to give man their greatest need for forgiveness is done! Since then, he has tasked his followers with the mission to share this wonderful news with people all over the world. He wants all people to know that God has served them by satisfying their greatest need of all: Forgiveness of sins and eternal life!

If the listener is interested, the pastor could then close with an invitation to learn more in a Bible information class, as well as an encouragement to read through the Bible themselves. Again, Paul's ministry in Athens reminds us to be prepared for both positive and negative reactions. Sometimes, a person may ultimately reject the gospel which was just presented to them, much like the Athenian scholars did to Paul. But on the other hand, the Holy Spirit may have just led another soul once lost in spiritual darkness into the light of faith and hope. Thank God for when this happens, because it is wonderful sight to witness!

What are some other ways to minister to the still biblically illiterate person?

In his book, *The Strategy Of Evangelism*, Charles Mueller tells the story of a missionary in India who had ministered to a man there. The man was evangelized, became a member of the church, but eventually, he became inactive. When asked as to why he was no longer coming to the missionary's church, the man responded in a very interesting way,

“When I first came to your church, everyone spoke to me. Members of the parish called on me. They seemed eager to share the gospel with me and concerned for my soul's welfare. But as soon as I was baptized and joined the church, this interest disappeared. No one prayed with me. No one came to speak with me about Jesus Christ. No one wanted to share with me the joy of the Christian faith. I got the impression that all they really wanted was my name on the membership rolls.”²²

While this particular member may or may not have been dealing with biblically illiteracy, his complaints against the church he was once so eager to join and be a part of can be the same

²² Mueller, Charles S. *The Strategy Of Evangelism*. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 74

kind which can come from a member who still struggles with illiteracy. It can be very easy for the pastor, once the person has been evangelized and made a member of the church, to forget that the member's illiteracy still remains. It hasn't instantly disappeared along with his unbelief. So the question then becomes, "What can I, as a spiritual shepherd, do in order to properly serve this person who still has a lack of many of the facts the Bible presents? What can I do in order to assist him in his quest to read, understand, and appreciate the grand narrative of Scripture?"

First off, the pastor should remember something very important in regard to this task: His ultimate goal is not necessarily to "cure" a member of his illiteracy, but to feed his soul with the words of the gospel. He cannot stand over a person 24/7 and make sure that he is faithfully reading through his Bible everyday. The only way biblical illiteracy will be conquered is by the member actually sitting down, picking up a Bible, and reading it for himself. Just as a weight-loss program requires careful discipline in both diet and exercise, Bible reading and study also requires discipline on the part of the individual.²³ This is an individual responsibility which must not only be encouraged, but even urged.

But that doesn't mean there are not ways which the pastor can assist in a person's acquisition of knowledge of the stories of the Bible. One way is through the worship service itself. A survey of WELS pastors (see appendix), indicates that it is a common trend among churches today to print the lessons for a given Sunday in the worship bulletin. This eliminates a potential hassle for the individual and especially helps him to follow along with the readings and the order of service in general.

Another key area where the illiterate member may be served is through the pastor's sermon. As someone who has been born and raised Lutheran all his life, the author of this paper has heard many sermons and has had the opportunity to write a few of his own. As such, the author was taught how very important it is to be able to apply the truths of a given sermon text to his hearers in the 21st century. In other words, what is the malady or specific law of this text which cuts people to the heart, and what is the specific gospel which heals those wounded hearts and makes them rejoice in God's goodness? What are some Bible passages which could be used to support such applications?

However, in the midst of wrestling with the correct and best way to apply and appropriate the words of a given sermon text and perhaps even trying to back them up with proof texts,

²³ Swenson, Kristin. "Biblically challenged: Overcoming Scriptural Literacy," *Christian Century* November 3, 2009.

sometimes something which isn't always given a great deal of weight is simply giving an exposition of what is going on in the text. Who are the people in this text? What is going on? What is the reason for a person saying or doing what he is saying and doing? Such questions are very important to have answered, especially for the person who has not grown up with Bible stories like others have.

As for quoting proof texts, that is certainly not wrong to do in and of itself and at times, can be an effective technique. However, will the passages the pastor chooses be recognized or understood by the member who doesn't have a great knowledge of Bible passages? Again, Professor Gurgel weighs in on this question in his article in *Preach The Word*,

Preaching today is not typically well served by resembling a doctrinal essay with numerous "proof texts." Since many hearers have no contextual understanding of the added passages, now they are confused by multiple texts! Also, proof-texting assumes that since the Bible says it, it must be true. Scripture has convinced you of that, but some hearers aren't so sure. Deal thoroughly with text and context, use the text's implicit or explicit narrative to place your hearers into the sandals of the first hearers, and trust the text to establish its own authority...don't defend the lion; turn him loose.²⁴

This is where a careful balance of sermon exposition and application can really help to serve such a member. The pastor can spend some time talking about the circumstances of a narrative text, or if the text is from an epistle, perhaps he could spend a paragraph or two speaking about the circumstances which prompted the writing of the letter in the first place.

For examples of this, think about the pastor who is preaching on 2 Samuel 12:11-25.²⁵ The text recounts David's admonishment for his sin with Bathsheba by the prophet Nathan, and the painful consequences which follow. To many Lutherans, this is a well-known story, but to the biblically illiterate person, he may be confused as to what is happening or why these words are being spoken to someone like David. With that in mind, it certainly would not hurt to spend some time giving a brief summary of the situation which led to the words of the text. In this way, the member can better understand what is going on and why Nathan speaks the harsh and comforting words he does to David.

²⁴ Gurgel, Richard. *Preach The Word*. (November/December 2011)

²⁵ This is the supplemental first lesson chosen for the 6th Sunday after Pentecost, year B by the WELS Commission on Worship.

Or what about a preacher who is expounding on an epistle text such as 2 Timothy 4:11-18?²⁶ He could assist the biblically illiterate member by speaking of the circumstances which prompted the apostle Paul to write this letter. At this point in his life, Paul's day of execution could have come at any moment, so it would only be natural for Paul to ask for Timothy's presence, as well as his scrolls and parchments, during this dark time in his life.

Another area of pastoral ministry where the biblically illiterate can be served is in the classroom. In both Sunday morning Bible classes and especially Bible information classes, there are wonderful opportunities to help such members begin to fill in their gaps of knowledge not only in Bible history but also in doctrine. For Sunday morning Bible classes, the pastor might want to focus more on teaching books of the Bible, rather than just doing topical studies. Not only does this help the illiterate in their study of Bible history, but even the literate can review material they learned earlier in life (after all, one is never done with re-studying key stories and events in Scripture!). The Northwestern Publishing House website has a number of materials available in their *Christ-Light Curriculum* section, perfect for going through either Old or New Testament history.²⁷

The Bible information class can also be utilized to not only give students an effective explanation of Bible doctrine, but also a strong encouragement to conduct daily and careful Bible study on their own. During his vicar year, the author was able to make use of a curriculum called *New Life In Christ*. This curriculum was a 20-lesson course which covered basic biblical doctrines from creation, to redemption, to sanctification, to proper Christian living. Each lesson also concludes with reading through a particular Bible story and answering some questions about the story, something which not only reinforces the lesson taught, but also helps the student to overcome their lack of knowledge of certain Bible stories. In addition, one lesson in particular which was found to be very insightful and interesting was its fourteenth lesson entitled *The Christian And Bible Study*. In addition to giving a comprehensive summary of Bible history and how it all ties together in the promise of Jesus, the lesson also gives some practical tips for how a person may conduct Bible study on his own.^{28 29}

²⁶ This is the supplemental second lesson chosen for Reformation Sunday, year A by the WELS Commission on Worship.

²⁷ This curriculum is suggested merely as an example, not necessarily as something which has to be used.

²⁸ Bivens, Forrest and Valleskey, David. *New Life In Christ*. (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 53-56.

Conclusion: God’s Word is our great heritage. Let’s make use of it!

It is the author’s sincere hope that this paper has given the reader some awareness of this growing issue of biblical illiteracy. In general, evangelism and Bible study are things which should never be taken lightly, but should be done with the greatest care and diligence. But it becomes all the more true when it comes to ministering to those who do not have a solid background in Bible history and doctrine. Given the high numbers of people who own Bibles, yet don’t read them, it would seem that for many, the problem stems not from a lack of access to Scripture, but rather an apathy towards reading and studying it. With that in mind, how lamentable it is for church members and even pastors who themselves fail to keep up with regular Bible study!

If there is one final point the author would like the reader to take away from this paper, it is the fact that God’s Word was given to us, not so that people can just shelve it away in their personal libraries or leave it in plastic wrappings or in pristine condition. It was given to people everywhere for their benefit. It is meant to be opened, read, re-read, studied, and applied. It is to be used, over and over again, until it is worn out and it needs to be replaced with a new one (don’t worry, more are being made everyday!) Most importantly, it is meant to offer comfort and hope to people burdened with guilt and despair with the grand narrative of salvation through Jesus.

With that said, the author hopes that this paper was insightful and gave some motivation and tactics for ministering to the biblically illiterate, both inside and outside of church. It is also his prayer that the same Spirit which moved the Israelites to talk about God’s Word on a constant basis (Deuteronomy 11:18-19), who motivated the noble Bereans to eagerly search the Scriptures for confirmation of their faith (Acts 17:11) will also move each individual pastor and layman to continually search the Scriptures for themselves. Thus, in the words of the apostle Peter, Christians everywhere may learn “to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory forever and ever! Amen” (2 Peter 3:18).

²⁹ Again, such a specific course is emphasized, not to say that it’s better than other BIC classes, but because it can serve as a model for ministering to those who lack knowledge in both history and doctrine.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY OF PASTORS ON BIBLICAL ILLITERACY

Survey contributors

David Clark at Grace Lutheran, Glendale, Arizona

Norman Seeger at Good Shepherd Lutheran, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Jonathan Werre at Good Shepherd Lutheran, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Norman Burger at Shepherd Of The Hills Lutheran, Lansing, Michigan

Kevin Westra at Beautiful Savior Lutheran, Grove City, Ohio

Steve Bauer at Faith Lutheran, West Newton, Pennsylvania

Jonathan Rockhoff at Messiah Lutheran, Wichita, Kansas

Mark Schroeder at Tree Of Life Lutheran, Cary, North Carolina

Matt Zimplemann at Cross Of Christ Lutheran, Boise, Idaho

Andrew Schwartz at Christ the King Lutheran, Bremerton, Washington

John Vieths at Calvary Lutheran, Dallas, Texas

Steven Lange at Hope Lutheran, Louisville, Kentucky

Peter Prange at Jerusalem Lutheran, Morton Grove, Illinois

Roger Sachs at 1st Lutheran, LaCrosse, Wisconsin

Pastor #1: David Clark at Grace Lutheran, Glendale, Arizona

General info and Biblical illiteracy

1. How long have you been serving in the ministry?
30+ years
2. How would you define “biblical illiteracy?”
Lack of knowledge of basic bible stories, lack of understanding of basic bible doctrines.
3. Based on your definition above, how “biblically literate” would you say your congregation is?
Newest Christians are (justification always comes before sanctification). Nurture is an ongoing process.
4. How “biblically literate” would you say the area in which you serve is?
About average. More so now than when I first entered the ministry.
5. Based on your experience in the ministry, would you say people have become more or less biblically literate over the years?
Less biblically literate now. In my BIC class I start with explaining what a book, chapter, and verse of the Bible is. I never did this at the beginning of my ministry.

Evangelism calls/presentations

1. How do you usually come across prospects for evangelism calls?
Word of mouth, brought by others. Some through our website.
2. What other outreach tools/methods has your congregation used in recent years?
We heavily stress personal invitation. We have done mailings. We use our school.
3. What methods (God’s Great Exchange, for example) do you use to conduct evangelism calls with prospects?
God’s great exchange is the one I use most often and have even written it into the first lesson of my BIC.
4. Has the presence of biblical illiteracy (or lack thereof) affected the way you have conducted your evangelism presentations? If so, how?
Yes. You can’t use Bible stories at all.

Preaching and Worship

1. When you announce Scripture readings, do you mention the page number, rather than the chapter/verse reference?
No. We print out the lessons in the bulletin and project them.
2. Do you normally use introductions with your Scripture readings? If so, what things do you mention in those introductions?
Yes. Basic context, how it fits in with other readings and theme of the day.
3. Do you normally take time to establish the historical context and circumstances of a given text during a sermon? If so, how much of the sermon do you devote to doing so?
Absolutely. You can't not do this (that's what the historical-grammatical method of interpretation is). Usually just a few sentences and it provides cultural/historical perspective either the same or why it is different from today.

Teaching Bible classes

1. Are your Sunday morning classes more topical studies or studies on books of the Bible?
Both.
2. Is there a written curriculum that you use for your Bible Information Classes, or do you use one of your own creation?
Use one I have written.
3. How are the lessons of your BIC class arranged? (a brief outline will do here)
God's great exchange/Bible/Catechism
God The Father (2 lessons)
God the Son (2 lessons)
God the Holy Spirit (2 lessons)
Sacraments (2 lessons)
Ministry of Keys & Confession
Prayer
Ten Commandments (3 lessons)
Church membership
4. Does your BIC course teach the Apostles Creed or Ten Commandments first? Why?
Creed first. Teach commandments as 3rd use that way while also talking about 1st & 2nd use.

5. Does your BIC course include a lesson on how to conduct personal Bible study?

No. Some of the problem of Biblical illiteracy comes from not having professionally trained teachers/ curriculum for adults. Much of the small group materials that I have seen tend to be pretty shallow because they do not have professionally trained teachers. While there may be a place for this kind of format, it cannot be the only format with severe repercussions to spiritual maturity. As we are reaping the “benefit” of the post modern age, it is even more important to teach Bible history for adults.

Pastor #2: Norman Seeger at Good Shepherd Lutheran, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

General info and Biblical illiteracy

1. How long have you been serving in the ministry?
36 years
2. How would you define “biblical illiteracy?”
Not knowing the basic truths of salvation is ‘severe’...
Not knowing many of the basic Bible history stories is ‘average’...
3. Based on your definition above, how “biblically literate” would you say your congregation is?
Many of our members are well informed Bible students
A majority of our members, I believe, have “above average” knowledge
Some of our members know the simple truths of salvation, at best
4. How “biblically literate” would you say the area in which you serve is?
We are a supposedly religious city, but I believe true Bible knowledge is lower than most Christians in our city would like to imagine
5. Based on your experience in the ministry, would you say people have become more or less biblically literate over the years?
In society, less
In our church, I pray we are more literate than in the past

Evangelism calls/presentations

1. How do you usually come across prospects for evangelism calls?
Contact with members, through our school; through our early childhood center
2. What other outreach tools/methods has your congregation used in recent years?
Presence at community “family fairs,” etc. ‘Trunk or Treat’ open house
3. What methods (God’s Great Exchange, for example) do you use to conduct evangelism calls with prospects?
Great Exchange remains the basic outline in my mind as we talk
4. Has the presence of biblical illiteracy (or lack thereof) affected the way you have conducted your evangelism presentations? If so, how?
Not noticeably – I try not to assume people know God’s basic truths

Preaching and Worship

1. When you announce Scripture readings, do you mention the page number, rather than the chapter/verse reference?
No. our readings are printed in the worship folder

2. Do you normally use introductions with your Scripture readings? If so, what things do you mention in those introductions?

Brief notes may tie the reading into this Sunday's theme

3. Do you normally take time to establish the historical context and circumstances of a given text during a sermon? If so, how much of the sermon do you devote to doing so?

Depends upon the familiarity of a text and how critical the background is to understanding the message of the text

Teaching Bible classes

1. Are your Sunday morning classes more topical studies or studies on books of the Bible?

Studies on books of the Bible lead into topical questions / applications

2. Is there a written curriculum that you use for your Bible Information Classes, or do you use one of your own creation?

We generally start with "Christ Light" materials

3. How are the lessons of your BIC class arranged? (a brief outline will do here)

"New Life in Christ" – my associate likes to start with commandments in #15-#17

4. Does your BIC course teach the Apostles Creed or Ten Commandments first? Why?

Ten commandments – my associate prefers to teach law more as a mirror / I used to put a little greater emphasis on law becoming our guide

5. Does your BIC course include a lesson on how to conduct personal Bible study?

Yes

Pastor #3: Jonathan Werre at Good Shepherd Lutheran, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

General info and Biblical illiteracy

1. How long have you been serving in the ministry?
22 years
2. How would you define “biblical illiteracy?”
A lack of knowledge of the Bible history / stories that are known by the average Christian for whom church is important.
3. Based on your definition above, how “biblically literate” would you say your congregation is?
I would guesstimate that 30 % of our congregation would be “Biblially illiterate.”
4. How “biblically literate” would you say the area in which you serve is?
Our area is rather church-ified, so I would guess that our Biblical illiteracy rate is substantially lower than most areas.
5. Based on your experience in the ministry, would you say people have become more or less biblically literate over the years?
More.

Evangelism calls/presentations

1. How do you usually come across prospects for evangelism calls?
Our primary means of contact is through sidedoors—our early childhood center, members inviting friends to special events, etc.
2. What other outreach tools/methods has your congregation used in recent years?
We built an early childhood center (both for inreach for members, as we have a grade school we want members to utilize even more, and for outreach). We have an Evangelism Cart in our entryway with pamphlets, magnets, “welcome to our neighborhood” bags, etc. that members can grab and take home with them any time. We have an Easter 4 Kids and a Christmas 4 Kids events each year. We verbally encourage the invitation of friends/family for various events, as well as the willingness of the pastors to meet with anyone at any time.
3. What methods (God’s Great Exchange, for example) do you use to conduct evangelism calls with prospects?
God's Great Exchange, though most often it is presented in conversation, rather than a formal presentation.

4. Has the presence of biblical illiteracy (or lack thereof) affected the way you have conducted your evangelism presentations? If so, how?

No. But it has affected my choice of BIC materials. I now use “New Life in Christ” by Vallesky/Bivens because each homework lesson begins with the students reading some portion of Scripture, often a Bible story or parable.

Preaching and Worship

1. When you announce Scripture readings, do you mention the page number, rather than the chapter/verse reference?

No, as we print the lessons in the bulletin.

2. Do you normally use introductions with your Scripture readings? If so, what things do you mention in those introductions?

Yes. I try to keep it to three sentences. The purpose is to highlight what this lesson teaches us about the theme of that particular Sunday.

3. Do you normally take time to establish the historical context and circumstances of a given text during a sermon? If so, how much of the sermon do you devote to doing so?

Yes, but I try to do it in a few sentences. More, if the historical setting is essential to the understanding of what the sermon is about.

Teaching Bible classes

1. Are your Sunday morning classes more topical studies or studies on books of the Bible?

A mix of both, though more books of the Bible.

2. Is there a written curriculum that you use for your Bible Information Classes, or do you use one of your own creation?

Yes, “New Life in Christ” by Vallesky/Bivens, though I modify the last several lessons.

3. How are the lessons of your BIC class arranged? (a brief outline will do here)

“New Life in Christ” follows this order--Apostles Creed; Lord's Prayer; Sacraments; 10 Commandments; Then, using my own materials: Confession/Ministry of the Keys; Table of Duties/What church membership means.

4. Does your BIC course teach the Apostles Creed or Ten Commandments first? Why?

“New Life in Christ” teaches the Creed first. I would prefer to follow the catechism and start with the 10 Commandments. However, there are advantages to starting with the Creed—you start with gospel (those who actually want to take the BIC are often those on whom the law has already begun to do its work). As we know, the stuff you hear first is the stuff you remember best, so why not start with the gospel since the law is already a known quantity in light of our conscience? In terms of finding the answers to life's problems (which those in

BIC classes usually have plenty of, as you would expect if you've been living your life apart from the gospel), the Creed is an excellent tool for connecting the dots for people (ie, 1st Article gives us, among other things, a reason to love our bodies...which is useful for someone who has body-image issues or who neglects their body; 2nd Article gives us, among other things, our self-worth and the ability to have the attitude, “Because of the certainty of salvation in Christ, today is a good day to die; and if it is a good day to die, it is also a good day to live—so let's live this day to the fullest!”, etc.)

5. Does your BIC course include a lesson on how to conduct personal Bible study?
Yes. In fact, I make it an assignment—they must have a week's worth of devotions (I show them how and give them materials). The next week, I simply ask their observations. Inevitably, their observations are the same as everyone who tries to have a regular devotional life: it has a building-up influence in their own/families' lives, but it is also hard to have devotions regularly...which leads to some good discussion about the reality of Satan who is terrified of how powerful that Word is, and the reality of the necessity of self-discipline in the Christian life so we do what we know rather than what we feel.

Pastor #4: Norman Burger at Shepherd Of The Hills Lutheran, Lansing, Michigan

General info and Biblical illiteracy

1. How long have you been serving in the ministry?

26 years

2. How would you define “biblical illiteracy?”

Ignorance not only of the central message of the Bible (sin and grace), but also ignorance of the story of salvation history recorded in it (events and people) and basic doctrines (creation, original sin, justification, deity of Jesus, etc.).

3. Based on your definition above, how “biblically literate” would you say your congregation is?

The congregation breaks down into two categories: 1) Those fairly “biblically literate”, confirmed and coming to church at least fairly often, and 2) Those who are confirmed but did not attend Sunday School much and whose parents didn’t teach them at home, and who do not attend worship much. While they may be familiar with the central message of the Bible, they lack in knowing the story of salvation history and are probably weak in knowing doctrines, especially given the world’s erosions of those convictions if we are not growing in the Word.

4. How “biblically literate” would you say the area in which you serve is?

Not very. Also I hear more and more people parroting the stuff they hear and read about us not even knowing if the origin of the Bible is divine. So there is a lack of knowledge about Scripture and also a growing bias against divine inspiration and the authority of Scripture.

5. Based on your experience in the ministry, would you say people have become more or less biblically literate over the years?

Far less. We are talking epidemic status here.

Evangelism calls/presentations

1. How do you usually come across prospects for evangelism calls?

People bringing friends, kid’s outreach programs, work with seniors in the community (assisted living centers, nursing homes, etc.)

2. What other outreach tools/methods has your congregation used in recent years?

(See above)

3. What methods (God’s Great Exchange, for example) do you use to conduct evangelism calls with prospects?

God’s Great Exchange.

4. Has the presence of biblical illiteracy (or lack thereof) affected the way you have conducted your evangelism presentations? If so, how?

No. Dr. James Kennedy put it well. If an intruder has snuck into your house and is coming at you with a weapon, do you take the time to explain to him what your .44 magnum you keep at your beside is and how it works to convince him he better back off- or do you just pull the trigger? It doesn't matter if a person is biblically illiterate or not. God will do his thing through law and gospel.

Preaching and Worship

1. When you announce Scripture readings, do you mention the page number, rather than the chapter/verse reference?

No

2. Do you normally use introductions with your Scripture readings? If so, what things do you mention in those introductions?

Always. Very important. And fairly lengthy. I feel it is critical to give the context to the reading, assuming people may not know characters, events, etc. I also try to put it in the context of life. E.g. The Israelites complaining leads to the question, "Have you ever thought that God is holding out on you or not being fair to you?" I also always try to specifically mention Christ and direct people to him, even in the Old Testament lesson.

3. Do you normally take time to establish the historical context and circumstances of a given text during a sermon? If so, how much of the sermon do you devote to doing so?

Yes. However much it takes.

Teaching Bible classes

1. Are your Sunday morning classes more topical studies or studies on books of the Bible?

We try to be balanced and do both. At times we have simply done the stories the children are learning.

2. Is there a written curriculum that you use for your Bible Information Classes, or do you use one of your own creation?

We do our own.

3. How are the lessons of your BIC class arranged? (a brief outline will do here)

We start with sin and grace, and then move on from there to the Trinity, then to creation and other doctrines.

4. Does your BIC course teach the Apostles Creed or Ten Commandments first? Why?
Apostles Creed. But we could do it the other way. As I see it, it really doesn't make a difference, but there is perhaps some wisdom to laying down who God is and what he has done for us first, then when one gets to sensitive issues in regard to the Ten Commandments (human sexuality, for instance) one is more likely to accept God's will.

5. Does your BIC course include a lesson on how to conduct personal Bible study?
We do that in new member orientation classes.

Pastor #5: Kevin Westra at Beautiful Savior Lutheran, Grove City, Ohio

General info and Biblical illiteracy

1. How long have you been serving in the ministry?
20 years
2. How would you define “biblical illiteracy?”
Not understanding the central message of Scripture, aware of very little Bible history knowledge, not knowing what we consider the basic Sunday school lessons
3. Based on your definition above, how “biblically literate” would you say your congregation is?
Long time members are above average. Newer members are below average.
4. How “biblically literate” would you say the area in which you serve is?
Average, the younger the people the more illiterate they seem to be.
5. Based on your experience in the ministry, would you say people have become more or less biblically literate over the years?
Less

Evangelism calls/presentations

1. How do you usually come across prospects for evangelism calls?
Referrals by members, walk in visitors, preschool and school families
2. What other outreach tools/methods has your congregation used in recent years?
Mass mailing, newspaper ads, facebook, website, canvassing, door hangers.
3. What methods (God’s Great Exchange, for example) do you use to conduct evangelism calls with prospects?
Try to get to a basic law/gospel presentation – often using a version of God’s great exchange
4. Has the presence of biblical illiteracy (or lack thereof) affected the way you have conducted your evangelism presentations? If so, how?
Unable to bring characters from the Bible into the discussion without lengthy details about who they are.

Preaching and Worship

1. When you announce Scripture readings, do you mention the page number, rather than the chapter/verse reference?
We do both

2. Do you normally use introductions with your Scripture readings? If so, what things do you mention in those introductions?
Yes, brief context and how it fits in with the theme of the day. Usually only a sentence or two.

3. Do you normally take time to establish the historical context and circumstances of a given text during a sermon? If so, how much of the sermon do you devote to doing so?
You can't assume people know the context anymore. Most sermons it is probably a paragraph or two. The challenge is doing this without boring those who are more literate

Teaching Bible classes

1. Are your Sunday morning classes more topical studies or studies on books of the Bible?
We try to offer both – often alternating between the two.

2. Is there a written curriculum that you use for your Bible Information Classes, or do you use one of your own creation?
I have four that I rotate using. 2 from NPH and 2 that brothers in the ministry have written. I have one that I use specifically when I know that the group has less Bible knowledge.

3. How are the lessons of your BIC class arranged? (a brief outline will do here)
 - 1) Law/Gospel presentation
 - 2) Who is God? (Apostle's Creed)
 - 3) Sacraments
 - 4) Ten Commandments
 - 5) Prayer
 - 6) The Bible and the Church
 - 7) End Times

4. Does your BIC course teach the Apostles Creed or Ten Commandments first? Why?
Creed, so they know who God is before they see what he has to say about how we are to live, and why we want to live that way.

5. Does your BIC course include a lesson on how to conduct personal Bible study?
Yes

Pastor #6: Steve Bauer at Faith Lutheran, West Newton, Pennsylvania

General info and Biblical illiteracy

1. How long have you been serving in the ministry?
Ordained in 2003
2. How would you define “biblical illiteracy?”
One does not know both the basic people and teachings of the bible.
3. Based on your definition above, how “biblically literate” would you say your congregation is?
**Those who come to the adult class are quite literate.
The parents of families along with their children are not.**
4. How “biblically literate” would you say the area in which you serve is?
Very illiterate.
5. Based on your experience in the ministry, would you say people have become more or less biblically literate over the years?
This area is overrun with Roman Catholic and old LCA Lutherans. Neither of those church bodies have been much for training their people in God's word. So, they've been starved of God's word for a long time.

Evangelism calls/presentations

1. How do you usually come across prospects for evangelism calls?
Mailings, personal contact.
2. What other outreach tools/methods has your congregation used in recent years?
Mailings, Minor festivals.
3. What methods (God’s Great Exchange, for example) do you use to conduct evangelism calls with prospects?
I simply talk to them about how broken the world is. From there I talk about sin. From there I talk about Jesus.
4. Has the presence of biblical illiteracy (or lack thereof) affected the way you have conducted your evangelism presentations? If so, how?
God's great exchange, while quite useful for inactive visits is no longer practical for evangelism. The 'dealing with objections' part definitely is. But the outline doesn't fit very well in a non-biblically literate area.

Preaching and Worship

1. When you announce Scripture readings, do you mention the page number, rather than the chapter/verse reference?
I announce the chapter and verse. However I have all the lections printed in the bulletin.
2. Do you normally use introductions with your Scripture readings? If so, what things do you mention in those introductions?
Sometimes I introduce the lessons if the logical connection to the theme isn't obvious.
3. Do you normally take time to establish the historical context and circumstances of a given text during a sermon? If so, how much of the sermon do you devote to doing so?
I devote only 1 to 3 minutes of a sermon to the background.

Teaching Bible classes

1. Are your Sunday morning classes more topical studies or studies on books of the Bible?
Bible books. I find that it gives them a familiar starting place. Also, it gives them a framework in which to cover topics/doctrines. (e.g. we went through Romans. It took well over a year. But we were able to cover many doctrines/topics in an indepth way.)
2. Is there a written curriculum that you use for your Bible Information Classes, or do you use one of your own creation?
I use the BIC handed down to me from Quandt (Knowing Jesus, Connecting with Jesus, Living for Jesus)
3. How are the lessons of your BIC class arranged? (a brief outline will do here)
Part 1: Christology
Part 2: Means of grace
Part 3: Sanctification topics
4. Does your BIC course teach the Apostles Creed or Ten Commandments first? Why?
Nope. Though I have been wondering if incorporating more of the enchiridion in a direct way might help.
5. Does your BIC course include a lesson on how to conduct personal Bible study?
Yes.

Pastor #7: Johathan Rockhoff at Messiah Lutheran, Wichita, Kansas

General info and Biblical illiteracy

1. How long have you been serving in the ministry?
25 years
2. How would you define “biblical illiteracy?”
The inability to understand the basic concepts and doctrines of Scripture
3. Based on your definition above, how “biblically literate” would you say your congregation is?
I believe that, by my definition, my congregation is biblically literate.
4. How “biblically literate” would you say the area in which you serve is?
About 50% of our county is unchurched, so I would estimate that probably about 25% of our area is biblically illiterate
5. Based on your experience in the ministry, would you say people have become more or less biblically literate over the years?
If you’re referring to my congregation, I believe we’ve become more biblically literate over the years. As for the area in which we live, I believe the opposite is true, as we continue to live in the end times.

Evangelism calls/presentations

1. How do you usually come across prospects for evangelism calls?
Usually by connections to members (i.e., friendship evangelism)
2. What other outreach tools/methods has your congregation used in recent years?
VBS, Christmas/Easter for Kids, our child care center, newcomer mailings, county fair booth, soccer camp
3. What methods (God’s Great Exchange, for example) do you use to conduct evangelism calls with prospects?
A scaled-down version of God’s Great Exchange
4. Has the presence of biblical illiteracy (or lack thereof) affected the way you have conducted your evangelism presentations? If so, how?
Perhaps that’s why I’ve used a simplified version of God’s Great Exchange.

Preaching and Worship

1. When you announce Scripture readings, do you mention the page number, rather than the chapter/verse reference?
No, since the readings are printed on the back of the bulletin.
2. Do you normally use introductions with your Scripture readings? If so, what things do you mention in those introductions?
Yes, usually the context or a brief summary as to how that reading fits the theme of the day.
3. Do you normally take time to establish the historical context and circumstances of a given text during a sermon? If so, how much of the sermon do you devote to doing so?
Yes. It usually covers a minute or two of the sermon.

Teaching Bible classes

1. Are your Sunday morning classes more topical studies or studies on books of the Bible?
A mixture of both.
2. Is there a written curriculum that you use for your Bible Information Classes, or do you use one of your own creation?
I make use of about a dozen courses prepared by others.
3. How are the lessons of your BIC class arranged? (a brief outline will do here)
I use so many different ones, that they vary quite a bit.
4. Does your BIC course teach the Apostles Creed or Ten Commandments first? Why?
Not usually. Most start out with a basic law/gospel presentation over the first couple of lessons. That way people at least hear the basics right away.
5. Does your BIC course include a lesson on how to conduct personal Bible study?
Most of them do.

Pastor #8: Mark Schroeder at Tree Of Life Lutheran, Cary, North Carolina

General info and Biblical illiteracy

1. How long have you been serving in the ministry?
I am a 2007 graduate of WLS.
2. How would you define “biblical illiteracy?”
An unfamiliarity with the characters, stories and doctrinal concepts of the Bible.
3. Based on your definition above, how “biblically literate” would you say your congregation is?
1 being illiterate and 10 being literate, I’d say a 8.
4. How “biblically literate” would you say the area in which you serve is?
1 being illiterate and 10 being literate, I’d say a 6.
5. Based on your experience in the ministry, would you say people have become more or less biblically literate over the years?
I don’t know. I think that depends on how much their parents are/were involved in making Bible study, home devotions, and Sunday worship a priority.

Evangelism calls/presentations

1. How do you usually come across prospects for evangelism calls?
50% are friends of members. 45% are walk-ins who happen to stumble upon us via the web, see our church sign, recently moved and looking for a church. 5% from planned outreach events and canvassing.
2. What other outreach tools/methods has your congregation used in recent years?
Web presence, mailings, post cards for members to invite friends to special services or events, fliers. We’ve held concerts (Koine, Branches Band, Spark & Echo). We’ve held “fun” events (Trunk or Treat, Teen Group babysitting nights, Scavenger Hunt, Outdoor Movie Nights, Bonfires, Canoe Outings, etc.). We’ve offered classes to help with Marriage, Finances, etc. We’ve had “special” services (Christmas Eve Candlelight, Easter Worship w/ egg hunt and breakfast, Reformation Festival with German food, etc.). We’ve had Evangelism Bible studies to equip our members for sharing the gospel one-on-one.
3. What methods (God’s Great Exchange, for example) do you use to conduct evangelism calls with prospects?
My first visit is usually a “thank you for coming” visit and I drop off materials and “goodies” (church magnet, Meditations, FIC, Church calendar, brochure). The second visit is a “get to know you” visit and then I’ll share the gospel and what our church is all about.

4. Has the presence of biblical illiteracy (or lack thereof) affected the way you have conducted your evangelism presentations? If so, how?

Sure. You have to take each situation on an individual basis. I've made visits to people coming with all sorts of different backgrounds. After I get to know them I try to "diagnose" where they're at and apply God's Word to their situation and understanding of Scripture.

Preaching and Worship

1. When you announce Scripture readings, do you mention the page number, rather than the chapter/verse reference?

No. I mention the chapter and verse. All of our lessons are printed out in full in the worship folder. Along those lines, when I'm in a Bible class and I've asked my people to look something up, I'll say something like: "Please open your Bibles to John 3:16. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans. John 3:16."

2. Do you normally use introductions with your Scripture readings? If so, what things do you mention in those introductions?

All of the time. It varies. Sometimes I'll give a historical background. Sometimes I show how it ties in to the theme of the week. Sometimes I'll explain an uncommon phrase or name. It all depends.

3. Do you normally take time to establish the historical context and circumstances of a given text during a sermon? If so, how much of the sermon do you devote to doing so?

If I am preaching on a narrative I do. And probably half of the sermon is telling the context, circumstances and story. If it is on one of the epistles, psalms, proverbs, etc. usually not as much. It depends on whether or not that historical context ties in with the theme which I am preaching on.

Teaching Bible classes

1. Are your Sunday morning classes more topical studies or studies on books of the Bible?

65% topical. 35% books.

2. Is there a written curriculum that you use for your Bible Information Classes, or do you use one of your own creation?

I've "stolen" and modified from several over the years.

3. How are the lessons of your BIC class arranged? (a brief outline will do here)

1. Sin

2. Grace.

3. Faith

4. Works

5. What is the Bible? and What is it about?

6. How does the Bible effect faith? and Tips for reading the Bible

- 7a. The Trinity
- 7b. Creation
- 8. Jesus Christ and his work
- 9. Baptism
- 10. Lord's Supper
- 11. Holy Christian Church, Fellowship
- 12a-c. Christian Living, 10 Commandments

Usually takes about 15 sessions to work through.

- 4. Does your BIC course teach the Apostles Creed or Ten Commandments first? Why?
Apostles' Creed. From my experience, it is easier for people to understand how they ought to live once they realize who God is and all that he's done for them.
- 5. Does your BIC course include a lesson on how to conduct personal Bible study?
Yes (see lesson 6)

Pastor #9: Matt Zimplemann at Cross Of Christ Lutheran, Boise, Idaho

General info and Biblical illiteracy

1. How long have you been serving in the ministry?
I've been serving for just over 10 years.
2. How would you define "biblical illiteracy"?
I've never used the term but would assume refers to a general deficiency in biblical knowledge or even the ability to read the bible with comprehension.
3. Based on your definition above, how "biblically literate" would you say your congregation is?
As a young (in faith) congregation, I would have to say the people I serve do not possess the storehouse of bible history and factoids that most LES graduates have. I would say, however, that our people's *comprehension* is very good – we have a fairly well-educated family of believers and their ability to read and understand clear biblical truths is at least average (the Holy Spirit's effectiveness work!)
4. How "biblically literate" would you say the area in which you serve is?
Not very. Our area is highly Mormon. Mormon's don't know their bibles very well – they don't need to. So verifying a truth for them in Scripture is often no verification at all. In order to witness to them you need a working knowledge of the Book of Mormon.
5. Based on your experience in the ministry, would you say people have become more or less biblically literate over the years?
Less biblically literate.

Evangelism calls/presentations

1. How do you usually come across prospects for evangelism calls?
Nearly every single prospect fits into one of two categories: 1) they have been invited through a friendship relationship by one of our members OR 2) a family who becomes connected through our PreK.
2. What other outreach tools/methods has your congregation used in recent years?
NA
3. What methods (God's Great Exchange, for example) do you use to conduct evangelism calls with prospects?
On the rare occasion we do something like that, I'd say some version of GGE. Frankly, we don't do very many. Our congregation is excited to bring people to meet their Savior. We really try to funnel everyone to our BIC's. The majority of the time we have our opportunity to really witness Jesus when they come to that class.

4. Has the presence of biblical illiteracy (or lack thereof) affected the way you have conducted your evangelism presentations? If so, how?

Yes. Using 'WELS shorthand' loses people in translation. We make an effort to assume nothing when it comes to Bible knowledge, making a concerted effort to use simple definitions.

Preaching and Worship

1. When you announce Scripture readings, do you mention the page number, rather than the chapter/verse reference?

No, but the verses are printed in our bulletins.

2. Do you normally use introductions with your Scripture readings? If so, what things do you mention in those introductions?

Yes. Background/context. How the reading ties into the theme. Our worship services tend to be didactic.

3. Do you normally take time to establish the historical context and circumstances of a given text during a sermon? If so, how much of the sermon do you devote to doing so?

Yes. Can't make any assumptions about biblical knowledge. Really depends on the text, but maybe a couple of minutes on context – more if OT.

Teaching Bible classes

1. Are your Sunday morning classes more topical studies or studies on books of the Bible?

Neither. We generally use Adult Christ Light as our Base Camp, sometimes taking three or four week 'day hikes' off the main path for a topical class or book of the bible.

2. Is there a written curriculum that you use for your Bible Information Classes, or do you use one of your own creation?

Our own.

3. How are the lessons of your BIC class arranged? (a brief outline will do here)

Lesson 1: Jesus' Resurrection – The Foundational Fact For Our Faith

Lesson 2: Jesus' Unique Message – Heaven, How To Get There, What's The Cost?

Lesson 3: Jesus' Unique Person – Why ONLY He Can Save Me!

Lesson 4: Faith – Where Does It Come From? (w/Review of Christian Denominations)

Lesson 5: The Bible – The Most Wonderful Book

Lesson 6: Baptism – A Wonderful Gift From Jesus For All Nations

Lesson 7: Lord's Supper – A Wonderful Gift From Jesus To His Church

Lesson 8: The Wonderful God Behind These Wonderful Actions (Creat. vs. Evol.)

Lesson 9: Christians Worship Their Savior Privately and Publicly (1, 3)

Lesson 10: Christians Are Careful With Their Public Praise (2 Witnessing, Fellowship)

Lesson 11: The Christian And Family Life (4, 6 Marriage, Divorce, Sexuality, Children)

Lesson 12: The Christian And Society (4, 5, 7, 8 Authority, Human Life, Our Neighbor)

Lesson 13: The Christian And Money (7, 9, 10 Blessings, Management, Cautions)

4. Does your BIC course teach the Apostles Creed or Ten Commandments first? Why?
Strictly speaking, we don't ever teach the Apostles' Creed. But to the spirit of your question, the first 8 lessons cover God's loving action toward us (Apostles' Creed) and the final 5 lessons cover our thankful response to Him (10 Comm).
5. Does your BIC course include a lesson on how to conduct personal Bible study?
Yes

Pastor #10: Andrew Schwartz at Christ the King Lutheran, Bremerton, Washington

General info and Biblical illiteracy

1. How long have you been serving in the ministry?
12 years
2. How would you define “biblical illiteracy?”
Not being able to find your way around in a Bible and having a lack of knowledge of general Bible History Accounts (and, therefore, doctrinal teachings too)
3. Based on your definition above, how “biblically literate” would you say your congregation is?
Around 50% literate.
4. How “biblically literate” would you say the area in which you serve is?
About 35% literate in my immediate 10 mile bubble area. State-population-wise, much less.
5. Based on your experience in the ministry, would you say people have become more or less biblically literate over the years?
The people I come into contact with are usually relatively high as they are searching for more answers from the Word, but overall as a country, less. I see that the most clearly right now as we see that 54% of Americans now find it not only okay, but even “Biblical” to be homosexual.

Evangelism calls/presentations

1. How do you usually come across prospects for evangelism calls?
Through visitors and our LES school.
2. What other outreach tools/methods has your congregation used in recent years?
Many Come/go events.
3. What methods (God’s Great Exchange, for example) do you use to conduct evangelism calls with prospects?
A hybrid version of GGE
4. Has the presence of biblical illiteracy (or lack thereof) affected the way you have conducted your evangelism presentations? If so, how?
No, people in general know they are sinful via the NNOofGod and most know at least “of” Jesus. To hear he’s the world’s true Savior is usually even better to them!

Preaching and Worship

1. When you announce Scripture readings, do you mention the page number, rather than the chapter/verse reference?
We don't have Bibles in pews. We print it in the bulletin (which usually keeps people, traditionally, from bringing their Bible's to church unless they stick around for Bible study- then they use their own.). Can't use page numbers anyways as they are different Bibles if they bring them.
2. Do you normally use introductions with your Scripture readings? If so, what things do you mention in those introductions?
Yes. Basic reading intro and law-gospel gems within them (also how it matches with theme of the day).
3. Do you normally take time to establish the historical context and circumstances of a given text during a sermon? If so, how much of the sermon do you devote to doing so?
Yup. As much time as it takes to adequately present it (usually around 2-5 minutes though)

Teaching Bible classes

1. Are your Sunday morning classes more topical studies or studies on books of the Bible?
Both 50/50 split
2. Is there a written curriculum that you use for your Bible Information Classes, or do you use one of your own creation?
Both but usually more 75/25 written to own.
3. How are the lessons of your BIC class arranged? (a brief outline will do here)
[See Attached] (Not attached on this paper!)
4. Does your BIC course teach the Apostles Creed or Ten Commandments first? Why?
AC as an introduction, Ten Commandments as introduction, then gets into creeds and 10 commandments in later lessons.
5. Does your BIC course include a lesson on how to conduct personal Bible study?
Yes

Pastor #11: John Vieths at Calvary Lutheran, Dallas, Texas

General info and Biblical illiteracy

1. How long have you been serving in the ministry?
21 years
2. How would you define “biblical illiteracy?”
Inability to recognize key characters and historical accounts in salvation history, as well as lack of familiarity with passages that have served as popular support for key teachings (John 3:16, Psalm 23, etc.)
3. Based on your definition above, how “biblically literate” would you say your congregation is?
At least 75% of my congregation has reasonable biblical literacy
4. How “biblically literate” would you say the area in which you serve is?
We live in a very “churched” area. My impression is that at least 40% of the people in our neighborhood have reasonable biblical literacy.
5. Based on your experience in the ministry, would you say people have become more or less biblically literate over the years?
People have become less biblically literate. Some mainline churches teach very little Scripture. More and more people come from homes in which regular church attendance was not the norm. Even many evangelical churches ignore the teaching of Bible history in its context, instead replacing it with “topical” sermons and Bible classes which fail to give people a real familiarity with the Bible itself.

Evangelism calls/presentations

1. How do you usually come across prospects for evangelism calls?
Families inquiring about our school and visitors to our Sunday services.
2. What other outreach tools/methods has your congregation used in recent years?
We hosted TCW teams each year between 2005 and 2009, canvassing 25,000 homes and conducting 7000 surveys at the door. During that time this provided us about 500 households on which we made follow up calls. We subscribe to a new homeowners list and mail between 10,000 and 15,000 postcards per year. We conduct a Soccer Bible Camp that attracts about 20 unchurched families annually. We have a float in the community’s July 4th parade and an information booth in the fair that follows.

3. What methods (God's Great Exchange, for example) do you use to conduct evangelism calls with prospects?

Sometimes we use God's Great Exchange. Sometimes I conduct a devotion in the home at the end of my visit based on a passage of Scripture like Romans 3 or Ephesians 2. Sometimes I try to discuss sin and grace based on some topic or question that has come up in the conversation.

4. Has the presence of biblical illiteracy (or lack thereof) affected the way you have conducted your evangelism presentations? If so, how?

I don't feel so obligated to give chapter and verse for "proof passages" that I reference in my presentation. People likely aren't in a position to check them in Scripture, anyway.

Preaching and Worship

1. When you announce Scripture readings, do you mention the page number, rather than the chapter/verse reference?

No. We mention chapter and verse, but we also print the entire service in the worship folder, including the lessons. As a result, the Scripture passages are printed for them in the order that they come in the service.

2. Do you normally use introductions with your Scripture readings? If so, what things do you mention in those introductions?

We use introductions, but try to limit their length to a sentence or two. We try to focus attention on the way in which the passage fits the overall theme for the day.

3. Do you normally take time to establish the historical context and circumstances of a given text during a sermon? If so, how much of the sermon do you devote to doing so?

Yes. I rarely take it for granted that people already know the context. I try to limit "background" to a paragraph or two in most cases—perhaps 300-500 words?

Teaching Bible classes

1. Are your Sunday morning classes more topical studies or studies on books of the Bible?

We try to have an even mix. We have two pastors, and often one is teaching a topical class while the other is teaching a book of the Bible.

2. Is there a written curriculum that you use for your Bible Information Classes, or do you use one of your own creation?

I use my own BIC, tailored for the kinds of issues that most often come up in our part of the country. It spends a little more time explaining things that might distinguish us from Baptists, less time explaining things that might distinguish us from Catholics. It also has sections that are meant especially for people for whom the very idea of "God" may be something new.

3. How are the lessons of your BIC class arranged? (a brief outline will do here)
 - 1) **Who is God—natural knowledge, revealed knowledge, Trinity, characteristics.**
 - 2) **What is man—original creation, fall into sin, sin’s effects**
 - 3) **Who is Jesus Christ—his person, active obedience, passive obedience, exaltation, “Christ”**
 - 4) **Where do I find God—“Hidden,” the Word/Means of Grace, Faith, the Bible**
 - 5) **Where does my life with God begin—What’s a Sacrament, Baptism, Why Infant Baptism, Baptism and daily life**
 - 6) **Where is my life with God nourished—Lord’s Supper, OT background of L.S., Close Communion**
 - 7) **Where does my life with God lead—Death, Jesus’ return, Judgment Day, Heaven, Hell**
 - 8) **What is my relationship with other Christians—Holy Christian Church, Visible Churches, Fellowship and Division**
 - 9) **Who really lives the Christian life—Gospel-powered rather than law-led Christian life**
 - 10) **How can I serve God (part 1)—Sanctification, Law, Commandments 1-3**
 - 11) **How can I serve God (part 2)—Commandments 4-8**
 - 12) **How can I serve God (part 3)—Commandments 9-10, Adiaphora and Christian Liberty**
 - 13) **What do I say to God—Prayer**
 - 14) **How do I use God’s gifts to me—Stewardship**
 - 15) **How does God take care of me—Creation and Providence**
 - 16) **How does God make my new life grow—Bible study in the believer’s life**
 - 17) **How does God’s goodness make me respond—Basics of Christian worship**
 - 18) **How does God make his family grow—Evangelism**
 - 19) **How does God speak on current issues facing his people—Life issues, Sexuality Issues, Roles of men and women, Lodge and Scouts, Antichrist**

4. Does your BIC course teach the Apostles Creed or Ten Commandments first? Why?

Mostly the Creed. Something of the Commandments is necessary, however, for lesson 2, We want to get to the gospel as soon as possible, thus the 2nd and 3rd Articles dominate the first eight or nine lessons. This is also where most of the distinctive things about Lutheran teaching come up. Lesson 2 deals with the historical fall into sin, mostly first commandment or first table of the law issues, so that the work of the Savior and of the Spirit in following lessons makes sense. We don’t reference the Ten Commandments as such in lesson 2, however. We deal with man’s rebellion and its effects on faith and love toward God, and love toward one’s fellow man.

5. Does your BIC course include a lesson on how to conduct personal Bible study?

It is included as part of lesson 16, which also deals with corporate Bible study.

Pastor #12: Steven Lange at Hope Lutheran, Louisville, Kentucky

General info and Biblical illiteracy

1. How long have you been serving in the ministry?
Since 1997 (15 years)
2. How would you define “biblical illiteracy?”
Unfamiliarity with the content (story, teachings, persons, events) of the Bible.
3. Based on your definition above, how “biblically literate” would you say your congregation is?
My congregation is about average. Some are very literate. Others not so much. We work hard in Bible Class and in sermons to increase biblical literacy by providing the background story to Bible passages and sermon texts that we use.
4. How “biblically literate” would you say the area in which you serve is?
Louisville is very Catholic and Evangelical. So, it is my feeling that many people think that they are rather literate biblically, but in reality they really aren’t.
5. Based on your experience in the ministry, would you say people have become more or less biblically literate over the years?
Less...Just watch Jeopardy! and wait for the Bible category to come up.

Evangelism calls/presentations

1. How do you usually come across prospects for evangelism calls?
Follow-up on worship guests.
2. What other outreach tools/methods has your congregation used in recent years?
We have used Parents’ Nights Out, Christmas for Kids, movie nights, church picnic, and many other events that help introduce us to the members of the community and allow them to get to know us.
3. What methods (God’s Great Exchange, for example) do you use to conduct evangelism calls with prospects?
I don’t have a set “script” that I follow. I listen to what people have to say and let their questions and statements guide how I present the law and the gospel to them at that time.
4. Has the presence of biblical illiteracy (or lack thereof) affected the way you have conducted your evangelism presentations? If so, how?
I can’t assume that people know about even basic people and events in the Bible. I always need to set the stage and introduce the background for the people and events I may talk to them about.

Preaching and Worship

1. When you announce Scripture readings, do you mention the page number, rather than the chapter/verse reference?

Our Scripture lessons are all printed out in the worship folder. In Bible class, I announce both the reference and the page number.

2. Do you normally use introductions with your Scripture readings? If so, what things do you mention in those introductions?

Yes, but I usually keep my intro very short: just one sentence to summarize the main point of the Lesson.

3. Do you normally take time to establish the historical context and circumstances of a given text during a sermon? If so, how much of the sermon do you devote to doing so?

Yes, definitely. How much of the sermon is devoted to this depends on the text. If it's a narrative text, I may take up a lot of the sermon describing the setting.

Teaching Bible classes

1. Are your Sunday morning classes more topical studies or studies on books of the Bible?

A mix.

2. Is there a written curriculum that you use for your Bible Information Classes, or do you use one of your own creation?

I mainly use Bible Classes available from NPH and CPH.

3. How are the lessons of your BIC class arranged? (a brief outline will do here)

I use Jon Buchholz's Basic Bible Christianity.

4. Does your BIC course teach the Apostles Creed or Ten Commandments first? Why?

Creed. I feel that people need the narrative of salvation before we can talk about how we live in response to that.

5. Does your BIC course include a lesson on how to conduct personal Bible study?

Yes.

Pastor #13: Peter Prange at Jerusalem Lutheran, Morton Grove, Illinois

General info and Biblical illiteracy

1. How long have you been serving in the ministry?

14 years (1998 WLS graduate)

2. How would you define “biblical illiteracy?”

In my experience, biblical illiteracy is normally the result of three factors. First, people don’t understand biblical words and concepts (e.g. justification, faith, sin, etc.). Second, they don’t know and appreciate the historical context of the books, Gospels and letters. Finally, they don’t understand or appreciate the proper distinction between law and gospel. Many Christians are biblically illiterate when it comes to all three.

3. Based on your definition above, how “biblically literate” would you say your congregation is?

I would estimate that 50-60% of my congregation is biblically literate when it comes to understanding words and concepts (i.e. they can sit down and read much of the Bible without an aid; they understand it). I would estimate that 25-35% of my congregation is biblically literate with respect to historical context. I would estimate that 10-15% of my congregation is biblically literate with respect to the proper distinction between law and gospel.

4. How “biblically literate” would you say the area in which you serve is?

The members of my congregation would be among the most biblically literate in our area. We live in a densely Roman Catholic setting, and Roman Catholics normally rank very low on the biblically literate scale.

5. Based on your experience in the ministry, would you say people have become more or less biblically literate over the years?

I don’t believe I seen any decline in my years of ministry, but there hasn’t been general improvement either. I certainly have worked hard to raise the biblical literacy rate in the two congregations I’ve served by emphasizing the importance of regular worship and Bible study.

Evangelism calls/presentations

1. How do you usually come across prospects for evangelism calls?

Our number one source of prospects is through our school and preschool. Our location is, unfortunately, not conducive to Sunday walk-ins

2. What other outreach tools/methods has your congregation used in recent years?
Flyers about church, school and preschool are regularly distributed in our community. Some door-to-door canvassing work that has not proven at all successful in “getting a foot in the door.” Involvement in community events. Recently began English-as-Second-Language classes for the community.
3. What methods (God’s Great Exchange, for example) do you use to conduct evangelism calls with prospects?
I have no set presentation, but God’s Great Exchange certainly serves as a model.
4. Has the presence of biblical illiteracy (or lack thereof) affected the way you have conducted your evangelism presentations? If so, how?
No. I pretty much have always assumed that, if I’m presenting the gospel for the first time to someone, that person is going to be biblically illiterate.

Preaching and Worship

1. When you announce Scripture readings, do you mention the page number, rather than the chapter/verse reference?
Complete readings are printed in the service folder for worship. In Bible study, I attempt to provide the same edition for every student so that I provide not only the book, chapter and verse but also the page number. I’m sure many people appreciate that, even if once upon a time they memorized their books of the Bible.
2. Do you normally use introductions with your Scripture readings? If so, what things do you mention in those introductions?
Most often, if I provide an introduction, I will do it for those readings that I’m not preaching on. But I attempt to make them very brief.
3. Do you normally take time to establish the historical context and circumstances of a given text during a sermon? If so, how much of the sermon do you devote to doing so?
Always. I normally set the historical context immediately after presenting my sermon theme (unless I have already done so in my introduction). I believe historical context is essential to a proper understanding of the text. Too much preaching and teaching in our circles shows a lack of appreciation for historical context. Taking words out of their context results in misunderstanding and misapplication of Scriptural principles.

Teaching Bible classes

1. Are your Sunday morning classes more topical studies or studies on books of the Bible?
My Sunday morning class is most often a study of Bible books, though I throw in some short topical studies. Ideally, I attempt to do topical studies on the basis of one or two books of the Bible (e.g. Christian freedom on the basis of Paul's letter to the Galatians or 1 Corinthians 8-11; "How Does the Christian Church Grow?" on the basis of Acts 1-12).
2. Is there a written curriculum that you use for your Bible Information Classes, or do you use one of your own creation?
I have developed my own Bible Information Class.
3. How are the lessons of your BIC class arranged? (a brief outline will do here)
**My eight-lesson BIC revolves around the Sunday morning Order of Service:
Lesson One – The True God and His Creation (Invocation)
Lesson Two – Our Sin and Our Savior (Confession of Sins)
Lesson Three – Jesus Is Our Redeemer from Sin and Death (Absolution)
Lesson Four – Our Faith-Relationship with Jesus Today (Gloria in Excelsis)
Lesson Five – Our Conversation with God (Word & Prayer)
Lesson Six – Holy Baptism and the Church (Creed)
Lesson Seven – The Communion of Saints: Communion and Fellowship
Lesson Eight – Jesus Will Come Again! Watch!
Each lesson is reinforced with a pithy Lutheran hymn that summarizes the lesson.**
4. Does your BIC course teach the Apostles Creed or Ten Commandments first? Why?
I do not have a lesson on the Ten Commandments per se. My goal is to first establish who God is, what he is like, how he has created us, and how "for all this, we ought to thank and praise, serve and obey him." Then in my second lesson I establish how we have sinned against him and one another, showing various examples from the Scripture (especially from Matthew 5) and concluding with Romans 1:18 – 2:1.
5. Does your BIC course include a lesson on how to conduct personal Bible study?
No, because I don't believe that personal Bible study will likely take place until a person is first involved in corporate Bible study. So I strongly encourage continued participation in congregational Bible study after the BIC is completed.

Pastor #14: Roger Sachs at 1st Lutheran, LaCrosse, Wisconsin

General info and Biblical illiteracy

1. How long have you been serving in the ministry?
45 years
2. How would you define “biblical illiteracy?”
Failure to understand the main teachings of the Bible and being ignorant of the most familiar stories of the Bible.
3. Based on your definition above, how “biblically literate” would you say your congregation is?
This question is more personal than congregational; I would estimate that 10-15% are “biblically illiterate.”
4. How “biblically literate” would you say the area in which you serve is?
60%
5. Based on your experience in the ministry, would you say people have become more or less biblically literate over the years?
Less biblically literate

Evangelism calls/presentations

1. How do you usually come across prospects for evangelism calls?
Personal referrals or friendship register
2. What other outreach tools/methods has your congregation used in recent years?
Newspaper ads, direct mailing, door to door canvass
3. What methods (God’s Great Exchange, for example) do you use to conduct evangelism calls with prospects?
We try to build a relationship with the person first.
4. Has the presence of biblical illiteracy (or lack thereof) affected the way you have conducted your evangelism presentations? If so, how?
No

Preaching and Worship

1. When you announce Scripture readings, do you mention the page number, rather than the chapter/verse reference?
No, our Scripture readings are printed in our bulletin.

2. Do you normally use introductions with your Scripture readings? If so, what things do you mention in those introductions?
Yes, a short explanation to help the hearer understand the lesson
3. Do you normally take time to establish the historical context and circumstances of a given text during a sermon? If so, how much of the sermon do you devote to doing so?
Only insofar as the historical context is pertinent to the theme. Usually a brief part of the sermon.

Teaching Bible classes

1. Are your Sunday morning classes more topical studies or studies on books of the Bible?
Sunday classes are usually topical. Other classes usually study books of the Bible.
2. Is there a written curriculum that you use for your Bible Information Classes, or do you use one of your own creation?
Most often we use “The Wonders of God.” It is helpful in overcoming “biblical illiteracy.”
3. How are the lessons of your BIC class arranged? (a brief outline will do here)
Creed, Lord’s Prayer, Commandments, Sacraments and Keys
4. Does your BIC course teach the Apostles Creed or Ten Commandments first? Why?
Creed (because that is the outline of the book) which I think is the best approach to Christian doctrine.
5. Does your BIC course include a lesson on how to conduct personal Bible study?
Not a lesson, but encouragement to do so.