

A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF ERIKSON'S DEVELOPMENT STAGES APPLIED TO THE GOSPEL OF MARK: A HERMENEUTICAL LENS FOR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Ben van Vuuren, PhD Student, Africa Nazarene University, Kenya.

Abstract

Erikson, as a psychologist, observed humanity over a life cycle and concluded that it can be defined in eight stages of psychosocial development. He was interested in the development of a person through social interactions and relationships. In this article Erikson's eight stages are applied as a hermeneutical lens to read the Gospel of Mark. The article does not argue for a new reading of Mark but to help Christians explore Scripture through different lenses. The eight stages are applied to the Gospel to seek equal stages but for a spiritual life. A Christian is a person spiritually born and in a relationship with Jesus Christ and who partakes with Him in Kingdom work. Relationships and social interactions are part of the narrative in Mark, emphasising the Identity of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Son of God. Reading Mark through this lens enlightens Mark's narrative and identifies the stages that need to be applied to spiritual development. The Christian's spiritual life is first to be identified with Christ, to follow Him and to ensure that the stages are met up to the end to look back over a life lived with integrity with all wisdom.

Introduction

Erik Erikson was a psychologist and was responsible for what is known as developmental theories.¹ He defined life as a cycle of eight stages that focuses on psychosocial development, which differs from Sigmund Freud's theory of psychosexual stages. Erikson was interested in how social interaction and relationships impact a person's development. He believed that each person reaches a point of conflict that must be faced and passed within each development stage. Conflict is described as an assessment at the end of a stage. The assessment replicates a conflict for the person who must overcome this conflict to be able to pass the related stage. Erikson says, "For man, to remain psychologically alive, must resolve these conflicts unceasingly, even as his body must unceasingly combat the encroachment of physical decomposition."² This is the crucial point for Erikson, where personal growth develops or fails. The developmental stages are related to the age of a person. The person will move through the stages; therefore, sufficient development must occur in each stage. Erikson's theory is well accepted and recognised within the psychological field.

Erikson's developmental stages are used to understand the development of a person throughout their life. He did not only present a theory but also wrote about several people to highlight his theories. Some were real and others fictional like Young Man Luther³ and Gandhi.⁴ Donald Capps is an Erikson Scholar and he also compared Erikson's work with the Beatitudes. He published several works about Erikson's theories in context of pastoral theology. Capps a

¹ Erik H. Erikson and Joan M. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, Kindle (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1998).

² Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, Kindle (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1980), 51.

³ Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1962).

⁴ Erik H. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1969).

Professor in Pastoral theory at Princeton Theological Seminary published “*Jesus the Village Psychiatrist*”⁵ where he looked at the ministry of Jesus and how He interacted with people and healed them, not just on a physical level but also mentally and emotionally.

The developmental stages are not limited to psychosocial development as it is also applied in recovery care for people with mental health conditions. Studies have been done to integrate recovery with psychiatric care. The scope of this article is not about psychiatric care, but it presumes that Erickson's model is used broadly even in mental care recovery and over a shorter period. Erikson's stages are understood over a person's lifespan; if people pass them well, they mature better.⁶ However, using the stages in mental care patients proves that it can be applied over a shorter span, as the objective is to meet the conflict and not the related age.⁷ For psychiatric patients, it is not about the age to move through the stages but passing the conflicts in each stage.⁸

Hetty Zock compares Donald Capps's work and indicates that Erikson's developmental model has also been used for many years in pastoral care.⁹ Fowler's book “*Stages of Faith*”¹⁰ is a comprehensive study of psychological structure compared to the six stages of faith. Analysing Erikson's work and applying it on different levels is not uncommon in these different disciplines as mentioned.

This article aims to use Erikson's eight development stages of life and apply them as a hermeneutical lens to the Gospel of Mark.¹¹ The intention is not to look for the psychosocial development of a person but the spiritual development of a person in a relationship with Jesus Christ. The argument is that Erikson observed the development of humanity and concluded that there are eight stages in a person's lifespan. So, if Erikson observed this, God created humanity accordingly. If eight stages can be identified for the psychosocial development of a person, are these not applicable to spiritual development as well? It all comes down to the identity of the Christian with Jesus. Identity can be understood in different domains; therefore, this focuses on the spiritual.¹² So, this article aims to answer this question: does Scripture and, in this article, Mark illustrate a model that can be used in pastoral care that focuses on a person's spiritual development?

⁵ Donald Capps, *Jesus the Village Psychiatrist*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

⁶ Johanna C. Malone et al., “Midlife Eriksonian Psychosocial Development: Setting the Stage for Late-Life Cognitive and Emotional Health.,” *Developmental Psychology* 52, no. 3 (March 2016): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039875>.

⁷ Malone et al., 1.

⁸ Suzanne E. Vogel-Scibilia et al., “The Recovery Process Utilizing Erikson's Stages of Human Development,” *Community Mental Health Journal* 45, no. 6 (December 2009): 405–14, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-009-9189-4>.

⁹ Hetty Zock, “Human Development and Pastoral Care in a Postmodern Age: Donald Capps, Erik H. Erikson, and Beyond,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 2 (April 2018): 437–50, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-017-0483-0>.

¹⁰ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, First HarperCollins paperback edition (New York, NY: Harper One, 1995).

¹¹ From here on “Mark” will be used.

¹² Päivi Fadjukoff, Lea Pulkkinen, and Katja Kokko, “Identity Formation in Adulthood: A Longitudinal Study from Age 27 to 50,” *Identity* 16, no. 1 (2016): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2015.1121820>.

We aim to accomplish this by using Erikson's eight stages as a hermeneutical lens to read Mark with psychosocial development in mind but apply it spiritually to understand spiritual development. The whole Gospel will be used as Mark intended for the reader to read the entire Gospel. This process can be done with any book and probably has different outcomes. The author chose Mark for this study “because his theological purpose is primarily to reveal the identity and meaning of Jesus as Messiah, Son of God.”¹³ Origen stated that the Gospel is “concerned with Christ Jesus, who is the head of the whole body of those who are being saved.”¹⁴ It is critical for a person to establish their identity; therefore it seems fit to review the Gospel for this reason.

Using Scripture as a case study is not a foreign practice. Jesus, through his ministry, quoted Old Testament passages and used parables so the people could understand. The Apostles in the early church used to narrate the Old Testament so people could understand. As mentioned above, Donald Capps used Erikson's stages in pastoral care. Mantor used the Book of Job to understand the importance of caring for sufferers.¹⁵ Wynkoop argued that the return to the language of Scripture was the answer to the credibility gap.¹⁶ The list can go on to give evidence of Scripture being used as a case study for Christians to understand God and us better. This article focuses on Mark helping the pastor, counsellor, or Christian to understand their spiritual life better and realise that the Word of God applies to all aspects of life. The purpose is not to present a model but to highlight and entice the reader that Scripture applies to all aspects of life.

Before studying the topic, it is essential to set the baseline for what spiritual means in this article. According to a Wesleyan interpretation of Scripture, any person born physically is a sinner. Through the grace of God, the person is convicted of sin and must choose to obey God by confessing and repenting of their sins. God forgives sins, and the Holy Spirit will confirm the forgiveness of sins, but also if the person is regenerated or, in other terms, becomes spiritual. Romans chapter eight defines two types of people: those living according to the flesh and those according to the Spirit. Paul wrote:

⁵ For those who live according to the flesh have their outlook shaped by the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their outlook shaped by the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For the outlook of the flesh is death, but the outlook of the Spirit is life and peace, ⁷ because the outlook of the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to the law of God, nor is it able to do so. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. Now, if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is your life because of righteousness. ¹¹ Moreover, if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from

¹³ K. E. Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2012), 31.

¹⁴ Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, eds., *Mark*, Rev. ed, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture 2 (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 2.

¹⁵ Abbie F. Mantor, “Caring for the Sufferers Among Us: Job 3 Through the Lens of Classical Rhetorical Theory and Modern Psychological Trauma Studies,” *The Asbury Theological Journal* 75, no. 2 (2020): 226–40, <https://doi.org/10.7252>.

¹⁶ Johan Tredoux, *Mildred Bangs Wynkoop: Her Life and Thought* (Kansas City, MO, 2017), loc1100.

the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit who lives in you. (Rom. 8: 5-11, NET)¹⁷

Spiritual in this article follows the premise that a person who has the Spirit of God is a Christian; they obey God and follow Him. They are spiritually alive and not dead in their sins. So, this article aims to help this person, even from an infant state, to understand the spiritual just as Erikson defines the development of the physical life.

Erikson's Eight Stages of Development

There are eight stages in Erikson's model of the life cycle theory of a person. His wife, Joan, added a ninth stage in 1997, which will not be added to this study.¹⁸ Here is a table of the eight stages identified by Erikson.¹⁹ The stages will be described under each heading.

Stage	Age	Conflict	Outcome
One	Infancy (birth to 18 months)	Basic trust vs Mistrust	Hope
Two	Early Childhood (2 to 3 years)	Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt	Will
Three	Preschool (3 to 5 years)	Initiative vs Guilt	Purpose
Four	School Age (6 to 11 years)	Industry vs Inferiority	Confidence
Five	Adolescence (12 to 18 years)	Identity vs Role Confusion	Fidelity
Six	Young Adulthood (19 to 40 years)	Intimacy vs Isolation	Love
Seven	Middle Adulthood (40 to 65 years)	Generativity vs Stagnation	Care
Eight	Maturity (65 to 90 years)	Ego Integrity vs Despair	Wisdom

Table 1 (Table is adapted for this article.)²⁰

The eight stages applied to the Gospel according to Mark

The article's methodology is to review Mark with the eight stages of Erikson as a lens to read the Gospel. The eight stages of the life cycle theory are then aligned with the spiritual life of a believer. The hermeneutical lens focuses on enlightening the spiritual principles for developing a person's spiritual life in a relationship with Jesus Christ. The syntonic quotient “supports growth and expansion, offers goals, celebrates self-respect and commitment of the very finest.”²¹ The conflicts in each stage must be met as the stages also build on top of the other. Erikson's first stage is trust, which is the cornerstone of the development of every person.²² Trust is the

¹⁷ Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible*, Second Edition. (Denmark: Thomas Nelson, 2019), Ro 8:5–11.

¹⁸ Erikson and Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, 107.

¹⁹ Malone et al., “Midlife Eriksonian Psychosocial Development,” 21.

²⁰ Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 128.

²¹ Erikson and Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, 107.

²² Erikson and Erikson, 48.

foundation of the spiritual life, and a person must continue to trust in the redemptive work of Christ.

Stage One: Trust vs Mistrust

The first stage of Erikson, or as he coined them, the “ages of man,”²³ is basic trust versus mistrust. This is the first stage, as the infant is born and starts to interact and form relationships with the parents and the people around the child. The Infancy stage (birth to 18 months) is where trust is the principle that must be obtained. The infant has only a few reflexes but is dependent on the parent.²⁴ The child must learn to trust the parent for caring and provision; even if the parent is absent, the child must learn to trust that the parent will return.⁽²⁵⁾

Trust is the capstone of Christianity. Each person must make a childlike decision to trust God to become a Christian. Trust in God is not just for acceptance but also for a continued relationship. The infant Christian must trust God. As with the physical life, the spiritual person must trust God for the provision and care. Erikson has defined the comparison between trust and mistrust as conflicts that must be met. In Erikson's terminology, conflict is the objective that must be met, which, in this stage, is trust. If the person mistrusts, there is a break in the relationship, and the conflict has not been met.²⁶

Mark starts the Gospel in the heart of a prophecy by establishing the identity of Jesus and quoting from the Old Testament.²⁷ This is significant as Mark uses the prophecy to introduce his characters, John the Baptist and Jesus. For the reader, this brings credibility as it indicates it is not fiction but what God is doing. John the Baptist is wrapped in all the aspects of an Old Testament prophet. He comes from a priesthood family; he stayed within the wilderness, and his clothes and food represent all the characteristics of an Old Testament prophet.²⁸ Mark uses John the Baptist to prepare the way of God. Origin applies this and wrote, "The way of the Lord must be prepared within the heart."²⁹ The early church did not deny an internal working from God according to Scripture. Oden proves that in the patristic period, exegesis was done to seek the truth in Scripture and obey it.³⁰ Mark presents the reader with evidence of trust in the characters. John the Baptist is significant in several aspects of the narrative. As a prophet, he is preparing the way of the Lord; he is proclaiming what the people need to do. Mark indicates that the people responded in numbers (Mk. 1:5). They did not only arrive to listen to John but obeyed, "People from the whole Judean countryside and all of Jerusalem were going out to him, and he was baptising them in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins." (Mk. 1:5) Many people responded to John's call, indicating God was at work.³¹

Mark introduces Jesus through the ministry of John. So many people responded to John that it is unimaginable that somebody could be more important than the prophet. Mark lays it

²³ Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, Kindle (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1993), 247.

²⁴ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 53.

²⁵ Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 249.

²⁶ Erikson and Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, 82.

²⁷ Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 44.

²⁸ Brower, 54.

²⁹ Oden and Hall, *Mark*, 2.

³⁰ Oden and Hall, *Mark*, xxix.

³¹ Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 54.

down that Jesus is so much more than John. It sets the scene for John to go before and prepare the way of the Lord. Jesus is baptised, and the voice from heaven is more impressive than the baptisms of all the other people. In the Mark account, only Jesus hears the voice from heaven (Mk. 1:11). The reader knows more than the audience. The voice identifies Jesus as the Son of God. There is much information here, but in a short space, the Isaiah prophecy is quoted with John, who fulfils it. As wonderful as the prophet is, he is no match for the One following him. The voice from heaven confirms that He is supernatural and victorious in the wilderness and over Satan (Mk. 1:12-13).

This establishes the first aspects of Jesus' identity and that all authority is given to Him. The question is, will anybody follow Him? The answer is yes; as Jesus starts His ministry, he proclaims: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the gospel." (Mk. 1:15) Jesus' call to repentance is a "turn to God and a radical change of mind."³² It is the calling to change the mind from the old and to trust in Jesus as the Son of God. "Jesus called Israel to return to covenant faithfulness and obedience."³³ The Christian can trust Jesus as the narrative unfolds from the Old Testament through the ministry of John the Baptist. The voice from God confirms that Jesus is the Son of God; he is victorious and worthy to be followed. The Christian can trust Jesus for spiritual care.

Zock confirms that trust is the cornerstone of Erikson's study.³⁴ Therefore, trust cannot be completed, but it is the foundation of further development. Mark establishes the identity of Jesus so that the reader may trust in Him and the narrative as it unfolds. The reader must trust Jesus, and they will find He is more faithful and trustworthy than a parent. Trusting in the care of Jesus then leads to the next stage of taking up some responsibility.

Stage 2: Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt

The second stage of Erikson's life cycle theory focuses on personal development and self-control. This stage is during early childhood in the region of 2-3 years of age. Children are developing from a stage where they rely on their parent's caregiving to become more independent. They are starting to make decisions and take basic actions in certain areas. The child develops in this stage to be more independent, which means a sense of autonomy.³⁵ The child starts to take personal control, which can lead to accidents. If the child struggles to overcome these accidents, it leads to shame and guilt. When the child develops control and overcomes accidents, it leads to more autonomy. This stage is about the child finding a balance between autonomy, shame, and doubt, leading to the child understanding their will.³⁶ This stage is about exploring autonomy but not fully owning it. There is much dependence still on the parent.

Mark's narrative continues and helps the reader to move on to the next stage in their spiritual development. The infant stage was about trusting in Jesus and being in a relationship with God. It also sets the tone for the relationship that Christians can trust Jesus as Lord. The

³² Ralph Earle, Sanner A. Elwood, and Childers Charles L., *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), 6:277.

³³ Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 66.

³⁴ Zock, "Human Development and Pastoral Care in a Postmodern Age," 439.

³⁵ Malone et al., "Midlife Eriksonian Psychosocial Development," 2.

³⁶ Erikson and Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, 82.

second stage focuses on how Mark indicates the development of autonomy. Christians must learn to think for themselves and act within well-defined parameters. An example of this stage is through the narrative of Simon's mother-in-law. When Jesus and the four men came from the Synagogue, they went to Simon's house. Simon's mother-in-law was ill, and "so they spoke to Jesus at once about her." (Mark 1:30) The development in this stage is for the person to become independent. Independence in Mark means something different. A person must think and act individually but solely depend on Jesus. For Mark, nothing is possible without Jesus. In the narrative, Simon turns to Jesus and tells Him about her condition. He thought for himself, but his hope and trust were in Jesus. This is a progressive step as Simon acted upon his beliefs and those he trusted. Simon's decision to talk to Jesus was wilful. The narrative continues with people bringing more ill and demon-possessed to the house of Simon. Mark uses the hyperbole "the whole town" (Mk. 1:33) to describe the people's response towards Jesus after the news has spread. The event with Simon's mother-in-law was the first healing in Mark, and now it escalates to establish that people can make wilful choices and depend on Jesus. It establishes autonomy for the follower but not without Jesus.

The subsequent narrative event takes place early the following day. Jesus leaves for an isolated place to pray. The disciples searched for Him, and when they found Him, they responded, "Everyone is looking for you." (Mk. 1:37) Jesus then suggested that they move on as He needed to go and preach in other towns. He preached in many synagogues in all Galilee, and a leper came to Him, beseeching Him, falling on his knees before Him, and saying, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." (Mk. 1:40) The same trust and action took place here that Mark emphasises; the leper also asks that the cleansing occur according to Jesus's will.³⁷ "Moved with indignation, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, I am willing. Be clean." (Mk. 1:41) Chrysostom states that "Jesus is not submissive to the law, but He holds the law in His hands."³⁸ The way Mark portrays Jesus indicates the deep care Jesus has for people. He is even willing to touch a leper with no concern. It was the opposite of how people reacted around a leper, but Jesus was different and was willing to cleanse him. Mark has taken autonomy a step further; from a personal conversation between Simon and Jesus, it has escalated to a public cleansing of the worst illness.

Mark also indicates shame and doubt; Jesus sternly warned and instructed the leper on what to do after he was cleansed. The leper did not listen to Jesus, he did the opposite. The consequences of the leper's action were that "Jesus was no longer able to enter any town openly but stayed outside in remote place." (Mk. 1:45) This narrative has an opposite energy, and the conflict point was not fully met. Mistakes will be made, and accidents will happen as a person seeks a balance between autonomy, shame, and doubt. Although Jesus was trusted for cleansing, He demanded more. The person must seek Him for healing, deliverance, and cleansing, but mostly, they must obey Him within the parameters He has set. Failing to do so has an impact even on the ministry of Jesus. Autonomy for Mark is not independence from God. It is all about Jesus and how a person can be an individual but depend on God and be part of His ministry and work. There is a shaping of the will that takes place here where the follower of Jesus decides if and how they will follow and trust in God. There is a second chance when Jesus returns to Capernaum, where He healed many people. The event of the friends who lowered a man down to

³⁷ Oden and Hall, *Mark*, 24.

³⁸ Oden and Hall, 24.

Jesus through the roof proof their actions but dependence on God. The next stage moves further as the believer realises their interaction with society and the world.

Stage 3: Initiative vs Guilt

The third stage of Erikson's psychosocial development is where children assert their power and control in the world in pursuit of new tasks. This stage takes place in preschool from 3-5 years of age. The child is self-aware, and social interactions are essential as children learn to lead and interact with others.³⁹ Those who fail will have guilt and doubt and struggle with initiative in a social setting. This stage aims to find the balance between initiative and guilt and how to work with others to achieve the purpose in this stage.⁴⁰

Trust in Jesus is the foundation for all believers as they realise their participation in Jesus' ministry. Mark sets the scene where the reader realises things will be different moving forward. Jesus was in the house of Levi, eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners; the disciples of John and the Pharisees came to Him. They wanted to know why the disciples of Jesus were not fasting (Mk. 2:14-18). Jesus answers them with several metaphors. He discusses a bridegroom (Mk. 2:19-20) repairing an old garment and concludes that new wine must be put into fresh wineskins (Mk. 2:21-22). Without explaining these metaphors' meaning, it indicates a change to follow. The old and traditional ways will be challenged as the new comes.⁴¹ Mark continues, as Jesus and the disciples moved through the grainfields, they began to pick the heads of grain. This was not allowed; therefore, the Pharisees confronted Jesus about the disciples' actions. Jesus reminds them of the actions of David but also states, "The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath." (Mk. 2:27) The narrative continues as Jesus also heals the man with the withered hand. Even as Jesus was in the Synagogue and the Pharisees sought evidence to accuse Him, Jesus continued to heal the man. Mark indicates how Jesus took leadership and interacted socially. After the event, Jesus left, and a multitude followed Him as He fled in a boat by the sea.

This stage comes to fulfilment when Jesus is not solely leading the way and ministering. "The disciples are called to be with Jesus, empowered by Him and on His mission."⁴² "He appointed twelve so that they would be with him and he could send them to preach, and to have authority to cast out demons." (Mk. 3:14) The conflict is met when the disciples need to step up, preach, and serve the communities. They had to find the balance between leading and working together. They are away from Jesus and the group and must take the initiative to work together for the greater good. Mark is helping the reader that the change that is taking place is that the follower must be part of the ministry of Jesus and work with others to be a disciple of Jesus. The ministry of the believer is in obedience and dependence on Jesus. He is Lord, and the good news that must be proclaimed is about Him. As Jesus allows His disciples to develop, they also grow and understand how they fit within the Kingdom of God.

³⁹ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 133.

⁴⁰ Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 253.

⁴¹ Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 89.

⁴² K. E. Brower, *Holiness in the Gospels* (Kansas City, Mo: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2005), 88.

Stage 4: Industry vs Inferiority

The fourth stage in Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is where a person must develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments and abilities.⁴³ They must keep up with people's requirements and grow to meet them socially and emotionally. This stage takes place from 6-11 years. This stage aims to help the person be competent in their actions and interactions with people.

Mark's narrative continues from the parable of the Sower, the seed, and the mustard seed in chapter four. All three parables are based on the principle of growth and fruition that must take place. None of the seeds can grow if they are not part of a system, just as a person is part of a larger society. This is seen in the continuance of the narrative where Jesus stills the storm (Mk. 4:35-41) and the exorcism of the Gerasene Demoniac. (Mk. 5:1-20) Many miracles, healings and teachings took place. (Mk. 5:21-6:6) Jesus again sends the twelve to minister to people. When they returned, Jesus requested they go with Him to a lonely place, but the people followed them. The feeding of the five thousand then follows. "When it was already late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is an isolated place, and it is already very late. Send them away so that they can go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.'" (Mk. 6:35-36) The disciples just returned from ministering to the people and are probably still talking about what took place, and now they want to send the people away than to meet their needs. Jesus responded: "You give them something to eat." (Mark 6:37) For Mark, it is primarily about the "unveiling of Jesus' identity."⁴⁴ Jesus is teaching them who He is and to meet the needs of the people as He feels compassion for them. (Mk. 6:34) As Erikson indicates, this stage is about being confident and interacting with people. Sending the people away will not help the disciples, but they must meet their needs. The disciples will be challenged but must meet the outcome by handling the task. In the second phase, Jesus is helping them understand that it is not about getting food but what they have in hand. This is a difficult stage as it forces a person to interact with others based on what is available from their sources. When this is viewed from a spiritual point of view, it is not what the disciple goes and collects but when dealing with who they are as a person. Jesus commanded the people to sit in groups, "He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. He gave them to his disciples to serve the people and divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied." (Mk. 6:41-42) The needs of the people were met with satisfaction and food remaining.

Mark chapter eight, the second feeding took place of the four thousand. This is almost a repetition as many similarities occurred to the first. There was a great multitude with Jesus for three days. They were without food, and Jesus was concerned about them. (Mk. 8:1-10) Mark narrates that Jesus felt compassion towards the multitude and did not want to send them away as He was concerned that they might faint on their way. (Mk. 8:3) As He conversed with His disciples, they responded, "Where can someone get enough bread in this desolate place to satisfy these people?" (Mk. 8:4) Jesus asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" (Mk. 8:5) They gave the seven loaves and the few small fish to Jesus, He thanked and gave it to the disciples to share with the multitudes. Mark states: "Everyone ate and was satisfied." (Mk. 8:8) This is a difficult stage in learning to trust in God, to do above their understanding, and to interact with and fulfil people's social and emotional needs. The reader cannot move past the fact that these

⁴³ Erikson and Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, 115.

⁴⁴ Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 176.

were miraculous events.⁴⁵ There is something for the reader to desire to be part of such a day where thousands were served food until satisfaction from only a few loaves and fish. Satisfaction is the underlying topic here, but it can also be imagined that the disciples were amazed and felt part of something bigger than just taking place through their hands. Although the disciples did not fully understand everything, they were confident in their actions to fulfil Jesus' commands. Development remains a process; the next stage is when Mark addresses understanding towards maturity.

Stage 5: Identity vs Confusion

The fifth stage in Erikson's theory is the development of a personal identity, which will continue to influence behaviour and development for the rest of a person's life.⁴⁶ The adolescent moves from the childhood stage under the parent's care towards autonomy and establishing a personal identity. Teens must develop a sense of self and personal identity to stay true to themselves. Failure to develop a personal identity leads to identity confusion. Erikson has identified two processes that help achieve a mature identity: exploration and commitment. For identity to come to maturity, a person must be able to decide according to the information provided but then commit to the decision.⁴⁷ Exploration and commitment should function together. If one lacks or both, a person will not pass the crisis aspect in this stage, and it will lead to identity confusion.⁴⁸ The Meeus-Crocetti model has three processes and adds reconsideration of commitments.⁴⁹

Erikson has placed a particular emphasis on this stage, with identity being the central issue.⁵⁰ This development stage is almost the axle in the development of a person. It is the stage where self and identity must be found; the old way of life is passing by.

Mark has the same tendency in the Gospel. There is a type of climax in his narrative. After feeding the four thousand, the Pharisees came to Jesus, seeking a sign from heaven. Jesus dismissed them, but the key in the narrative is the following conversation. Jesus told His disciples: "Watch out! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod!" (Mk. 8:15) The disciples were discussing among themselves that they had no bread. Their response was not in line with what Jesus said. There is a misunderstanding among the disciples.⁵¹ Jesus then noted what was happening and responded, "Why are you arguing about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Have your hearts been hardened?" (Mk. 8:17) Jesus continues to state that they have eyes and ears and still do not see or hear. He asked them, "Don't you remember?" (Mk. 8:18) Jesus reminds them of the two events when He fed the five thousand with five loaves and the four thousand with seven loaves. He asked them each time how many baskets were left.

⁴⁵ Brower, 176.

⁴⁶ Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 259.

⁴⁷ Cynthia Lightfoot, Michael Cole, and Sheila Cole, *The Development of Children*, 7th ed (New York, NY: Worth Publishers, 2013), 575.

⁴⁸ Leslie Swartz, *Psychology: An Introduction* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa, 2008), 89.

⁴⁹ Wim Meeus et al., "Identity Statuses as Developmental Trajectories: A Five-Wave Longitudinal Study in Early-to-Middle and Middle-to-Late Adolescents," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 41, no. 8 (August 2012): 1009, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-011-9730-y>.

⁵⁰ Zock, "Human Development and Pastoral Care in a Postmodern Age," 439.

⁵¹ Brower, *Holiness in the Gospels*, 90.

They did remember the number of baskets that were left. Jesus concludes this discussion, “Do you still not understand?” (Mk. 8:21)

Mark leaves his reader in a state of not understanding.⁵² In the stage of identity and confusion, understanding is an important principle. As noted, Erikson states that exploration and commitment must come together to develop a mature identity. The questions Jesus gave to the disciples addressed this exploration. The disciples had to understand before they could commit. Mark understands that he addresses the point that the disciples need to understand. This leads back to chapter one, where Jesus referred to the change of mind. Understanding is a cognitive aspect, so the disciples had to understand first. This seems unclear to them as it needs to be read with the following part.

Mark leads his reader into a phase that strongly focuses on discipleship.⁵³ In this event's climax, Jesus leaves His disciples with the statement of not yet understanding. Mark narrates the event where Jesus healed a blind man but had to touch him twice (Mk. 8:22-26). This is the only double-touch healing that occurs. Mark hints on the blindness of the disciples through the first healing of the blind man. As Jesus and His disciples continue their path, He asks them, “Who do people say that I am?” (Mk. 8:27) Jesus is helping his disciples to focus on what is essential. He helps them develop a mature identity by reminding them of the past, the feeding of the thousands. Jesus indicates that they focus on the wrong things; it is not about the number of baskets but about the One that provides the food. Therefore, He asked them what the people were saying. As disciples were conversing about what people said, Jesus struck to the heart of the problem, “But who do you say that I am?” (Mk. 8:29) The disciples went twice to minister to people, so the question is relevant. What did you tell people? Who am I? Peter answered, “You are the Christ.” (Mk. 8:29) The conflict of understanding is met, and the disciples now understand.⁵⁴ Jesus warned them to stay quiet about Him. “Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” (Mk. 8:31) This is the first revelation from Mark about what will happen to Jesus. In this first account of the coming events in the life of Jesus, He tells His disciples who is the Christ. Their hope in a Messiah was probably something else, but for Mark, it is the first time he is specific about who Jesus is as the Son of God.⁵⁵ In the development stage, the disciples and the reader gain knowledge, and exploration takes place. Knowledge and information are gained, and a decision must be made. Jesus also states why He mentioned that the disciples must be careful of the Pharisees, as they will be the reason for His suffering. Jesus is also very considerate in explaining what will come. He mentions that He will suffer, be rejected, and be killed but will rise again (Mk. 8:31).

Peter's reaction is well known, but it indicates that people respond towards the information they obtain. It is all part of the development process. Jesus is very firm in helping His disciples develop an identity where they will know and understand Christ. Jesus indicates that there are two parts: the human side but also the Godly side. Jesus exhorts Peter that he is not setting his mind on “God's interests but on man's.” (Mk. 8:33) In the second phase of developing their identity, Jesus moves on to the commitment. He summons the disciples but also the multitude.

⁵² Brower, 92.

⁵³ Brower, 92.

⁵⁴ Brower, 93.

⁵⁵ Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 31.

“If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” (Mk. 8:34) As information is obtained, a commitment must be followed to ensure the proper development of identity. The action that must be taken is based on who Christ is according to the description of Jesus. The past must be left behind as Jesus requests a denying of yourself. In this stage, the person moves from dependence upon someone else to a place of autonomy. However, autonomy looks different in the spiritual life. In physical development, an adolescent develops the self of independence and self-sustainment. In the spiritual life, Jesus calls His followers to find their identity in Him. As they deny themselves, they must take up their cross and follow Him. In Erikson's terms, following Jesus is the crisis here. The person must decide upon the information provided if they will commit and find their identity within Jesus. When exploration leads to commitment to Christ, spiritual identity will be obtained.

The way Jesus taught the disciples is a climax in Mark's narrative; they were quiet with no response, even when there was an emphasis on teaching and information. Mark continues by quoting Jesus about the importance of life, what a person values, and what is gained by the decision. Mark strengthens this argument by confirming Jesus's identity and authority. (Mk. 9:1-13) Jesus took Peter, John and James and went up a high mountain. Jesus was transformed before them and met with Moses and Elijah. Peter responded that they must build tabernacles so they could stay there. “(For they were afraid, and he did not know what to say.) Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came from the cloud, ‘This is my one dear Son. Listen to him!’” (Mk. 9:6-7) Mark is clear that as he draws on the past with Moses and Elijah, it all ends with Jesus. God comes and confirms to them that they need to listen to Jesus, and He is the beloved of God. It is amazing how everything and everyone disappears in a moment, and only Jesus is standing in front of the three disciples (Mk. 9:8).

Concluding this stage is the development of a spiritual identity found in Christ according to the will of the Father. Jesus asked them to keep quiet about the event as they came down. The disciples would not be the same after what has been revealed. The reader is taken along in the narrative and will not be the same as they better understand who Jesus is and how they may find their identity. Mark's Gospel focuses on illustrating the identity of Jesus, so it cannot be uncommon for the followers of Jesus to be identified with Him.⁵⁶ As the believer understands and is committed to their newfound identity, the next stage looks at relationships.

Stage 6: Intimacy vs Isolation

The sixth stage in Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is where people engage in intimate relationships and must share a life with another peer.⁵⁷ As people establish their identity and start to realise the needs of others, they must develop committed relationships. In this early adulthood stage, it is essential to establish relationships; if it fails, it leads to loneliness and isolation from society.⁵⁸ On the other hand, developing solid and committed relationships leads to the virtue known as love.

In the previous stages, Jesus taught the disciples to attend to the social and physical needs of others. As Jesus came down the mountain, they found some scribes arguing with the other disciples. A person out of the crowd spoke to Jesus about his son, who was possessed by a spirit

⁵⁶ Brower, 31.

⁵⁷ Vogel-Scibilia et al., “The Recovery Process Utilizing Erikson’s Stages of Human Development,” 407.

⁵⁸ Vogel-Scibilia et al., 411.

from his childhood that made him mute. The father was concerned, and as he explained the causes of the possession of the spirit, Jesus answered him, “If you are able? All things are possible by the one who believes. (Mk. 9:23) The father responds, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mk. 9:23-24) The central theme in this story is faith.⁵⁹

Jesus later explains to his disciples why they failed to cast out the spirit, “This kind can come out only by prayer.” (Mk. 9:29) In stage five, it was indicated that personal identity must be in Christ. If identity is not developed within Christ, there is confusion about the person's role and whom to follow. Mark states two sides here; as the four came down the mountain, the three disciples must also be mute about what they had seen. Mark indicates that their faith must mature and that prayer must take place.⁶⁰ It seems like the disciples became independent of Jesus in their ministry and, therefore, failed. There are two reasons: Jesus did not pray to exorcise the demon, and later, one of the disciples complained about a man casting out demons in Jesus' Name. Jesus did not have a problem here, which leads to the fact that because it was taking place in His name, the person was dependent on Jesus.⁶¹ This is the point Mark wants to emphasise here: identity and discipleship must be grounded in Jesus and not independence. As indicated in stage one, a person must trust God, and God can help them with their shortfalls, just like the father asked for his son. Jesus emphasises that prayer and fellowship with God is crucial to helping others. Mark emphasises that reliance and dependence on God are the keys to continuing in the spiritual life. Mark continues with Jesus, warning them not to stumble and end in hell.

Mark chapter ten begins with the question from the Pharisees “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” (Mk. 10:1) Jesus responds that Moses had allowed it because of their hardness of heart. “But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this cause, a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh; consequently, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, God has joined and let no man separate.” (Mk. 10:6-9) Jesus later told His disciples in the house that if the man or the wife remarries, they will commit adultery. This section carries much weight, but for the article's purpose, what God puts together, no person should separate. This also applies to the spiritual life and a person's relationship with God. If the person divorces God (if this can be stated), they will continue with adultery if they do not return to God. Mark states that a relationship is built on trust and prayer; there must be communication to stay in the relationship. Mark reminds his reader, as in chapter one, that an old life must be left behind and a new commitment must be taken up. When a person leaves their old life and enters a relationship with God, they become one.

Mark then takes his reader to the virtue of love with the narrative of the rich young ruler. This man came to Jesus and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mk. 10:17) Jesus reminded him about the commandments, and he positively responded that he upholds them. “As Jesus looked at him, he felt love for him and said, You lack one thing. Go, sell whatever you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” (Mk. 10:21) This event within the narrative is like a checkpoint for the reader. As Jesus told the disciples and people earlier, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” (Mk. 8:34, NASB) Mark indicates that Jesus loved this man. The request was not from the point of authority or to dominate but from a

⁵⁹ Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 250.

⁶⁰ Oden and Hall, *Mark*, 117.

⁶¹ Brower, *Holiness in the Gospels*, 95.

place of love. Jesus requested that the young man leave everything to follow him as he requested what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. For Mark, this relationship must be with Jesus as identity must be developed in Jesus. Therefore, Jesus felt love and compassion for this man. God always acts first, no matter the circumstances. An intimate relationship with Jesus requires an obedient response to His requests.

As the intimacy crisis is met in this stage, the person must form a healthy relationship with Jesus as they continue to confirm their identity in Him. This stage flows from the previous one; Identity must be found in Jesus to know how to have a proper relationship with others and what an intimate relationship looks like with God. If a person does not find their identity in Jesus, their role is confused, leading to isolation. From this stage about relationships, the next stage looks at the purpose of a person.

Stage 7: Generativity vs Stagnation

The seventh stage in Erikson's psychosocial development is where the adults become aware that they must create and nurture things that will outlive them as they strive to leave a legacy. It is a stage where accomplishment must be met, or it will fail, which means a life with little involvement in the world. Care is the virtue that must be met at this stage. As the stage builds on the previous virtue of love, it leads to a life of caring for family and the benefit a person brings to others in the world. Care for others and form relationships that must be cherished and protected so they can outlast the person.⁶²

The conversation with the rich man ended as he walked away; Jesus mentioned the difficulty for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God. (Mk. 10:23) The disciples were amazed, and He answered them again. The event concludes, but the main discussion here is that the rich man walked away from the opportunity to enter the kingdom of God. The stage transitions to the point of deep caring that people should follow Jesus, but it will cost them much. A person should not be short-sighted and only see earthly and temporary worthiness but look beyond this time to eternity. Jesus calls His disciples not to seek the methods of the world and what is known but to serve others, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk. 10:45)⁶³ The section concludes with the healing of the blind Bartimaeus. It can be noted that the healing of Bartimaeus is also a call to the better sight of the information given. The reader can relate that relationships are about serving others and following Jesus' example. It is also interesting that Jesus did not immediately heal Bartimaeus but requested him to come to Him and asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mk. 10:51)

This stage has several pointers in the following passages about caring and how people engaged with Jesus. First, Mark leads the narrative by stating the authority of Jesus and then the sad parable about the vine-growers (Mk. 11:27-12:12). This parable reflects the Old Testament prophets, and the Son is Jesus, who is also killed.⁶⁴ As this stage reflects on the virtue of caring and relationships, Mark indicates that humanity naturally is self-centred. Even though God sent many servants and His Son, humanity rejected them all and killed the only Heir. This reflects the failure to care for others and only live for themselves. Mark then indicates the conversations

⁶² Erikson and Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, 115.

⁶³ Brower, *Holiness in the Gospels*, 96.

⁶⁴ Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 303.

between Jesus and the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes (Mk. 12:13-40). These groups were supposed to be the followers of their God, but they were the ones who opposed Jesus the most.

There is also the tendency to see that the question to Bartimaeus fits this stage. It indicates that there are choices to think about regarding how we can leave a legacy and what our expectations of God are for our lives. The following section indicates disobedience and self-gain lead to death (Mk. 10:46-52).

Stage 8: Integrity vs Despair

The final stage, maturity, occurs during old age in the 65-year-old age range. Joan added the ninth stage in the late 1990s after this stage and reflected on life from age 90 onwards.⁶⁵ In the eighth stage, the person looks back on their life and reflects if they had achieved their goals as planned. As Erikson describes it, fulfilling the crisis brings a sense of integrity and satisfaction. On the other hand, the person who reflects on their life and does not reach satisfaction is disappointed, bitter and in despair.⁶⁶

For Mark, it is the same late in the Gospel. As Jesus is the central message, it is not unfamiliar that this stage focuses on Him. Mark chapter twelve concludes with how Jesus observed the widow who placed two copper coins in the treasury at the temple. Jesus stated, “This poor widow has put more in the offering box than all the others.” (Mk. 12:43) because she had put in all she had. In the previous section, Mark reflected on Jesus' warnings against the religion and the practice of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes, how they would receive greater condemnation, and how people should not follow their example. Mark concludes by saying that Jesus observed the people as they placed money in the treasury and states that life should be like hers, that you must give all you have to God and not only your surplus. Mark draws a contrast between the woman who gives all she has to God and the Pharisees who seek to kill. It reflects a life of satisfaction against a life of despair.

Mark then reflects on the coming things and the return of Jesus (Mk13:1-37). The following section is the warning of the things to come and how Jesus warned his disciples to be alert day and night. The prophecies were about the near future for Jerusalem and the expected second coming of Jesus. It entails life events as they unfold and, therefore, fit for this stage. Mark turns to the last supper of Jesus with his disciples (Mk. 14:22-31). The Passover is a time of remembrance of when God delivered Israel from Egypt.⁶⁷ The time is known to remember the past and the provisions of God. As Jesus sat with His disciples, He said, “I tell you the truth, one of you eating with me will betray me.” (Mk. 14:18) The response from the disciples indicates a time of reflection and even questioning that they might be the person. The supper concludes with Peter stating that he will lay down his life for Jesus, although Jesus assured him that he would deny him three times in the same night.

As the narrative moves to the Garden of Gethsemane, it is here that the three loyal disciples cannot stay awake and keep watch. Jesus found them sleeping several times as He went to pray. Jesus asked them, “Are you still sleeping and resting?” (Mk.14:41) This calls for evaluating priorities in the reader's life. It challenges the disciples and the readers to see if they are

⁶⁵ Erikson and Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, 107.

⁶⁶ Erikson and Erikson, 64.

⁶⁷ Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 347.

following Jesus and can look back over time with satisfaction or much despair. Jesus is in such agony and trouble in His soul, but His close disciples are sleeping and resting; it challenges the reader to be part of this battle.

The betrayal of Jesus and His appearance before the high priest, chief priests and elders take centre stage in the narrative (Mk. 15:1-21). Mark describes that Jesus could not be accused of anything as he stood before them. His only response to them was that He was the Son of God. As Jesus is on trial, Mark indicates that Jesus is alone with only Peter in the background, standing by the fire with servants and observing. Peter denies knowing Jesus to a servant girl but does not walk away. As the rooster crowed, he began to weep, disappointed that he had denied his Lord. As this stage is about integrity, Mark calls this into question as Peter was firm that he would die for Jesus, but he could not stand firmly before a servant girl.

Jesus was brought before Pilate and could not be accused of anything. His only response was that Pilate said He is the King of the Jews (Mk. 15:2). The narrative unfolds as the people reject Jesus as they want Barabbas to be released. Jesus is sent away and scourged and is led to be crucified. Mark gives an account of the event of Jesus in the palace with the guards and the mockery. Through all these events in the night, Jesus was quiet and did not say anything. It reflects the humility and the scale of sin against the Son of God. As Jesus hung on the cross, Jesus said: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mk. 15:34) before he gave his last breath.

Mark mentions two men who were not Jesus' disciples but played an essential role in the last events. The first was Simon of Cyrene, that helped Jesus carry His cross as His disciples were not in sight. Secondly, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus to bury Him (Mk. 15:42-47). Mark calls the reader to take stock of their lives and evaluate their relationship with Jesus. Is it the glamour of walking with Jesus and, when the trials come, denying the Lord, or is it the bravery of Joseph to stand before Pilate and request to receive Jesus or to be known as the man who helped Jesus bear His cross?

As the resurrection unfolds in the Gospel, it is embedded with doubt and unbelief. As the women visited the tomb, they found it empty with a man instructing them to go and tell the disciples that Jesus had risen and was in Galilee; they walked away afraid and did not tell anyone. When Jesus appeared to Mary Madelene and two other disciples, they reported it to the disciples and did not believe them.

The Gospel concludes when Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples, He reproached them for their hardness of heart and unbelief because they responded to the others who told them Jesus had risen. Mark then concludes Jesus' sayings with the command, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mk. 16:15) This is what they must do and what Jesus expects of them.

This stage is physically late in a person's life, but it is not the same spiritually. Capps's work in pastoral care indicates that Erikson's stages can be applied to any age and gender. Believers should become spiritually mature and continuously evaluate their lives. The command to go and preach the gospel is applied to the life of a Christian. It is the command that must be observed throughout the believer's life. Obeys the command and let Jesus be the subject of life where the believer can come to the end of life and state that a life was lived with integrity and fulfilment because Jesus is worthy and the One they followed.

Conclusion

Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development are used as a hermeneutical lens to read the Gospel of Mark with an emphasis on the spiritual development of the Christian. Scripture applies to all aspects of life and can be used as a case study or a different reading method to help Christians understand Christ and themselves better. Christianity is a life of obeying and following Christ, and this article indicates that a different way of reading Mark can help the Christian to develop through different stages. These stages are not related to age but about meeting the conflict in each stage. Erikson analysed humanity over a lifespan to reach this conclusion. Therefore, it can be agreed that God created humanity according to his theory. A person must be spiritually born to become a Christian, and it also makes sense to think about spiritual development in the same sense as physical and psychological development.

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