

**THE CROWN
AND
THE CROSS**

A study of Mark's Gospel

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A Study of Mark's Gospel

A resource of Parkview Church

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New Bible Commentary

Editors Gordon J. Wenham, J. Alec Motyer,

D.A. Carson, and R. T. France

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Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions

Edited by Arthur Bennett

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Dear Parkview family,

It's with great joy that I get to introduce you to the Mark Study Guide. I have enjoyed the opportunity to dig into this magnificent Book and marvel at Jesus as He confronts religious leaders, performs powerful miracles, and patiently trains His disciples. I also need to give a special thank you to Thomas Hoak who served as an intern at Parkview this summer. He spent many hours working on the study guide you hold in your hands, and we are grateful for his hard work and insightful mind.

I hope the 12 weeks we spend in Mark together is fruitful and life changing. Remember God's Spirit is alive in you and our church family! Let's expect Him to show up in our study and discussions, and learn how to be sensitive to His conviction and subtle promptings.

One of the consistent goals of this study guide is to encourage you towards concrete application of God's Word. It's become so easy to fall into "information transfer mode" where we bounce from study to study and don't allow God's Word to confront us, grip our hearts, and change our lives. James warns Christians in the first century of a similar danger when he calls them to "...be doers of the Word, and not hearers only..." (James 1:22) We have tried to create space for reflection and discussion around applying God's Word personally and as a Community Group.

I will be praying for you, and trusting God's faithfulness to call us upward in the faith and to be gracious to us in our failures.

*Blessings,
John McHale
Community Groups Pastor*

How To Use the Study Guide

The study guide you hold in your hands is written for community, it's not intended for individual study. We believe the Bible calls us to live all of the Christian life in community with other believers. People who will inevitably become your greatest resource in learning what it looks like to radically follow Jesus. Our hope is this season of study in Mark would be a catalyst for a new season of obeying God's Word and discovering the powerful presence of Jesus in your life.

Individual Studies

Each week comprises three individual studies. The first one will cover a larger section of Scripture and the other two will focus on specific passages from within the larger section for more intensive study. We recommend working through all three studies during the week. The more you dig into the Word during the week, the more sensitive you will be to God's Spirit, and the greater blessing you will be to your Community Group.

One of the primary goals of this study guide is prioritizing application of God's Word. There will be a consistent opportunity to think through practical, concrete ways to apply the Scripture throughout this study. Take time to pray, reflect, and journal. Studying God's Word should change your life! He calls us to be doers of the Word, not simply hearers (James 1:22).

Going Deeper Sections

Throughout the individual studies there will be sections marked off for more in-depth study. It may be focused on theology, geography, or a theme in the story.

Community Group Discussion

At the end of each week there is a guide for a Community Group discussion. Please use this guide at your discretion. If you're a leader, feel free to use what is helpful. There is also a help in the Appendix called "Guidelines for Leading a Discussion." It's always important to plan and to be sensitive to God's Spirit as you lead and participate in the discussion.

Application for the Heart and Life

Within the Community Group Discussion guide there is also a section geared towards application for the heart and life. True life change is born when our broken hearts find the hope and healing power of the Gospel in the Word. Formation Groups are an opportunity to be open and honest about doubts, sin struggles, and battles with suffering. As sinful people, we are all a work in progress and desperately need Jesus.

Fight hard to create a space of safety and grace in your Formation Group, and be the first one to authentically share. Then, fight to give people Jesus by denying the temptation to be a problem-solver. You can't fix a person's brokenness, only Jesus can.

Introduction

Gospel of Mark

Read the following excerpt from the New Bible Commentary and the ESV Study Bible.

Date

Mark's Gospel was probably written quite early, perhaps between AD 60 and 70, i.e. only about thirty years after the death of Christ. That would put it around the time of the deaths of Paul and Peter, which we think took place about AD 64, and just before the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. Although it would not matter if it was written later, this pre-70 date would fit better with what early Christians said about the Gospel and also with what the Gospel itself says. For example, in Mk. 13 Jesus prophesies the fall of Jerusalem, but there is no hint in the text that the prophecy has been fulfilled by Mark's time.

Author

The book was probably written by the John Mark of whom we read several times in the New Testament (e.g. Acts 12:12). We have to say 'probably' because, as in so many other cases, we cannot be certain. Although the Gospel itself nowhere says that it was written by Mark (the heading at the beginning is not part of the Gospel but only its 'title page'), the early Christians had no doubts about it. John Mark was not a famous figure like Paul or Peter, so there does not seem to have been any good reason for his name being given as author unless it was so. He was a younger co-worker at different times with Paul, Barnabas (his relative; Col. 4:10) and Peter. This last link may be important. John Mark probably lived in Jerusalem, where he would have known many of Jesus' followers, (though he was too young at the time to have been a follower himself). If the church in Jerusalem met in his mother's house (see Acts

12:12), it is possible that the Last Supper was held there. However, even without this, John Mark would have been a very valuable early witness to what Jesus said and did, especially during his last week.

The Influence of Peter

The early church believed that Mark got many of his facts from Peter, for they knew that Mark himself had not been a disciple of Jesus during his lifetime. We cannot prove this point, but we do know that both Mark and Peter were together in Rome in later years (1 Pet. 5:13). We also know that Peter was intending before his death to make a permanent record of his memories of Christ (2 Pet. 1:15). Most of the early church fathers believed that Mark's Gospel was this record. Certainly there are many details in the Gospel that are best explained as personal memories of Peter, e.g. descriptions of incidents at which only Peter, James and John were present. Another possible clue is that the Gospel is very uncomplimentary to Peter, pointing out all his faults and failings. As Peter later became such an important man at Rome, it is hard to see how these could have got into the Gospel unless Peter himself had insisted on it.

Place of Origin

If Peter was the source for the Gospel, it is very likely that it was produced in Rome, where Peter was almost certainly martyred in AD 64. Most of the early records suggest Rome, or at least Italy, as the place of origin, though some suggest Alexandria. Rome was a sprawling city with a population of several millions. It had all our familiar problems of slums, pollution and communications. Mark's background was very close to ours: that makes his book even more relevant today.

The Structure of the Gospel

Mark's Gospel is not just a collection of sayings and doings of Jesus with no particular plan or connection. If you read Mark through at one sitting, you will see this. It has a definite plan and outline, and the commentary shows how the different

parts fit together. In the first part Jesus has a wide ministry in which he does many miracles. In the second section, he deliberately restricts himself to his own followers and teaches them. The last part (a third of the book) deals with the final week in Jerusalem, including Jesus' trial, death and resurrection. Much of Jesus' teaching centered on the kingdom of God. There is also a strong element of kingship in Jesus' teaching about himself as it emerges gradually until we find him tacitly accepting the title 'King of the Jews' from Pontius Pilate. In the commentary on Mark, therefore, hindsight has sometimes been used to present Jesus as king, inaugurating his Father's kingdom in a royal manner. This is one way of interpreting the unfolding story.

Purpose of the Gospel

It would seem that Mark had more than one purpose in mind when he wrote his Gospel.

1. To make the good news accessible to Gentiles. Rome was a Gentile city, though naturally there were many Jews there as well, drawn by trade and business. To judge from Paul's letter to the Roman Christians, the church there contained both Gentiles and Jews, and feelings probably ran high between them at times. A Gospel produced in and for such a 'mixed' church would have to explain carefully Jewish words and customs, so that the non-Jewish readers could understand. That is exactly what Mark's Gospel does and in that sense it is a Gospel for the non-Jew, the Gentile, the outsider. This also explains why Mark does not quote nearly as much from the Old Testament as Matthew does. Mark's Gentile Christians would not have known the OT as well as Jewish Christians, nor indeed would they have had the same interest in it.

2. To encourage those facing persecution. Rome, being the imperial capital and therefore directly under the eye of central government, was the very place where persecution was most likely to occur. We know both from the New Testament (Acts 18:2) and from Roman history that Jews had suffered persecution at Rome even before Christians had. We also know from Roman writers of the great persecution of Christians at

Rome under Nero about AD 64. Many Christians, probably including Paul and Peter, died for their faith at this time. Mark's Gospel, with its probable background in Rome, seems to have been aimed at preparing Christians, whether at Rome or elsewhere, for future persecution. It does this by telling of Christ's suffering and of how he had foretold similar suffering for his followers. In other words, it was written to encourage a minority church in a hostile environment, and because of this it speaks to and encourages many today.

3. To defend the faith. Mark could be described as an apologist for the Christian faith. Like Luke in Acts he wanted to show that Christians were good citizens of the Roman Empire, not revolutionaries, and that any fair-minded Roman official would see this at once, as would ordinary people, not blinded by prejudice. Mark makes clear that in the case of Jesus, the charges that he was a rebel against Rome were trumped up and completely false. Mark wants to explain the true nature of Christianity and remove false ideas about it that might hinder evangelism. This too is an important task before the church today, both in countries where other great organized religions coexist (and Christians are sometimes at risk from jealous 'fundamentalist' religious leaders) and in so-called 'Christian' lands, where there is pagan ignorance and indifference.

4. To explain the significance of the cross. Mark is anxious to avoid not only political but also religious misunderstanding, which was a far more serious hindrance when preaching the Gospel, his great task. He makes it clear that the death of Jesus was not a tragic accident but part of God's plan from the start, and that Jesus not only knew this but also told his disciples of it. True, Mark shows the disciples as being blind to this until after Jesus' death and resurrection, but that is another matter. Mark, unlike Paul, does not explain in detail, except for one or two places, why Jesus had to die. He is, however, clear that the cross was God's age-old plan of salvation, even if he does not quote as much from the OT as the other Gospel writers do, to prove the point. That God's way for the establishment of his rule on earth should involve the death of the Messiah, his chosen one, was a hidden and

mysterious plan, and none but Jesus saw it at first. That seems to be the meaning of the phrase 'the mystery of the kingdom of God' in Mk. 4:11. Even people who admired Jesus as a miracle-worker or even saw him as a prophet could not see this. That God should choose to bring in his kingdom through the shameful death of his chosen servant was a great stumbling-block to many, both Jews and Gentiles, who listened to the preaching of the early church. Today it is still a problem for some. For example, Muslims find it a great stumbling-block that God should have allowed such a good man, and indeed such a prophet, to die such a terrible death.

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

Though Mark wrote from Rome, the Gospel of Mark was composed for the wider church as the record of the apostolic testimony of Peter. Even during the early Patristic period, Gentile Christians were frequently mentioned as the recipients of this Gospel. Mark addresses an audience that is largely unfamiliar with Jewish customs. He intends to familiarize them with those customs, because only then will they understand the coming of Jesus as the culmination of God's work with Israel and the entire world.

Theme of Mark

The ultimate purpose and theme of Mark is to present and defend Jesus' universal call to discipleship. Mark returns often to this theme, and as the narrative unfolds he categorizes his main audience as either followers or opponents of Jesus. The outline demonstrates that Mark's central effort in presenting and supporting this call is to narrate the identity and teaching of Jesus. This fact implies that discipleship for Mark is essentially a relationship with Jesus, not merely following a certain code of conduct. Fellowship with Jesus marks the heart of the disciple's life, and this fellowship includes trusting him, confessing him, taking note of his conduct, following his teaching, and being shaped by a relationship to him. Discipleship also means being prepared to face the kind of rejection that Jesus faced.

Week One

DAY ONE

Mark 1:1-15

READ Scripture

Before we begin, pray for God's enabling power. Only his powerful Spirit can open our eyes and soften our hearts to behold the wonders of His Word. Ask him to do so now.

Read the passage below slowly and thoughtfully. Engage with the text: underline important words and/or circle verses or phrases that jump out at you.

Mark 1:1-15

¹*The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

²*As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,*

*"Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way,*

³*the voice of one crying in the wilderness:*

*'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'"*

⁴*John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

⁹*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit*

descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

¹²The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, ¹⁵and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.”

STUDY Scripture

#1 As you observe what is happening in this passage, what grabs your attention?

#2 John the Baptist (v.4-11) plays an important role in the beginning of the Jesus story. What does the prophet Isaiah say about John’s ministry?

#3 Notice the verses that discuss the Holy Spirit, look at v.8, 10, 12. What is the Spirit doing in Mark 1:1-15?

#4 According to Jesus, what is the Gospel message? (v.14-15)

REMEMBER Scripture

➔ What is a truth God taught you in your study that you would like to remember and apply to your life? How will you practically remember this truth? Who are you going to tell?

Week 1

DAY 2

Mark 1:9-13

READ Scripture

Before we begin to study God's word, consider this promise from Isaiah 55:10-11:

*"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

Meditate on this promise about the power of God's Word and ask in prayer that He would exert that kind of power on your life as you meet with Him through His Word today.

Mark 1:9-13

The passage that we're studying today is only five verses long, so take some time to read it through at least five times.

⁹*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."*

¹²*The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.*

STUDY Scripture

#1 Write a two sentence summary that tells the facts of the passage in a condensed form. Can you do it without looking back at the passage?

#2 Look back at Mark 1:4-5. What kind of baptism was John calling all of Israel to submit to? What were they doing as they were baptized?

#3 In light of what John was proclaiming and what people were doing down by the Jordan River, why is it strange that Jesus gets baptized?

Going Deeper

This passage is our first real introduction to Jesus. Any other book describing a Spiritual hero would begin with him performing a feat of strength or displaying divine wisdom. Instead, we see Jesus receiving a baptism that is for sinners. So, why is Jesus' introduction so different from what we would expect?

Because his kingdom is so different. In Jesus' kingdom, service comes before status, humility before honor, cross before crown. "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Jesus is baptized by John, who just a few verses earlier told us that he wasn't even worthy to untie Jesus' sandals! Jesus undergoes baptism in fulfillment of God's plan for salvation and to show that he is a part of Israel. In fact, he is the only 'true' Israelite, the only one who didn't really need baptism. But he received it in solidarity with the rest of Israel and therefore demonstrated Godly humility but also made himself eligible to be the legitimate Messiah of Israel.

#4 What does this passage tell us about Jesus' relationship with God's Spirit? (Hint: look at the places in the passage where the Spirit is mentioned in the text and note the actions that accompany His mention).

#5 What does this passage teach us about Jesus?

Week 1

DAY 3

Mark 1:14-15

READ Scripture

Before you begin, ask God to give life through His Word as you study it today.

Mark 1:14-15

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.”

Since this passage is short, spend some time really soaking in it. Before you move on to the STUDY Scripture section, you should almost be able to repeat it from memory.

STUDY Scripture

#1 Vs. 14 tells us that Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel, the “Good News” of God. When we think of the “Gospel”, we tend to think of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins and being resurrected on the third day. But clearly Jesus wasn’t announcing that future event. What does this passage tell us about the Gospel that Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming? (Use v.15)

#2 What does the word ‘repent’ mean? How would you answer this question if it was asked by someone who had no knowledge of the Bible?

QUOTE:

“Repenting means experiencing a change of mind that now sees God as true and beautiful and worthy of all our praise and all our obedience.” -John Piper

#3 When we read certain words in the Bible, it’s easy to think they have the same meaning that they have today. When we say we ‘believe’ something, we could mean that we have true faith in it, but we also say that we ‘believe’ in the Hawkeyes or in Science.

In this passage, Jesus calls people to “repent and believe in the Gospel.” What does the Bible mean when it calls us to ‘believe in the Gospel?’

LIVE Scripture**Action Item: Mission**

This passage mentions the important idea that “the time has been fulfilled.” Jesus waited for the right time to proclaim the Gospel of God. 2 Corinthians 5:20 tells us that we are “ambassadors” for the Kingdom of God. Like Jesus, we represent and manifest God’s reign on earth, proclaiming the Gospel to all.

However, while Jesus encountered a ‘prepared’ nation of Israel (who had a knowledge of God from the Old Testament), we encounter a very different scenario. Knowledge of the Bible in

Iowa City area is among the least Bible-minded cities in the U.S. (<https://www.barna.com/research/2016-bible-minded-cities/>), and misconceptions and lies about God abound. Even the word “Jesus” conjures up wildly unbiblical notions of a fair-skinned, free-love, human teacher. This means that proclaiming the Gospel to those around you will involve some of what John did- ‘preparing the way.’ There are important questions to clarify, lest the Gospel be misheard and misunderstood. For example, who was Jesus? How can we know that the Bible is trustworthy? Why did Jesus have to die?

Think and journal below:

➔ What is the spiritual climate in your workplace? Among your unbelieving friends? What misconceptions do they have about God?

Pray that God would give you opportunities to discuss what you believe and why you believe it. Pray that God’s Spirit would give you the words to say and the eyes to see those opportunities. And most of all, pray that God’s Spirit would pour God’s love into your heart (Rom. 5:5) so that you can show that same love to those who are not yet living under the true freedom of the rule of King Jesus.

➔ Who is someone in your life that doesn’t know Jesus as the King of his or her life?

Pray this week that God would lead you to take the 'next step' in relationship with that person- even if it's just as simple as striking up a friendly conversation to show you care.

Week One

COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION

Remember to make the discussion accessible

- 1) There may be unbelievers in your midst. Even if someone is well-versed in the Bible and attending church doesn't mean God has awakened their heart to their sin and need for a Savior.
- 2) There may be young, immature believers in your midst. Don't assume people understand simple concepts. Continually prod the group for definitions, especially definitions in everyday language. This exercise is even helpful for believers, so even if you know the group is mature in Christ it is still a good practice and helps people prepare for spiritual conversations with unbelievers.

Begin your discussion by asking the group about their individual study of God's Word and hearing God's Word preached. The Spirit is working among you! Spend some time asking the group about what God is teaching them. If this is challenging, take some time to remind the group about God's abiding presence in them through the Holy Spirit to help them understand truth and convict them of sin.

Orient Your Minds to God's Word

Read Mark 1:1-15.

Who are the key characters in the beginning of Mark's Gospel? Why do you think Mark begins with these key characters? How does Mark draw attention to Jesus in this passage? As Messiah? Son of God?

Identify and Discuss Important Themes

In verses 14-15, we read the Gospel Jesus began preaching in Galilee at the beginning of his ministry. Mark calls it "the Gospel of God," and the message is: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel."

Repentance is a key theme in Mark 1:1-15. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance and Jesus' Gospel message was a call to "repent and believe in the Gospel."

In everyday language, how would you describe repentance?
How does repentance and belief in the Gospel go together?
What is Jesus' Gospel message and what does it mean?

Application for the Heart and Life

· This section is designed for Formation Groups = small (2-3) gender-specific groups for confession of sin and reminding one another of Gospel truth

Gospel growth

When we repent and believe in the Gospel, we are coming under the reign of Christ. Life in the Kingdom of God is a life of growing in the Gospel through the disciplines of repentance and faith. A Christian is always repenting, and always rediscovering the Gospel by believing afresh God's grace.

- What are some areas in your life where you are working through repentance of sin?
- What Gospel truths are you having a hard time believing?

Gospel promise

We gain courage and confidence to uproot sin and heart idolatry by believing Gospel promises. When we come under the reign of Christ, Jesus becomes a covering for us before God the Father. So the words of v.11 can be said of us because we have come under Christ.

Remind one another of this powerful Gospel promise: When God the Father looks at you, He declares, *"You are my beloved son/daughter; with you I am well pleased."* Rest your weary heart here.

WEEK TWO

DAY ONE

Mark 1:16-45

READ Scripture

Before today's reading, spend a moment in prayer to thank God for the gift of His Word, that He has not left us without His voice in our lives.

Take comfort that God still speaks to us like a shepherd speaks to his sheep by comforting them, protecting them, and leading them. Take a posture toward God's Word that reflects Psalm 95:6-7:

*Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
For he is our God, and we are the people
of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*

Mark 1:16-45

¹⁶Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

¹⁷And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." ¹⁸And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

²¹And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. ²²And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. ²³And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." ²⁵But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" ²⁶And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷And they were all amazed, so that they questioned

among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." ²⁸And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

²⁹And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. ³¹And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³²That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered together at the door. ³⁴And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

³⁵And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

³⁶And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, ³⁷and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." ³⁸And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." ³⁹And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

⁴⁰And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." ⁴¹Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." ⁴²And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. ⁴³And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, ⁴⁴and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them." ⁴⁵But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

STUDY Scripture

#1 One of the things that Mark’s Gospel is known for is its fast pace. Mark quickly shoots through events in Jesus’ life, giving enough information to make a point and then promptly moving on. Mark is especially noted for his use of the word translated “immediately.” Go through this passage again, circling this word.

#2 There are 5 ‘scenes’ that Mark rockets through in these 30 verses. Without looking at the headings in your Bible, what would you name them?

Verses	(Your) Title
vv.16-20	
vv.21-28	
vv.29-34	
vv.35-39	
vv.40-45	

#3 Each of these scenes features Jesus doing something and then seeing immediate results. Whatever He says, it is done. He calls some men to be His disciples, and they respond. He rebukes a demon and it comes out. He seeks healing and it happens. In telling the stories in this way, what simple thing do you think Mark is trying to show us about Jesus?

LIVE Scripture

Jesus truly is the all-powerful Son of God. As we saw in this portion of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus has authority to command people, demons and diseases and they respond to Him. One

simple truth that we can discern from this passage is that Jesus doesn't want to be "our King," a king who panders to our earthly wants and desires. He is the King of God's Kingdom. We are to treat Him just as Psalm 95 teaches us to treat His Word- bowing the knee, humbly submitting to Him with all of our hearts, our bodies, & our minds.

Yet all of us live with some level of disobedience in our lives, whether we recognize it or not. As we learn to thrive in God's Kingdom under King Jesus, we must always be battling the effects of sin that still linger in our lives.

If you viewed yourself under the rule of King Jesus, how do you think your life would change?

What is one concrete, measurable step you can take to live more obediently to your powerful King?

WEEK TWO

DAY TWO

Mark 1:21-28

READ and STUDY Scripture

Before we begin our study of the book of Mark, take a moment to pray and ask God to prepare your heart and mind to understand his Word.

PRAY

Today we will focus on one short story in **Mark 1:21-28**. We're going to take some time to read the story carefully.

#1 READ this account as if you were one of the disciples who recently joined Jesus (see 1:16-20). How do you think they would react to this episode?

#2 READ this account as if you were an average synagogue attendee- what a strange day at church! As an average synagogue attendee, what shocks you? What confuses you? What interests you?

#3 Consider the account simply as Mark conveys it. What is Mark showing you?

#4 Mark's use of quotations is fairly sparse. But when he does, it means something really significant is being said, and often tells us the point of the story. What does the crowd's quote in verse 27 tell us?

Outline the passage geographically by noting the details in the table below.

Person and/or Action	Place	Verse
Jesus, Andrew, Simon, James, John	Capernaum	21
Jesus teaches	Synagogue at Capernaum	21
Congregation wonders at Jesus' teaching	Synagogue at Capernaum	22
Demoniac & Jesus confrontation	Synagogue at Capernaum	23-26
Congregation wonders at Jesus' mighty act	Synagogue at Capernaum	27
Jesus' fame spreads	Throughout Galilee	28

#5 What do you think is the main point of this account? How would you explain the point of this passage to someone who was unfamiliar with the Bible?

Going Deeper

In this passage, Mark works like a master cinematographer—notice how the frame of vision starts out with a wide shot, then zooms in for a close-up, and then zooms out even wider than it began.

- He begins by referencing Capernaum (v.21a)
- Then, we zoom in on the synagogue (v.21b)
- Finally, we zoom in on Jesus, who is in the synagogue in Capernaum (v.22)
- We start to zoom out to see Jesus interacting with the demon-possessed man. (v.23-26)
- We zoom out further to see the crowd's reaction to this battle (v.27)
- Finally, we zoom out even further to see that Jesus' influence spread beyond Capernaum through all of Galilee (v.28)

This movement begins in Capernaum, zooms in to Jesus and then rebounds out beyond the original confines of the story. What could Mark be trying to demonstrate with this narrative device?

LIVE Scripture

One thing worth noting in this passage is that Jesus' fame spreads not just because of his teaching, and not just because of his mighty acts, but because of both. Some people say that the way to reach the world is by standing firm on doctrine (emphasis on Jesus' teaching). Others say that we must "share the Gospel, use words if necessary" (emphasis on mighty acts). Here, Mark seems to be indicating that both Jesus' teaching and godly acts are necessary ingredients to bear witness to our watching world.

Most of us tend to emphasize either standing for truth or performing acts of service and love. Which do you think you tend toward? What is one concrete, measurable step that you can take this week to imitate God's concern both for truth and for Godly acts this week?

WEEK TWO

DAY THREE

Mark 1:40-45

READ Scripture

As we read God's Word, let's be reminded of why we long to study the Bible. In Psalm 43, as the writer is lamenting his circumstances, his cry to the Lord is a yearning to receive light (rather than his present darkness) and truth (rather than the presence of deceitful lips). And what does the Psalmist declare is the correct response to receiving God's light and truth?

Let's enter the struggle with him:

*³ Send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling!*

*⁴ Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy,
and I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.*

The correct response to receiving God's enlightenment and truth is to worship Him. In this Psalm, the writer expresses the joy that comes in entering the presence of God in His Temple in Jerusalem. But for us today, we do not need to travel anywhere to commune joyfully with our God. His Spirit has been sent into our hearts--the very presence of God! No longer must we go to the temple, for we are His new temple through Jesus.

PRAY

Take a moment to thank God for this marvelous truth. Now ask God to empower us through His Spirit to understand His Word- and to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

Today, we will focus on the story of Jesus' cleansing a person infected with an infectious skin disease, which is found in **Mark 1:40-45**. Read through the passage several times, until you feel that you could give a summary of the passage without looking back at the text in your Bible. Record that summary here:

STUDY Scripture

#1 The significance of this passage can be lost on us if we don't have the Biblical background regarding leprosy and other skin diseases. Open your Bible to **Leviticus 13-14** and skim through it for reference. Note especially **Leviticus 13:45-46**, which says

⁴⁵“The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ ⁴⁶He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.

When Jesus healed this leper in Galilee, the book of Leviticus wasn't a dusty, rarely visited relic in the “Old” Testament. It was the active regulation regarding proper worship of God, and therefore it mattered deeply. How does knowing this background change the significance of this encounter?

#2 As the book of Leviticus displayed, it was important that faithful Jews be kept clean from skin diseases like leprosy, because leprous individuals were barred from enjoying the presence of God in the temple. And yet, Jesus goes against this by stretching out his hand and touching this diseased man. What is Mark trying to teach us about Jesus' relationship with the uncleanness of the world?

Going Deeper

Mark uses skillful parallelism in this account. Note how the actions of Jesus and the Leper mirror one another:

Leper (v.40)	Jesus (v.41)
Came to him,	Moved with pity
imploring him	stretched out his hand
and kneeling,	touched him
said,	and said to him,
“If you will,	“I will,
you can make me clean.”	Be clean.”

And then starkly, the parallelism ends. The leper made his request, which was granted. Now Jesus makes a command: *“See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them (v.44).”* Instead of obeying him, the leper tells everyone about what had happened.

	Leper	Jesus
Status in verse 40	Outcast	Able to enter the town freely
Status in verse 45	Able to enter the town freely	Outcast

This story is telling the Gospel in miniature. Jesus, confronting brokenness and disease, moved with compassion, trades places with the outcast. Jesus' perfect holiness cannot be corrupted by the disease, but he still suffers for his good deed. Because this man didn't respond with obedience to God's word (he told everyone instead of obeying Jesus' request), rather than being able to freely enter the towns, Jesus has to stick to the backwoods, like the leper used to do.

The incorruptible God, seeing our sin, seeing our corruption, moved toward us in love, and He didn't just stretch out His hand- He stretched out His body on the cross. If we were going to become His temple, the temple of His body would first need to be destroyed. What love! What grace! Spend some time praising God for the gift of Jesus.

Week Two

COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION

Remember to make the discussion accessible:

- 1) There may be unbelievers in your midst. Even if someone is well-versed in the Bible and attending church doesn't mean God has awakened their heart to their sin and need for a Savior.
- 2) There may be young, immature believers in your midst. Don't assume people understand simple concepts. Continually prod the group for definitions, especially definitions in everyday language. This exercise is even helpful for believers, so even if you know the group is mature in Christ it is still a good practice and helps people prepare for spiritual conversations with unbelievers.

Begin your discussion by asking the group about their individual study of God's Word and hearing God's Word preached. The Spirit is working among you! Spend some time asking the group about what God is teaching them. If this is challenging/no one is sharing, take some time to remind the group about God's abiding presence in them through the Holy Spirit to help them understand truth and convict them of sin.

Orient Your Minds to God's Word

Read Mark 1:16-45.

What are the major events in this passage?

Mark gets right to action in Mark 1, what is Mark highlighting about Jesus?

As you studied this week, what is God teaching you through Mark 1:16-45?

Identify and Discuss Important Themes

Throughout these verses, Mark highlights Jesus' power over brokenness as He heals people, casts out demons, and emerges as the King of a new Kingdom.

- When you think of great power, what do you think of?
- Jesus is more powerful than anything, “*by Him all things were created...he is before all things, and in him all things hold together*” (Col. 1:15-17). If we truly believed in the power of Jesus, how would that impact your life?
- Be attentive here. Listen for what people are saying. Can you ask clarifying questions? Can you help people make connections? Listen for what the Spirit is drawing out of your community.

Application for the Heart and Life

(This section is designed for Formation Groups = small (2-3) gender-specific groups for confession of sin and reminding one another of Gospel truth)

Gospel growth

One of our sinful tendencies is towards self-sufficiency--thinking of ourselves as sufficient to thrive in life. This is an illusion, or maybe your vision for life is too warped by the world. Spend time talking with one another about surrendering your life to the power of Jesus.

- What areas in your life continue to cause struggle and strain?
- Are you trying to fix these areas in your own strength?
- What if you relied on the power of Jesus with these areas?
- Encourage one another to repent of self-sufficiency, and trust in Jesus' power over our brokenness.

Gospel promise

We gain courage and confidence to uproot sin and heart idolatry by believing Gospel promises. When we come under the reign of Christ, Jesus becomes a covering for us before God the Father. Our new powerful King is our life.

Spend some time reminding one another that you have been united to Christ by faith in the Gospel. He is near to those suffering and battling sin.

WEEK THREE

DAY ONE

Mark 2:1-17

READ Scripture

Before you read today, pray with the author of Psalm 119 that God would meet you powerfully in His Word.

PRAY

Psalm 119:17-18

¹⁷ Deal bountifully with your servant,
that I may live and keep your word.

⁸ Open my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of your law.

Now let's turn to the Gospel of Mark. Today's passage has been printed with plenty of space for you to make notes, circle important words or phrases, and underline key points. Read through the passage several times, so that you feel you could retell it briefly but faithfully to a friend.

Mark 2:1-17

¹ And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ² And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. ³ And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. ⁴ And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. ⁵ And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷ "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸ And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus

questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts?”⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’?¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—¹¹ “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.”¹² And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

¹³ *He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them.* ¹⁴ *And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.* ¹⁵ *And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.* ¹⁶ *And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”* ¹⁷ *And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

STUDY Scripture

#1 Now that you have become familiar with the passage, work through it again, this time circling anything that you find surprising or noteworthy. (If this passage is familiar to you, consider what Mark (as the author) is trying to surprise us with.)

#2 One of Mark’s main concerns is to show his readers that Jesus is the “real deal”—truly God in human form, the King of all of creation. Is that theme evident in this passage? Where?

#3 Tax collectors were the scum of the Jewish community. They volunteered to collect taxes and often extorted money from their fellow Jews to fund the empire that was actively oppressing them. Eating with these men was a sign of companionship that goes much deeper than it does today. Why do you think Jesus spent his meals with people like this?

#4 What is one thing you learn about God from this passage of Scripture?

#5 Based on your answer to #4, what is one concrete, measurable step you can take to live obediently to God in light of this truth about Him?

WEEK THREE

DAY TWO

Mark 2:1-12

READ Scripture

Sometimes it is helpful to begin personal time with God by praying a well-worn prayer that has served the Church historically. It serves to prime the pump for prayer and orient the heart toward God and his Word.

Begin today by reading and praying this portion of a prayer from ***The Valley of Vision*** (p.31).

*Let me know that Christ is dear to me by his word;
I am one with him by the Word on his part,
and by faith on mine;
If I oppose the Word I oppose my Lord
when he has drawn close;
If I receive the Word I receive my Lord
when he is most near.
O! You who have the hearts of all men in your hand,
form my heart according to the Word,
according to the image of your Son.
So shall Christ the Word, and his Word,
be my strength and comfort.*

PRAY

Today's passage is **Mark 2:1-12**, the story of the paralyzed man. READ through the story slowly, focusing on the details that are given. After you've read the story, work through the questions below.

STUDY Scripture

#1 When the paralyzed man is lowered in front of Jesus, what is Jesus' response?

#2 Do you think this is what the paralyzed man and his friends were hoping for? Why or why not?

#3 The Bible is God's Word and never includes an unimportant detail. Why do you think that Mark notes how Jesus knew the thoughts of the Scribes rather than just reporting their thoughts directly to us? How does that detail add to the thrust of this account?

#4 Jesus asks the Scribes - some religious leaders of the day - whether it is easier to forgive a man's sins or to heal his body. How would you answer that question? Consider what it costs Jesus to do each of these things

#5 Jesus' encounter with the Scribes is the first appearance of these characters and the first occurrence of a major element of the Gospel; Jesus versus the religious leaders. Although this group would end up antagonizing Jesus, their questioning is theologically sound- indeed, only God can forgive sins, since our sins are not only against one another but primarily against God. How does Jesus' response to their question display the fundamental disagreement between Jesus and the religious leaders? (Hint: look at Jesus' words in verse 10)

LIVE Scripture

What is one truth about God that this story reveals?
How will you respond to this truth with Spirit-empowered obedience today?

WEEK THREE

DAY THREE

Mark 2:13-17

READ Scripture

One of the sweetest promises in the Christian's life is the constant presence of God's Holy Spirit. God's Spirit is indispensable in reading Scripture because He not only co-authored the text with human authors, but He also knows our hearts intimately. If we really want to come to God's Word for communion with Him and internal change, we must rely on the presence of God's Spirit.

Consider Jesus' words to His disciples in John 16:

¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

The Christian's prayer life ought to be shaped by God. We pray to the God who has revealed Himself to be Father, Son and Spirit. This is why Christians pray to the Father, by the Spirit, **in the name of** Jesus. This is not a magic formula that somehow legitimizes our prayers, but it helps to remind us that each Member of our tripersonal God has played a particular role in our salvation and does so in our day-to-day life as well.

Pray now that our heavenly Father would make us freshly aware of His Spirit, and that the Spirit would declare glorious truths about Christ to us today.

PRAY

The passage that we will focus on today is **Mark 2:13-17**. Turn to that passage in your Bible and spend some time poring over the details of this passage. By the end of your time reading it, you should be able to recall the details faithfully without looking back at the text.

STUDY Scripture

#1 This is the second interaction between Jesus and the religious leaders. Again they have a question that is perfectly legitimate, why does Jesus hang out with these wicked people? Just like in the story of the paralyzed man in 2:1-12, Jesus' answer shows that they don't understand who He is. What is Jesus' answer telling us about the difference between Himself and the religious leaders?

Going Deeper: The Incorruptible Christ

In Mark 1:40 through 2:17, Mark placed three stories in sequence. This is not by accident. Mark along with the Holy Spirit is showing us a very important point about God. Let's look at how these three stories go together in the narrative...

The three stories told in this section are as follows-

1. Jesus cleanses a leper: Mark 1:40-45
2. Jesus heals a paralyzed man: Mark 2:1-12
3. Jesus fellowships with tax collectors and sinners: Mark 2:13-17

In the first account, Jesus shows his willingness to associate with the religiously unclean. In healing this man, Jesus restores him to be able to attend the Temple and to be able to socialize with the Hebrew community.

In the second account, Jesus not only heals a man of his physical disability, enabling him to walk, but also forgives his sins.

In the third account, Jesus makes meaningful friendships with the morally impure, and in doing so puts Himself in a position to call them out of their life of immorality.

Jesus vs. Religious Leaders

These three stories go into three different areas of concern for Jesus, and they illustrate the difference between Jesus' view of God and that of the religious leaders of the day.

The religious leaders would never have gone near the leprous man, since contracting His disease would mean exclusion from the community and from the Temple of God. Jesus didn't just show compassion, He acted compassionately by stretching out His hand and touching him. Jesus was not "infected" by the disease because He is incorruptible, yet He still suffered for His compassion because of the leper's disobedience. In telling everyone what happen, Jesus was no longer free to minister in that area.

The religious leaders didn't have compassion on the paralyzed man, but instead hurled theological criticism against Jesus and refused to rejoice at the man's forgiveness and healing. Jesus had compassion on this man and responded with a display of authority and compassion, forgiving him and healing him.

The religious leaders wouldn't dream of associating with the tax collectors and sinners, who were the epitome of immorality. Rather than heaping scorn on them, Jesus moves toward them in love and hope for their redemption.

Jesus isn't afraid to go into the unclean, broken, sinful, immoral areas because they were no danger to Him. He worked His way deep down into the darkness of this world, like soap being worked deep into a wound. His life was so pure and His heart was so incorruptible (unable to be sinful) that He was able to bring the presence of God to these broken people. Jesus stands in stark contrast to the religious leaders who continually avoided contact with these people.

LIVE Scripture

Today, God has given us His Spirit to be this same kind of presence to a dark and dying world. Rather than clumping up into holy huddles, fleeing those who don't know God, we are called to be "salt and light", both acting as a preservative in this world (salt was used for preservation, not primarily for flavor) and also as a beacon of God's truth. Though we need to be wise in our interactions with unbelievers and their influence, God's call is for us to be a faithful presence in areas that most people would pass over.

Reflect and Journal through question below

Could you be accused, like Jesus, of associating with the "tax collectors and sinners" of our day?

If so, what are some examples of those relationships and what are you praying for them? How are you ensuring that you keep yourself "in the world" yet not "of the world?"

If not, who is someone in your neighborhood, workplace, or even in your family, that God may be calling you to form a deeper friendship with, as a representative of King Jesus?

Spend some time in prayer, thanking Him that He has made us His friends through the cross.

Remember and even recount some of the ways that your life was like that of the tax collectors and sinners, and then rejoice at the freedom that God has given you in Christ. Ask Him to give you renewed joy because He came not to call the righteous (a category we don't fit into) but sinners like us.

Week Three

COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION

As you prepare and lead the discussion, remember to make it accessible:

- 1) There may be unbelievers in your midst.
- 2) There may be young, immature believers in your midst.

Begin your discussion by asking the group about their individual study of God's Word and hearing God's Word preached. The Spirit is working among you! Spend some time asking the group about what God is teaching them. If this is challenging/no one is sharing, take some time to remind the group about God's abiding presence in them through the Holy Spirit to help them understand truth and convict them of sin.

Orient Your Minds to God's Word

- Read **Mark 2:1-17**, or feel free to pick one of the stories (2:1-12 or 2:13-17) and focus your discussion on it.
- What roles does Jesus play in this passage? (i.e. healer, friend of sinners)
- Why did Jesus talk about forgiveness of sins before He healed the paralytic? (hint: v.10) Jesus heals on a spiritual level and a physical level in 2:12, what does this teach us about the relationship between the body and the soul?
- Jesus gladly jumped into community with tax collectors, the worst of the worst in Jewish society. What group/groups might be contemporary to tax collectors in first century Israel? What is uncomfortable about stepping into intimate, fellowship relationship with them?

Application for the Heart and Life

(This section is designed for Formation Groups = small (2-3) gender-specific groups for confession of sin and reminding one another of Gospel truth)

Gospel growth

One of our sinful tendencies is towards self-righteousness - thinking of ourselves as better than others. Be careful because it usually creeps into your heart slowly. In fact, the person who tends to deny self-righteousness has demonstrated self-righteousness already. The truth is that ***“no one is righteous”*** (Rom. 3:10-12); this is why we need Jesus!

- Where have you become proud in your heart? Do you think of yourself as better than others? It could be towards those who are immoral, or “uncivilized”, or lack self-control.
- Encourage one another towards repentance. Talk through how you might begin to relate to others with compassion and grace remembering your sin and rebellious tendencies.

Gospel promise

We gain courage and confidence to admit pride and self-righteousness by remembering our status is secure in Christ.

Spend some time reminding one another that Jesus has become your righteousness. Meditate on and speak **2 Cor. 5:21** over one another....literally. For example, “Tom, for your sake God made Jesus to be sin even though He knew no sin, so that in him you might become the righteousness of God.”

WEEK FOUR

DAY ONE

Mark 2:18-3:6

READ Scripture

Before we read the Bible, take a moment to pray, asking God to prepare your heart to read His Word.

PRAY

Today's passage is **Mark 2:18-3:6**.

¹⁸Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁹And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. ²¹No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. ²²And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins."

²³One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" ²⁵And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" ²⁷And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

³ ¹Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. ²And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would

heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him.³ And he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come here.”⁴ And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent.⁵ And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

STUDY Scripture

#1 This passage gives us three different scenes, all of which feature Jesus discussing matters related to the religious rules of the Old Testament. What group of people is Jesus repeatedly engaging in dialogue?

#2 Notice that Mark’s account of Jesus’ interaction with the religious leaders first began at the beginning of Chapter 2. Fill out the table below regarding the interactions between these two groups from that point to the end of this section.

Religious leaders’ action/question	Section	Jesus’ response/action
	2:1-12	
	2:13-17	
	2:18-22	
	2:23-28	
	3:1-6	

What do you notice about the nature of their questions? Does it change over time? If so, how?

#3 What do you think God is communicating to us through this passage? No answer is too simple.

About Jesus?

About ourselves/humankind?

About the laws of God?

#4 How should this passage change the way that we live today?

#5 What is one way you could implement what you learned through this passage?

WEEK FOUR

DAY TWO

Mark 2:18-22

READ Scripture

Let's once again use an old prayer to build our vocabulary in prayer and launch us out into study of God's precious Word.

*Lord, I bless you, that great sin draws out great grace,
that, although the least sin deserves infinite
punishment because done against an infinite
God, yet there is mercy for me, for where guilt is
most terrible, there your mercy in Christ is most
free and deep.*

*Bless me by revealing to me more of his saving benefits,
by causing your goodness to pass before me,
by speaking peace to my repentant heart;*

*Strengthen me to give you no rest until Christ reigns
completely within me, in every thought, word,
and deed, in a faith that purifies my heart, works
by love, anchors me to you, and at all times clings
to the cross.*

~The Valley of Vision, p. 269

PRAY

Having prepared our hearts and welcomed God's illuminating Spirit, let's begin our study of **Mark 2:18-22**. Read through the passage several times. At only five verses, you should read through it thoroughly enough to be able to give a fairly faithful retelling without looking back at the text.

¹⁸ *Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"*

¹⁹ *And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the*

bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.²⁰ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.²¹ No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.²² And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.”

STUDY Scripture

#1 The text has been reproduced on this page for you to take notes. This is a significant recording of Jesus’ teaching in the early part of the book of Mark. What is the situation that evokes this response from Jesus?

#2 Verse 18 should leave us asking a question. Mark tells us that disciples of some other religious leaders were fasting. Then he tells us that some onlookers came and asked why His disciples weren’t also fasting. What does this tell us about the fasting they were doing?

#3 This passage comes at the junction of two major movements in the first part of Mark's Gospel. First, it immediately follows the accounts of (1) Jesus cleansing a leprous man, (2) healing a paralyzed man, and (3) associating with immoral people. The people seem to respond to these things by asking him, "Why aren't you fasting?" What could be the contrast drawn between Jesus and the religious leaders with this juxtaposition?

#4 What does this tell us about the difference between the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the religious leaders?

#5 Having studied the passage, what do you think is the main message that we are supposed to learn about Jesus?

LIVE Scripture

If you were to live your life completely in line with this truth about God, what is one big thing that would change?

Take a moment thanking and praising God that because of Jesus we do not live in the inflexible tyranny of religious tradition, but now rejoice that Jesus has fulfilled God's requirements on our behalf.

Ask God to help you by his Spirit to guide and empower you to live a life obedient to him.

WEEK FOUR

DAY THREE

Mark 3:1-6

READ Scripture

Before we launch into the Gospel according to Mark, let's meditate on one of the most unique Psalms in the Bible.

The Psalms were the songbook of the Hebrew people, and in Jesus' time they would be muttered, pondered, and recited in the synagogue where they gathered on the Sabbath day.

Psalms 50 records a rebuke of the nation of Israel, one that God wanted them to remember continually by singing it to one another regularly.

Psalms 50:7-15

- ⁷ *"Hear, O my people, and I will speak;
O Israel, I will testify against you.
I am God, your God.*
- ⁸ *Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;
your burnt offerings are continually before me.*
- ⁹ *I will not accept a bull from your house
or goats from your folds.*
- ¹⁰ *For every beast of the forest is mine,
the cattle on a thousand hills.*
- ¹¹ *I know all the birds of the hills,
and all that moves in the field is mine.*
- ¹² *"If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world and its fullness are mine.*
- ¹³ *Do I eat the flesh of bulls
or drink the blood of goats?*
- ¹⁴ *Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and perform your vows to the Most High,*
- ¹⁵ *and call upon me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."*

Insight on Psalm 50

God knew that His people would be prone to make the Old Testament sacrifices something they were never intended to be. They weren't just an easy way to pay off the debt of evil, only to continue living however one wanted. The entire system of laws and accompanying sacrifices could only be understood in the context of the existing **covenant relationship** between God and Israel. It wasn't cow meat and goat entrails that God was interested in. He wanted Hebrew hearts. And the same is true for us today.

Pray that God would purify your heart, and cleanse your motives for reading His Word today. Tell him how you long for your love for Him to be deep, whole-hearted, and pure. *"Call upon [him] in the day of trouble"* (v.15), and he will deliver you, even when you need delivery from your own issues.

PRAY

Today's passage is **Mark 3:1-6**. Take some time to read through the passage carefully and slowly, several times.

STUDY Scripture

#1 This scene is the last in a series of accounts of the interactions between the religious teachers and Jesus (they won't be mentioned again until chapter seven!). What are some things you have learned about Jesus from these interactions?

#2 The interactions between Jesus and the leaders in 2:1-3:6 begin with a simple thought-question by some onlooking scribes in 2:6 (v. 6, “*Now some of the scribes...questioned in their hearts...Why does this man speak like that?*”). This passage shows us the final result of these interactions. What was their conclusion about Jesus?

#3 What do you think led the leaders from the attitude of 2:6 to their actions in today’s passage?

Going Deeper: A Study in Contrasts

From 2:1-3:6, Mark shows us the escalating conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. This whole passage shapes a narrative that subtly shows the differences between Jesus and the religious leaders.

Drawing Near to the Needy

Mark is well-known for never wasting words. Mark 3:1 tells us all we need to know and nothing more. Jesus is in the synagogue, and also in the synagogue is a man with a diseased hand. Jesus draws near to the man. The Pharisees stand apart to keep an eye on Jesus.

Deeds Done in the Open

The Pharisees keep quiet in this story, staying on the sidelines to keep a close eye on Jesus, hoping to trap him. By the end of the story, they make their exit in order to scheme in secret about how to kill their enemy.

Jesus engages the man with the diseased hand. What the ESV translates “Come here” more literally says “Enter into the middle of the gathering.” Jesus is not going to let anyone think He is tricking anyone or seeking to deceive the masses .

What is Lawful?

In 2:24, the Pharisees accused Jesus’ disciples of breaking the Sabbath regulations by grabbing an impromptu dinner as they walked through a field. They asked Him why they were doing what was not lawful to do on the Sabbath. In today’s passage, Jesus turns their question back on them, asking them whether it was lawful to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill. Jesus, of course, is not asking a question as much as He is making a point. The Sabbath is by nature a day of restoration, so of course it makes sense to restore this man’s hand.

But why does Jesus mention the option of harming and killing on the Sabbath? Surely if the Pharisees thought rubbing some heads of grain together was not lawful on the Sabbath, then murder is out of the question, right? And yet, having seen Jesus heal and restore their fellow brother, what do they do? They begin to plot Jesus’ murder.

The stark contrast between Jesus and the religious leaders is intended to highlight God’s character and His desire to redeem all nations. Jesus represents a new leadership that is filled with mercy and justice, and we celebrate the reality of not worshipping a God who is like these religious leaders-- hard, unforgiving, and oppressive. No, we worship the Lord who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Ps. 145:8).

Week Four

COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION

As you prepare and lead the discussion, remember to make it accessible:

- 1) There may be unbelievers in your midst.
- 2) There may be young, immature believers in your midst.

Begin your discussion by asking the group about their individual study of God's Word and hearing God's Word preached. The Spirit is working among you! Spend some time asking the group about what God is teaching them. If this is challenging/no one is sharing, take some time to remind the group about God's abiding presence in them through the Holy Spirit to help them understand truth and convict them of sin.

Orient Your Minds to God's Word

- Read **Mark 2:18-3:6**, or feel free to pick one of the stories (2:18-22, 2:23-28, 3:1-6) and focus your discussion on it.
- Who is Jesus in conflict with? What do you know about this group?
- What is the conflict about?
- How does Jesus reshape the Jewish understanding of God and His ways? (You may need to do some research here, check a study Bible or commentary)
- Based upon what you've learned, how does this passage apply to real life?

Application for the Heart and Life

(This section is designed for Formation Groups = small (2-3) gender-specific groups for confession of sin and reminding one another of Gospel truth)

Gospel Growth

We all tend to default towards religion, which is putting obedience before acceptance. The heart of religion is

justifying yourself via obedience. If we are bad at studying the Bible on a regular basis or bad at evangelism, we feel like terrible Christians and are unable to enjoy God's love.

The Gospel is different altogether because it rightly puts acceptance before obedience. Your obedience ought to be an overflow of joy from being justified by Christ and accepted by the Father.

- Are there areas of your spiritual life where you feel like a terrible Christian?
- Do you see how this might be rooted in religion?

Gospel Promise

Remind one another of your acceptance by the Father through Jesus!

Some helpful Scriptures:

- **Rom. 5:1**
- **Rom. 8:1, 15-17**
- **Gal. 5:1**

WEEK FIVE

DAY ONE

Mark 3:7-35

READ Scripture

Before we begin studying God's Word, spend a moment in prayer. Thank God for His Word, and ask Him through His Spirit to guide you to understand and apply it in your life.

PRAY

Read through today's passage a few times to get familiar with it. Here are a few simple study methods that might help:

- Circle anything that you have a question about and write a brief note to investigate later or ask someone in your Community Group to help you understand it.
- Draw a box around verses that seem crucial to the passage and make a note of what you see there.
- Trace out themes that develop in the passage by noting when the same idea, word, or character reappears.

Mark 3:7-35

⁷ Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea ⁸ and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. ⁹ And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, ¹⁰ for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. ¹¹ And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God."

¹² And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

¹³ And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. ¹⁴ And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be

with him and he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and have authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶ He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸ Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." ²³ And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.

²⁸ "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" – ³⁰ for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

³¹ And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." ³³ And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

STUDY Scripture

#1 Do you see any cohesive theme or themes that hold this section together?

#2 Go through each section of this passage and make a note about something that we learn about Jesus.

Passage	<i>Jesus is...</i> , and/or <i>Jesus does...</i>
V. 7-12	
V. 13-21	
V. 22-30	
V. 31-35	

#3 In this passage people frequently make a mistake about who Jesus is. What are some common misconceptions that people living around you have about Jesus?

#4 If someone who had never heard of Jesus asked you who he was, how would you explain it? (Avoid using shorthand words like ***incarnation, eternal, holy***, etc.)

#5 What is one element of who Jesus is that would be especially captivating to those around you who don't know Him?

LIVE Scripture

What is one concrete way that you could begin to show people who Jesus is by living like Him in that one area you just wrote down?

Spend some time asking the God to use His Spirit to reshape and reform your heart and mind to have a right understanding of Jesus based on the truths you have seen today. Ask God to help you show people what Jesus is like as you seek to live faithfully among them...just as Jesus did.

Final Note

Jesus' mention of the unforgivable sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit has troubled many. A quick pastoral note is to simply say that if you are worried about having committed this sin, then you already are showing evidence that you are probably not guilty of this sin. Those who belong to Christ and have His Spirit will not blaspheme that Spirit. If you want more information about this verse or to learn more about the Holy Spirit, we recommend a short book called ***Engaging with the Holy Spirit: Real Questions, Practical Answers*** by Graham Cole.

WEEK FIVE

DAY TWO

Mark 3:7-21

READ Scripture

Before we begin our study of Mark today, spend a moment in prayer. Tell God something that you love about Him. Give Him your worries and any distractions that might draw your attention away from Him. Thank Him for the joyful things of the last few days, and remember His presence in your life.

PRAY

Now let's turn to **Mark 3:7-21**, our text for today's study.

Work through the passage several times, making notes as you go. Be especially mindful of the way that Mark shifts the focus of the reader in vv. 7-12. Be especially mindful of the details given in vv.13-21.

STUDY Scripture

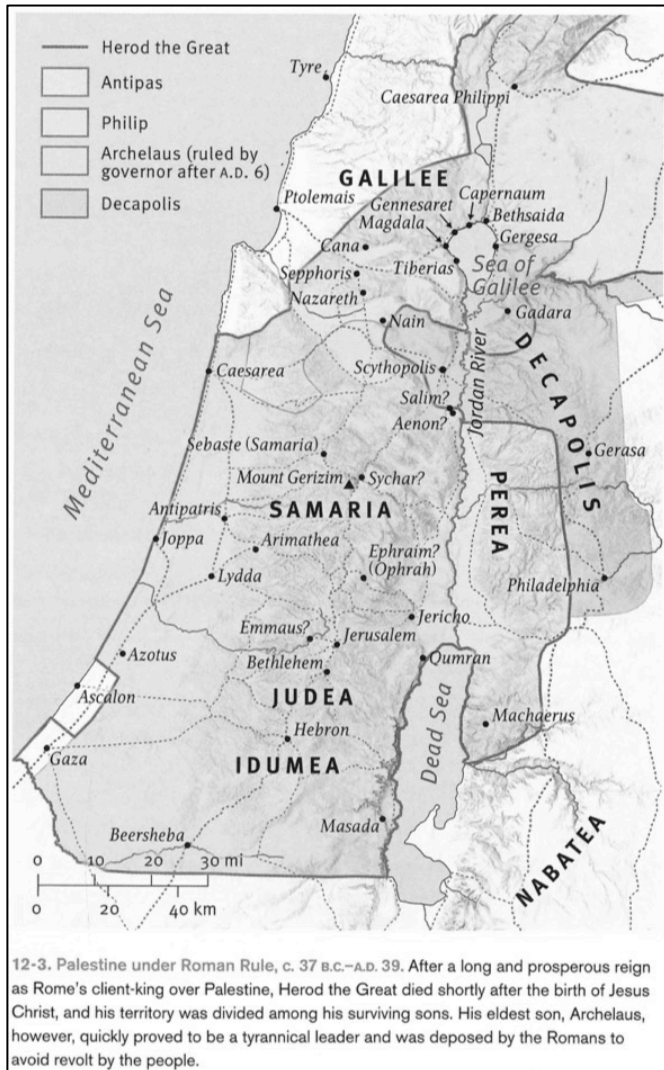
#1 The most significant focus of the first half of Mark is Jesus' identity- that He is the Son of God. What does this passage tell us about who Jesus is?

#2 What is strange about the group that correctly identifies Jesus? (v.11)

#3 Jesus seems like the most reluctant famous person of all time. Rather than stealing the spotlight, He withdraws to the sea (v. 7). Rather than broadcasting his identity, He silences those who try to proclaim it (v.12). Why do you think He is operating this way?

Going Deeper: What's with all these towns in v.8?

To the average non-Jew, the list of towns that Mark supplies us with in this passage feels pretty superfluous. Why does he mention Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, the land beyond the Jordan (river), Tyre, and Sidon? Take a look at the map below to learn more.



This map shows the location of these towns around the time when Jesus was on Earth. Take a moment to locate the towns that Mark mentions in his list.

The list of locations that Mark gives outlines the land that was called Israel before it was conquered by Roman occupation. People from every region of Israel, the entire nation, were going out to Jesus. They want to get near him. They want to touch him. His popularity is so overwhelming that He needs a floating platform to preach from, lest they crush Him. And yet, were they going to Him because they thought He was God's promised Messiah? Verse 8 tells us that they came because they "heard all that He was doing." So far it's only the demons who have rightly recognized Jesus.

And so, Mark connects Jesus and this passage to Israel's history. This isn't the first time that the entire nation of Israel gathered in front of a mountain. It isn't the first time that they were led by a solitary figure.

Exodus 19 tells us this:

¹On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ²They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, ³while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel...

The story in **Exodus 19** goes on like this:

⁸All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

And yet, this time in Mark God isn't calling Moses up the mountain. It's the Apostles (and all of Israel) being called up the mountain by Jesus. Will they make the connection?

The story in **Mark 3** goes on like this:

²¹*And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”*

They still continue to miss who Jesus is.

Thoughtful Reflection

We should see ourselves in these dim Israelites. Even though we have believed the good news about Jesus, hear it preached to us often, and even share it with others, we too forget who God is and what He has done.

What are some of the truths about God that you are most prone to forget?

Take some time to remind yourself of who God is, praising Him, and glorifying Him for what who He is.

What are some of the things that God has done in your life that you praise Him for?

Take some time to remind your heart of what God has done in your life and in the lives of those who know, thanking Him and glorifying Him in prayer.

Take a moment and think of someone in your Community Group that needs to be reminded of who God is. Pray for them to be reminded of who God is, and consider sending them a message or telling them in person by using a passage of Scripture that expresses that particular truth.

WEEK FIVE

DAY THREE

Mark 3:22-35

READ Scripture

Before we begin our study of the book of Mark, turn in your Bible to **Psalm 63**. Take a few minutes to read through one of Israel's songs to the LORD. Psalm 63 is especially filled with artful metaphors of experiencing God's presence.

David compares his longing for God's presence to finding a stream after wandering in a parched wilderness (vs. 1-4), and to a robust meal eaten with an abundance of flavor with juices rolling down your chin, every bite more succulent than the last (vs. 5). Select one of these metaphors and meditate on the overwhelming goodness of God's presence by the Holy Spirit within us.

Today we will study **Mark 3:22-35**. Read through the passage several times to become familiar with it.

STUDY Scripture

#1 Jesus' parables are designed to provoke thought in His hearers. In verses 7-21, Jesus has given an intentional structure to His own Kingdom, appointing the twelve Apostles who correspond to the twelve tribes of Israel. Yet verse 21 ends with His own family (house) opposing him. What point do you think Jesus is making about the Kingdom and family/the house?

#2 Jesus mentions a strong man who must be opposed and bound before his own house can be looted. Who do you think this strong man is? (Hint: Have we already seen a certain realm that is completely subject to Jesus' authority?)

#3 One of the themes that will become more apparent in the next few chapters is Jesus making strong distinctions between those who are with Him and those who are not. Already this theme has made an appearance beginning in 3:7. In 3:7, Jesus separates with only His disciples. A great crowd gathers, and yet He calls only a select few from among them. How does today's section continue this theme?

#4 Do you think Jesus is really calling people to reject their own family in v. 33-34? If not, what point do you think He is making?

#5 What truths about Jesus do you learn from this passage? How can you implement these things into your life in the next few days?

Week Five

COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION

As you prepare and lead the discussion, remember to make it accessible:

- 1) There may be unbelievers in your midst.
- 2) There may be young, immature believers in your midst.

Another way to think about leading a discussion is creating a culture. You want to create a culture of love, honesty, and vulnerability. Don't be afraid to tell your group the goal for the discussion, and be sure to model what you desire.

Begin your discussion by asking the group about their individual study of God's Word and hearing God's Word preached. The Spirit is working among you! Spend some time asking the group about what God is teaching them. If this is challenging/no one is sharing, take some time to remind the group about God's abiding presence in them through the Holy Spirit to help them understand truth and convict them of sin.

Orient Your Minds to God's Word

- Read **Mark 3:7-35**, or select a specific passage (3:7-12 or 3:13-19 or 3:20-35)

Ask some basic questions:

- Can anyone paraphrase this passage in their own words?
 - What surprises you?
 - What's the situation?
 - What does it mean?
-
- Always try to move the discussion towards real life application. It's very common and easy to fall into information transfer vs. hearing and doing the Word. Press here, often.

- What is one concrete step you can take in your life to live out this passage?
- What is one concrete step we can take as a Community Group to live out this passage?

Application for the Heart and Life

(This section is designed for Formation Groups = small (2-3) gender-specific groups for confession of sin and reminding one another of Gospel truth)

Gospel growth: Confession and Repentance

The second individual study guided people to think about truths they are prone to forget. If we believe all sin is a disbelief in the Gospel, then our sin reveals a belief problem. Some in your group may be new to this concept, so be patient and invite them into the discussion.

- What habitual sins are you wrestling with?
- What is weighing heavy on you?
- How does your sin/struggle reveal a belief problem?

Gospel promise

Remind one another of Jesus identity as the Son of God (v.11) and our identity as the family of God (v. 34-35).

- Jesus is your God, so go to Him with your sin to find forgiveness and with your struggle to find refuge and strength.
- You are a beloved son or daughter of God because of Jesus. He has secured your place in God's family. Celebrate together that God the Father treats you with the kind of affection He has for Jesus!

WEEK SIX

DAY ONE

Mark 4:1-34

READ Scripture

As we prepare to study God's Word, let's go to Him in prayer, praying as Jesus taught his followers to pray:

Matthew 6:9-13

⁹ Pray then like this:

*"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,
¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.*

Today's passage is **Mark 4:1-34**. Read it several times, enough that you could give a simple retelling without looking back at the text.

Mark 4:1-34

¹ Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. ² And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³ "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun

rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.⁸ And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”⁹ And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

¹⁰ And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables.¹¹ And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables,¹² so that

“they may indeed see but not perceive,
and may indeed hear but not understand,
lest they should turn and be forgiven.”

¹³ And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?¹⁴ The sower sows the word.¹⁵ And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.¹⁶ And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.¹⁷ And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.¹⁸ And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word,¹⁹ but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.²⁰ But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

²¹ And he said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand?²² For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light.²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”²⁴ And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.²⁵ For to the one who has, more will

be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

²⁶ And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. ²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. ²⁸ The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

³⁰ And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? ³¹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

³³ With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. ³⁴ He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

STUDY Scripture

These 34 verses comprise one of the longest sections recording the teachings of Jesus. Out of everything Jesus said during His earthly ministry, Mark was concerned to select these sayings in particular as he wrote his Gospel.

#1 Were there any words that you noticed being repeated throughout this section of teaching?

Make a list below and circle each occurrence of the word(s) you identified in the text above.

#2 Use the table below to organize the four soils from Jesus’ parable in vs. 1-9 and His explanation of each soil in vs. 10-20.

“Soil” Type	Parabolic <i>Description</i> (vv.1-9)	Parabolic <i>Explanation</i> (vv.10-20)
#1		
#2		
#3		
#4		

Note: In this passage Jesus tells a story about a sower who sows the seed - which is the Word of God - broadly upon the earth. In describing the context of this story, Mark tells us that Jesus was standing before the crowd who were sitting around Him on the earth, and the same word is used for “land” in v.1 as for “soil” in v.8. So Mark intentionally points out that Jesus describes a person ‘sowing’ on the soil as He is actively ‘sowing’ onto the crowd sitting on the soil.

#3 As you may remember, this passage comes at the climax of Jesus making a number of statements that draw sharp lines between those who belong to Him and His Kingdom and those who don't. Does this passage develop that theme further? Where? (Hint: see vs. 3, 9, 10-12, 34)

#4 This parable contains two main elements: seed and soil. The seed is spread upon the soil. Yet only one of these two elements shows any variation- the soil. What does this reveal to us about the nature of the Word?

#5 Jesus calls this entire massive crowd of people to "Listen! Behold! (v.3) and "He who has ears to hear, let Him hear" (v.9). It seems clear that the whole crowd literally heard him, yet not everyone spiritually understood, as His parable illustrated. He later explains this phenomena to His inner circle in vv.11-12. What do you think Jesus is saying is the difference between those who hear the word and bear fruit and those who do not? (Hint: really examine vv.11-12, as well as v.20)

LIVE Scripture

One of the clear points from this passage is that God is in control of growth. The one command that Jesus gives in this passage is to listen *very carefully* to God. What is one concrete, measurable way that you can be sure that you listen carefully to God this week? Share this goal with someone in your community group and ask them how they take care to listen to God as well.

WEEK SIX

DAY TWO

Mark 4:1-20

READ Scripture

Let's begin our time in Mark by using another old prayer to launch us into our study.

*Lord, your Word is full of promises,
flowers of sweet fragrance,
fruit of refreshing flavor
when extracted by faith.
May I be made rich in its riches,
be strong in its power,
be happy in its joy,
abide in its sweetness,
feast on its preciousness,
draw strength from its manna.
Lord, increase my faith.*

-The Valley of Vision, p. 197

Our passage for today is **Mark 4:1-20**. Take some time to read this passage carefully, noting the details, especially if it is already familiar to you.

STUDY Scripture

#1 While it is common in Bible study to work from abstract principles to concrete applications, both of these emphases should be present throughout. Before beginning deeper study, what are some practical applications that you see in this passage? How should it change your life, your Community Group, and our Church?

#2 A common application of this passage is that we ought to try to be fruitful soil. This application certainly has its merits. But is there anything in this passage that might point to a different primary emphasis? (Hint: What commands does Jesus actually give?)

#3 Jesus' parables seem to have any number of effects- they confuse, provoke, convict, et al. In this case, Jesus himself tells us why he speaks in parables and gives an explanation of this specific story. How would you summarize His answer? (v. 10-12)

#4 Notice that in Jesus' explanation of the parables (vv.10-20), every element of the story is given further definition, except for one. What is it? What connection do you think Jesus was making by leaving this element conspicuously absent?

#5 As Mark states in verse 2, this parable is just one of many that Jesus used to teach the crowd that followed him on this occasion. Why do you think that this parable in particular is the one that Mark records in his Gospel?

LIVE Scripture

Having worked through this passage with greater depth, revisit your application section from the beginning of this study. Below, write one way that your day-to-day life, your pattern of thinking, or your relationships will change based on the truth communicated in this passage.

WEEK SIX

DAY THREE

Mark 4:21-34

READ Scripture

Before we study the Gospel of Mark today, let's spend a moment meditating on a portion of **Psalms 119**. This Psalm celebrates the gift of God's Word to his people, and is the longest chapter in the entire Bible. The main image that is used to describe God's Word in this section is that of a lamp.

While a lamp may seem like an antiquated tool, they were absolutely vital in the time of the Bible. Life was ruled by things that were out of human control. There was no working after the sun went down. You didn't travel by night. And yet, the Psalmist says, the world is like a day where the sun has gone down permanently, and we find ourselves with no way to navigate this world. Only by taking God at his word will we know truth, seeing the world as it really is, ourselves as we really are, and, most important of all, who our God truly is. Take a few moments to read through this Psalm, and respond by giving thanks to God and asking Him to help you see truth in yourself, in the world, and especially in Himself through His Word today.

¹⁰⁵ *Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.*

¹⁰⁶ *I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,
to keep your righteous rules.*

¹⁰⁷ *I am severely afflicted;
give me life, O LORD, according to your word!*

¹⁰⁸ *Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O LORD,
and teach me your rules.*

¹⁰⁹ *I hold my life in my hand continually,
but I do not forget your law.*

¹¹⁰ *The wicked have laid a snare for me,
but I do not stray from your precepts.*

¹¹¹ *Your testimonies are my heritage forever,
for they are the joy of my heart.*

¹¹² *I incline my heart to perform your statutes
forever, to the end.*

PRAY

The passage that we will study today is **Mark 4:21-34**. Of course, when the things recorded in this passage were originally said by Jesus, they were heard, not read. When the Gospel of Mark was received, it would have been unimaginably precious and no one would be able to read it for themselves- it would be read aloud at church gatherings as members listened in awe. Mark certainly wrote his Gospel with this in mind. In light of this truth, instead of reading this passage silently in your head, read it aloud if you are able, and/or have someone else read it to you once or twice.

STUDY Scripture

Before we dive deeper into this passage, take some time to form 3 solid questions of your own. Use these prompts to help brainstorm:

- Note the literary structure of the passage. How are things arranged?
- Note the sequence of quotes. How do they relate?
- Note the wider context. Does this passage relate to what was written before and what comes after?
- What is this text, **functionally**- an exhortation, encouragement, rebuke, teaching, etc.?

Question 1:

Question 2:

Question 3:

#1 This passage is a continuation of 4:1-20. What do these 14 additional verses add to what was said in the first 20 verses? Another way of thinking about it is, “What would we lose if they weren’t there?”

#2 Jesus doesn’t give three parables when one will do just fine. Though there is certainly a cohesive message that holds these parables together, each of them also brings it’s own distinctive emphasis. Fill out the chart below to help you think about what they might be.

Verses	Your “Title”	Individual Emphasis

#3 This exercise may have forced you to note that this passage contains not only these three parables but also a summarizing note at the end. Verses 33 and 34 connect these stories back to vv.1-2 and together they form an envelope that contains this entire section.

What does this concluding section tell us about the passage as a whole (4:1-34)? (Hint: contrast vs. 33-34 and vs. 1-2)

#4 Now that you have taken some time to consider this story as a whole as well as its individual components, what do you think Jesus was encouraging people to do in response to these words? Why?

#5 Revisit your questions now and try to answer them to the best of your ability. If you don't feel satisfied with your answer(s), instead write how you could keep searching to learn more- asking someone in your Community Group, consulting outside resources, reading the passage more, etc.

#6 Jesus is clearly calling for a faithful response to His words. What would it look like for you to respond faithfully to Jesus' words in this passage?

Week Six

COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION

As you prepare and lead the discussion, remember to make it accessible:

- 1) There may be unbelievers in your midst. Even if someone is well-versed in the Bible and attending church doesn't mean God has awakened their heart to their sin and need for a Savior.
- 2) There may be young, immature believers in your midst. Don't assume people understand simple concepts. Continually prod the group for definitions, especially definitions in everyday language. This exercise is even helpful for believers, so even if you know the group is mature in Christ it is still a good practice and helps people prepare for spiritual conversations with unbelievers.

Another way to think about leading a discussion is creating a culture. You want to create a culture of love, honesty, and vulnerability. Don't be afraid to tell your group the goal for the discussion and be sure to model what you desire.

Begin your discussion by asking the group about their individual study of God's Word and hearing God's Word preached. The Spirit is working among you! Spend some time asking the group about what God is teaching them. If this is challenging/no one is sharing, take some time to remind the group about God's abiding presence in them through the Holy Spirit to help them understand truth and convict them of sin.

"Family Business" Conversation

It would be a mistake to miss this great opportunity without challenging one another and your Community Group towards growth. Spend some time talking together as a large group

about what God is teaching you as you study Mark. We are halfway through our study together.

Questions to Guide the Conversation:

1. What is God teaching you? What is He convicting you about? What is He calling you to do? (We tend to assume things in church world. Like, duh, we know God is calling us to trust Jesus with our lives. Encourage your group: this is worth saying out loud!)
2. How do you plan to obey His Word? What are simple, practical ways you can remember and practice these truths? (Ex. schedule time to reflect and pray, ask a friend to remind you of a specific passage, begin engaging your neighbor)
3. What needs to look different about our Community Group? As a group, how might we live out the Gospel of Mark?

Have someone take notes during this conversation, and revisit it in the future. As God's people, we are called to be doers of the Word (James 1:22-25). Too often, in church world, we have missed the importance of applying the Scripture. It may take some time, but be persistent in calling your group to apply God's Word.

WEEK SEVEN

DAY ONE

Mark 4:35-5:43

READ Scripture

Today we will be reading a fairly large section of Mark. So before we begin, let's ground ourselves in a simple song found in the shortest chapter in the Bible, **Psalm 117**.

Psalm 117

¹ Praise the LORD, all nations!

Extol him, all peoples!

*² For great is his steadfast love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures
forever.*

Praise the LORD!

Read this chapter aloud once or twice, even adding a tune if you wish. The simple message of God's love and unfailing faithfulness, sandwiched between calls to praise him, is a fitting way to begin our study of today's passage. Let it lead you to meditate on God's steadfast love toward you in examples in your life and conclusively displayed in the life, death and resurrection of our Christ.

Begin by reading through this passage only once, focusing on the details, and then follow the instructions below.

Mark 4:35-41

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." ³⁶ And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. ³⁷ And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.

And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹ And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Mark 5:1-43

¹ They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. ² And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. ³ He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, ⁴ for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. ⁶ And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. ⁷ And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." ⁸ For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" ⁹ And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." ¹⁰ And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹ Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, ¹² and they begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." ¹³ So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.

¹⁴ The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵ And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. ¹⁶ And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. ¹⁷ And they began to beg Jesus

to depart from their region.¹⁸ As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him.¹⁹ And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

²¹ And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea.²² Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet²³ and implored him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live."²⁴ And he went with him.

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him.

²⁵ And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years,²⁶ and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse.²⁷ She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment.²⁸ For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well."²⁹ And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.³⁰ And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my garments?"³¹ And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'"³² And he looked around to see who had done it.³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth.³⁴ And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

³⁵ While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?"³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe."³⁷ And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James.³⁸ They came to the house of

the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.³⁹ And when he had entered, he said to them, “Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.”⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was.⁴¹ Taking her by the hand he said to her, “Talitha cumi,” which means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.”⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement.⁴³ And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

STUDY Scripture

#1 Having read through this passage once, write down as many details that you remember, without looking back at the text. If you are familiar with the passage, try to just work from what you just read and not from your memory of the passage.

#2 Now, go back and read through the passage once more. This time, take note of the story as a whole rather than the details. Then, move on to the next prompt.

Now, try to write a brief, one paragraph summary of the story as a whole. Include details that fit the length, but focus on reproducing the idea of the entire story rather than getting every detail exactly replicated.

#3 Jesus is always the star of every story in Mark's Gospel. What do all of Jesus' actions in this passage have in common?

#4 What do you think is the main message of this narrative?

LIVE Scripture

How would your life change if you wholeheartedly believed the truth of this passage?

The Bible tells us that to “know” a truth without **living out** that truth is impossible. In order to **know** a truth we have to **inhabit** the truth, **put it on** and live it out in real ways (1 John 2:4). What would it look like for you to outwardly demonstrate your belief in this passage?

WEEK SEVEN

DAY TWO

Mark 4:35-41

READ Scripture

Before we begin our study of the book of Mark, let's take a moment to ponder **Psalms 116**.

Psalms 116:1-7

¹ *I love the LORD, because he has heard
my voice and my pleas for mercy.*

² *Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.*

³ *The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.*

⁴ *Then I called on the name of the LORD:
"O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!"*

⁵ *Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;
our God is merciful.*

⁶ *The LORD preserves the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.*

⁷ *Return, O my soul, to your rest;
for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.*

It can be enormously helpful to begin our time in Bible by latching onto one key truth about God and let it steep in our hearts. Today, listen to how **Psalms 116** remind us that God is a savior. God is in the business of rescuing His people.

Today we will be studying **Mark 4:35-41**. Turn there and read the passage through several times, taking time to notice all the details of the story. Spend enough time reading it closely

that you would be able to give a detailed retelling without looking back at the text.

STUDY Scripture

#1 Fill out the table below, detailing the actions of the main characters in this scene. When there are multiple empty spaces for one verse, that means there is more than one character or action to account for. The first verse has been completed for you.

Verse(s)	Character(s)	Action
38	Jesus	Sleeps on a cushion in the stern of the boat
38	Disciples	Awake Jesus and ask why he doesn't care that they are drowning
39		
39		
39		
40		
41		
41		

#2 Jesus has just finished a long day of teaching that centered on the importance of drawing near to Jesus and hearing and believing Him. Immediately, this story follows. Do you see any relationship between the parables that Jesus was teaching and this story?

#3 Mark is an incredibly frugal quoter. His quotations always cut to the core of the story being told, and usually bear fruit from closer inspection. In this case, the urgency of the situation meant that the brief exchange is even more charged with meaning. Let's consider the quotations in this passage-

1st QUOTE

"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?", v.38

-Disciples, spoken to Jesus

Can you sympathize with the disciples? They have seen Jesus cast out demons, cleanse lepers, and heal the paralyzed. And now, in the face of certain death, they go to Jesus in terror. Yet, they do not simply tell Jesus that they are in danger. Their question comes with an accusation about Jesus. What is it?

What does this teach us about the disciples?

2nd QUOTE

"Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?", v. 40

-Jesus, spoken to disciples

The sea of Galilee, the body of water upon which the boat was sailing, is positioned at 700 feet below sea level. Less than 50 miles away stood Mount Hermon, jutting out over 7000 feet above sea level. When the warm air from the lake met with the mountains, legendary storms erupted and still do today. Even the disciples, with seasoned fishermen among them, were completely overwhelmed.

When Jesus asks a question, it certainly isn't in order to get information that He doesn't already have access to- He is God. So what effect do you think these two questions would have had on the disciples? Jesus doesn't rebuke His disciples for having "not enough" faith, but for having **none at all**. This is a

stinging rebuke, and it's clear that Jesus isn't just exaggerating. Could this possibly relate to Jesus' teaching on faith in 4:1-34? (Hint: Check out 4:25)

3rd QUOTE

“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”,
v. 41

-Disciples, spoken to one another

What does their response reveal about their understanding of who Jesus is?

Often, this passage is taught with a sentimental tagline like “How to stay calm in the midst of life’s storms.” Yet, at the end of the story, are the disciples comforted? Why or why not?

WEEK SEVEN

DAY THREE

Mark 5:21-43

READ Scripture

As we begin our study of Mark, let's visit another time-honored prayer. The goal is not just to recite a prayer but to use it as a springboard into prayer, centering your heart on God as you prepare to hear Him in his Word.

*Thanks be to you for my high and holy calling.
I bless you for ministering angels,
For the comfort of your word
For the instruction of your Spirit
For the communion of the saints
For Christian fellowship
Your purposes are present in everything you provide
To enable me to grow in grace,
And to be ready for your eternal presence.
I draw near to you, knowing you will draw near to me.
I ask of you, believing you have already given it
I entrust myself to you, for you have redeemed me.
I bless and adore you, the eternal God,
For the comfort of these thoughts,
And the joy of these hopes.*

~The Valley of Vision. P. 300

Today's passage is **Mark 5:21-43**. Read through the passage several times, taking in the details of the story.

STUDY Scripture

#1 This passage features two separate encounters between Jesus and a needy person(s). Fill in the timeline of the story below, a few have been filled in for you:

Verse(s)	Subject/Action
21	Jesus crosses the boat and is beside the sea.
22-24	Jairus begs Jesus to come quickly to heal his sick daughter. Jesus goes with him.
25-29	
30-32	
33	The woman comes to Jesus and tells Him the entire story.
34	
35	
36	
37-40	
41-43	

#2 Jesus and His team of disciples are going with Jairus to heal his daughter. But they are side-tracked by this incident with the bleeding woman. The burning question: why is Jesus stopping to help this woman when the threat of the child's death is looming? There's no time to lose! What do you think Jairus was feeling when Jesus stopped to talk with the bleeding woman rather than running along to Jairus' house to heal his daughter?

#3 This story comes at the climax of a sequence of stories show Jesus exerting His power in various realms. Fill out the table below to see how this movement progresses.

Verses	Jesus shows His power over...	He shows this power by...
4:35-41		
5:1-20		
5:21-34		
5:35-43		

What do you think is being shown about Jesus through this sequence of events?

#4 In the case of both the bleeding woman and the dead child, Jesus does something that the law says will make him ceremonially unclean and unable to enter the place where God dwells (Leviticus 15:25; Numbers 19:11). Yet it is clear that Jesus has not become defiled by His actions. What does this tell us about Jesus?

#5 What do you think each character in this story learned about who Jesus is?

Jairus: (Hint: Consider how he would have felt while waiting for Jesus to go heal his daughter)

Bleeding woman: (Hint: Consider why Jesus goes out of His way to make her identify herself and her ailment)

Disciples: (Hint: Consider their lack of understanding that is displayed in v.31)

What character can you most readily relate to? Why?

LIVE Scripture

Many truths about who Jesus is are communicated in this passage. What is one that is most difficult for you to believe?

Spend some time doing as Jesus has asks us to do- draw near to Him by His Spirit and in prayer ask that He would teach this truth to you, confessing that you don't always understand, but still want to honor Him and know Him more deeply.

Week Seven

COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION

As you prepare and lead the discussion, remember to make it accessible:

- 1) There may be unbelievers in your midst.
- 2) There may be young, immature believers in your midst.

Another way to think about leading a discussion is creating a culture. You want to create a culture of love, honesty, and vulnerability, so don't be afraid to tell your group the goal for the discussion and be sure to model what you desire.

Begin your discussion by asking the group about their individual study of God's Word and hearing God's Word preached. The Spirit is working among you! Spend some time asking the group about what God is teaching them. If this is challenging, or if no one is sharing, take some time to remind the group about God's abiding presence in them through the Holy Spirit to help them understand truth and convict them of sin.

Orient Your Minds to God's Word

- Read Mark 4:35-5:43, or select a specific passage (4:35-41 or 5:1-20 or 5:21-43)

Ask some basic questions:

- Can anyone paraphrase this passage in their own words?
 - What surprises you? What do all these stories have in common?
 - If you gave these verses to someone who had never heard of Jesus before, what do you think their response would be?
-
- *Always try to move the discussion towards real life application. It's very common and easy to fall into*

“information transfer” mode vs. hearing and doing the Word. Press here, often.

- What is one concrete step you can take in your life to live out this passage?
- What is one concrete step we can take as a Community Group to live out this passage?

Application for the Heart and Life

(This section is designed for Formation Groups = small (2-3) gender-specific groups for confession of sin and reminding one another of Gospel truth)

Gospel growth: Confession and Repentance

In 4:35-41 we see the disciples wrestling with fear. Even though Jesus is with them, they are gripped by fear that they might drown. Fear is a very powerful motivator, and it often can drive our sin, anxiety, and anger.

- What are your greatest fears? (Example: Loss of job, loss of relationship, loss of security)
- If you have trouble confessing one, what do you worry about? The root of anxiety is fear.
- Confess your fears together and seek to meet your fears with the truth of the Gospel.

Gospel promise

Jesus Christ meets us in our fears. He is greater than our fears, and He continually rescues us from our fears. The disciples learned this when Jesus woke up, and rebuked the storm. Encourage one another to deny fear and fight for faith. When you are anxious and afraid, practice 1 Peter 5:7 by ***“casting all your anxieties on him, for he cares for you.”***

WEEK EIGHT

DAY ONE

Mark 6:1-29

READ Scripture

As we begin today's study of the Gospel of Mark, take a moment to go to God in prayer.

PRAY

Since our study will be focusing on Jesus' person and work, take a few minutes to prepare your heart by chewing on this brief but glorious description of Christ from **Hebrews 1-**

¹Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

This Christ, described explicitly in power and glory, is the One cloaked divine in Mark's Gospel. It's there that we turn now.

Read through the passage several times to become familiar with it. As you work through the passage, take notes on this page, circling things that are new or confusing to you, connecting related phrases or ideas with a pen line, highlighting quotes, or whatever else will help you examine and dissect the passage visually.

Mark 6:1-29

¹He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ²And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying,

“Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?”³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.⁴ And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.”⁵ And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.⁶ And he marveled because of their unbelief.

And he went about among the villages teaching.

⁷ And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.⁸ He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts—⁹ but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics.¹⁰ And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there.¹¹ And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.”¹² So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.¹³ And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

¹⁴ King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.”¹⁵ But others said, “He is Elijah.” And others said, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.”¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.”¹⁷ For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her.¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.”¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not,²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.

²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee.²² For when Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, “Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you.”²³ And he vowed to

her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom."²⁴ And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist."²⁵ And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."²⁶ And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her.²⁷ And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison²⁸ and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother.²⁹ When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

STUDY Scripture

#1 Now that you have read through the passage several times, write down some of the more significant observations that you made:

#2 Write down two or three questions that you have about this passage:

#3 There are three scenes of Jesus in a synagogue that are recorded in the book of Mark. In all of them, Jesus teaches and then there is a response. This is the third and final scene. Look up the others and fill in this table with the information you find.

Passage	Responding party	Response
1:21-28	The crowd	
3:1-6	The pharisees	
6:1-6	The crowd	

Would you say that Jesus' reception in the synagogues was generally positive or negative? Why do you think this is?

#4 What seems to have prevented the synagogue in Nazareth from believing in Jesus?

#5 What do we learn about God from this passage?

LIVE Scripture

What would a faithful response to this passage look like in your life?

What is a concrete step that you can take to embody the truths described in this story?

WEEK EIGHT

DAY TWO

Mark 6:1-13

READ Scripture

Before we begin our study of the Gospel of Mark, let's turn to **Psalm 119** again and consider another passage that commends God's instruction to His people. Meditate on this passage and let it lead you to adore God and the preciousness of His words to us.

- ¹²⁹ *Your testimonies are wonderful;
therefore my soul keeps them.*
- ¹³⁰ *The unfolding of your words gives light;
it imparts understanding to the simple.*
- ¹³¹ *I open my mouth and pant,
because I long for your commandments.*
- ¹³² *Turn to me and be gracious to me,
as is your way with those who love your name.*
- ¹³³ *Keep steady my steps according to your promise,
and let no iniquity get dominion over me.*
- ¹³⁴ *Redeem me from man's oppression,
that I may keep your precepts.*
- ¹³⁵ *Make your face shine upon your servant,
and teach me your statutes.*
- ¹³⁶ *My eyes shed streams of tears,
because people do not keep your law.*

Now let's turn to the focus of our study today, **Mark 6:1-13**. First, for 5-10 minutes, read through the passage several times until you feel you could give a faithful retelling of it from memory.

STUDY Scripture

#1 As was mentioned in the first study for this passage, this is the third and final synagogue encounter that Mark records in his Gospel. The scene is fairly simple, and in some ways it mirrors the first synagogue encounter (Mk. 1:21-28). But then, something changes. Examine these two encounters and list the similarities and differences below:

Mark 1:21-28 vs. Mark 6:1-6

Similarities	Differences

What seems to be the cause of the lack of faith displayed in Jesus' hometown?

#2 Mark's Gospel features a unique emphasis on the progressive revelation of Jesus' true divine identity. Every time Jesus is given a new attribute or title, our ears should perk up (i.e., Holy One of God (1:24), Son of Man (2:28) Son of God (3:11)). Jesus also associates Himself with certain roles using subtle references. The reference in 6:4 is the third of four that are present in this first half of the Gospel of Mark. Fill out the rest of this table to see how this element has developed, and how Jesus' self-definition aligns with the accounts of His mighty acts.

Verse(s)	Jesus' Self-Defined Role
2:17	
4:3;14	
6:4	Prophet
6:34	

How does this collection of titles inform our understanding of all that Jesus came to do?

#3 What similarities and differences do you see between the ministry of John the Baptist (1:4-5) and that for which Jesus commissions the Apostles?

#4 What similarities does this episode share with the appointment of the twelve Apostles in 3:13-21?

#5 What do we learn from those who reject Jesus in Nazareth? How can we sympathize with them? What would you tell them to help them see who Jesus really is?

#6 It's easy to have a cheery view of the Apostles because of their later work, and read this passage with those things in mind. But consider the fact that none of the Apostles has yet recognized Jesus as Lord. Consider that among them is the traitor, Judas Iscariot. With these facts in mind, what do we learn about God from this passage?

WEEK EIGHT

DAY THREE

Mark 6:14-29

READ Scripture

Let's begin today's study of Mark by meditating on a portion of **Psalms 119**, using each phrase ignite prayer as we ask God to prepare us to study his Word.

- ¹⁶⁹ *Let my cry come before you, O LORD;
give me understanding according to your word!*
- ¹⁷⁰ *Let my plea come before you;
deliver me according to your word.*
- ¹⁷¹ *My lips will pour forth praise,
for you teach me your statutes.*
- ¹⁷² *My tongue will sing of your word,
for all your commandments are right.*
- ¹⁷³ *Let your hand be ready to help me,
for I have chosen your precepts.*
- ¹⁷⁴ *I long for your salvation, O LORD,
and your law is my delight.*
- ¹⁷⁵ *Let my soul live and praise you,
and let your rules help me.*
- ¹⁷⁶ *I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant,
for I do not forget your commandments.*

Today's passage is **Mark 6:14-29**. Turn there now and read through the passage several times, becoming familiar with it.

STUDY Scripture

#1 In this section, Mark weaves together background information surrounding the death of John the Baptist. He does this using editorial comments, background details and direct quotes. The result is a very compact account that details this event and sheds light on the cultural and political atmosphere Jesus is stepping into.

Fill out the table below to wrap your mind around the composition of this account and what insights we can derive from it.

Verse(s)	Type of Information (Quote? Narrative? Background information? Multiple?)	Information transmitted
14-15	Background, Quote	Jesus has become a household name, yet there is great confusion about who He actually is.
16		
17-20		Herod had imprisoned John to appease his wife Herodias, but Herod also feared John because he knew he was righteous and holy.
21-28	Narrative	
29	Narrative	

#2 Why do you think Mark gives such a detailed account of this event? Couldn't he just have said "John the baptist died?" Why do you think he gives so much detail, background information and editorial comment?

Going Deeper: The Significance of John the Baptist

Mark's Gospel is incredibly concise and to-the-point. He doesn't take time to give more details than are necessary to make his theological point. He never overstates the case. Yet he uses 26 verses here to tell us about the death of John the Baptist, who seems to be a minor character in this story. He hasn't been mentioned since 1:9! How do we account for this apparent inconsistency?

It is easy for us to overlook the significance of John. Even the name that has been traditionally bestowed on him, "The Baptist," while being helpful to separate John from the numerous other Johns of the Bible (including the author of the book of Mark, whose name was John Mark), minimizes the significance of this God-sent man. He did not just baptize. He was sent by God to be the first step in the Jesus era. Mark introduces John by identifying him as the one of whom the Old Testament prophets Malachi and Isaiah prophesied, forming a deep connection between John and the prophets of God. He was not just a strange man in the desert who did a lot of baptizing. He was God's mouthpiece to a generation of Israelites who would be blessed to see the coming of God's promised Messiah.

It is also easy for us to forget the religious and cultural context that John entered. John appeared on the scene about 400 years after the last prophet that we know of, who was Malachi. And what are the last words of Malachi?

Malachi 4:5-6

⁵“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ⁶And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

It is no wonder then, that the coming of this mysterious figure in the wilderness who is anointed to lead Israel back to God has caused a great stir. Finally, after 400 years of deafening heavenly silence, God seems to have once again opened up communication with His people. Could this be the promised prophet, Elijah, whom God promised will come?

In **Mark 9**, Jesus answers this question:

¹¹ And they asked him, “Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” ¹² And he said to them, “Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? ¹³ But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him.”

Indeed Elijah is the one who comes to prepare the way of Jesus. Jesus’ ministry doesn’t begin until John’s ministry ends. And now, Jesus’ ministry begins to bloom only when John’s life is extinguished. History tells us that John’s ministry was easily viewed as more popular than that of Jesus. Mark tells us that when John appeared, “all of the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him...” (1:5). Jesus’ ministry grows slowly, unevenly. But now there is a huge contingent of faithful Israelites who followed John and his disciples. With John the Baptist dead, his followers are now left shepherdless. Who will replace this dead man? Mark doesn’t take long to tell us:

Mark 6:34

³⁴ *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.*

The Holy Spirit, through Mark, is showing us the transition between these two great leaders of God's people. Jesus' ministry explodes, and he begins drawing enormous crowds, feeding tens of thousands of people (Mk. 6:30-44), and all of this is leading down a path that is foreshadowed by the unjust murder of John the Baptist.

Week Eight

COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION

As you prepare and lead the discussion, remember to make it accessible:

- 1) There may be unbelievers in your midst.
- 2) There may be young, immature believers in your midst.

Another way to think about leading a discussion is creating a culture. You want to create a culture of love, honesty, and vulnerability. Don't be afraid to tell your group the goal for the discussion and be sure to model what you desire.

Begin your discussion by asking the group about their individual study of God's Word and hearing God's Word preached. The Spirit is working among you! Spend some time asking the group about what God is teaching them. If this is challenging, or if no one is sharing, take some time to remind the group about God's abiding presence in them through the Holy Spirit to help them understand truth and convict them of sin.

Orient Your Minds to God's Word

- Read Mark 6:1-29, or select a specific passage (v.1-13 or v.14-29)

Ask some basic questions:

- Can anyone paraphrase this passage in their own words?
- What surprises you?
- What prevented the people of Nazareth from faith in Jesus?
- How does John the Baptist fit into the story of Jesus? (Use the Going Deeper section from the third individual study)

- It must have been so unbelievable to the people of Nazareth that little Jesus was now supposedly this miracle working prophet, but it is easy to fall into this mentality. What's something in your life that seems so impossible or unbelievable that you need to surrender to God? Maybe a relationship, a circumstance, or a need.
- *Remember: Always try to move the discussion towards real life application.*

Application for the Heart and Life

(This section is designed for Formation Groups = small (2-3) gender-specific groups for confession of sin and reminding one another of Gospel truth)

Gospel growth: Confession and Repentance

Use this time freely. Share sin struggles, heavy burdens, or just plain apathy toward Jesus. Invite others into vulnerability, and seek to remind one another with the truth of the Gospel.

- Use the *[Formation Tree diagram](http://bit.ly/formation_tree_diagram) to give you ideas on how to point one another to the Gospel.
- Some good passages to consider: Romans 5:1, 8:1 and 15-17, Galatians 5:1, 2 Cor. 5:17

* (http://bit.ly/formation_tree_diagram)

WEEK NINE

DAY ONE

Mark 6:30-56

READ Scripture

As we begin our study of the Gospel of Mark, take a moment to thank God for the gift of His Word. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you in rich and wonderful ways as we study the Gospel of Mark now.

PRAY

Take five-ten minutes to carefully read this passage several times.

Mark 6:30-56

³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ² And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. ³⁶ Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." ³⁷ But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" ³⁸ And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." ³⁹ Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. ⁴¹ And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a

blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all.

⁴² And they all ate and were satisfied. ⁴³ And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴ And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

⁴⁵ Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷ And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, ⁵⁰ for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." ⁵¹ And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. ⁵⁴ And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him ⁵⁵ and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

STUDY Scripture

#1 Using the passage printed above, make the following notes:

-Circle the words that describe Jesus' actions or Jesus himself.

For example:

³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while."

-Use a highlighter or a different pen to mark background narrative.

For example:

⁴⁷ *And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.*

-Underline the responses of other characters or groups to the things that Jesus does.

For example:

³⁷ *But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?"*

#2 When all people are counted in Jesus' feeding of the 5,000, the number was likely closer to 15,000. What do we learn about Jesus from the account of the feeding of these five thousand?

About Jesus' power?

About Jesus' compassion?

About Jesus' identity?

#3 This is not the first time that Jesus has comforted His terrified disciples in the midst of a storm while they are sailing. Take a moment to revisit **Mark 4:35-41**. Why do you think Jesus' response in this encounter is different from His response in 4:40?

#4 Now that you have spent some quality time in this passage, what do you think is the primary truth (or truths) being communicated in this passage?

LIVE Scripture

How would your life look different if you wholeheartedly believed this/these truths? Ask the Spirit to give you insight as you consider this.

In your family:

In your friendships:

In your work:

True transformation only comes by the power of God's Spirit working through you. What is one concrete step you can take in each of these realms to carry out this kind of God-dependent obedience?

WEEK NINE

DAY TWO

Mark 6:30-44

READ Scripture

Before we study today's passage, let's spend a few minutes meditating on **Psalm 23**, where God is described as a shepherd of His people. This will not only center our hearts in God's Word but also frame today's study.

¹ *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

² *He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.*

³ *He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.*

⁴ *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of
death, I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*

⁵ *You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

⁶ *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

The passage for our study today is **Mark 6:30-44**. Turn there in your Bible and read the story slowly a few times to reacquaint yourself with it.

STUDY Scripture

#1 In order to better understand the timeline of these events, fill out the table below.

Verse(s)	Person/Group	Action/Dialogue
30	Apostles	Return from their mission and tell Jesus what happened
31-32	Jesus	Tells them to take a break to rest from their journey, because they hadn't even had time to eat. They get on a boat to go somewhere isolated, to rest and eat.
33	Crowd	
34	Jesus	
35-36	Disciples	
37	Jesus/Disciples	

38	Jesus	
39-41	Jesus	
42	Crowd	
43-44	Disciples	

#2 How do you think the Apostles felt when they returned from their journeys all over Israel? (v.30)

#3 How do you think they felt when Jesus invited them to go away with him for a private meal to refresh and relax? (v.31-32)

#4 How do you think it felt for their relaxing plan to be interrupted by an enormous, hungry crowd? (v.32-34)

#5 How do you think the Apostles felt when Jesus told them to give their own meal away to the hungry crowd? (v.37-38)

#6 The comment in v.34 that describes Jesus' reaction to the crowd is different from the rest of the narrative because it gives us information that could only be supplied by God. This kind of editorial comment reveals Mark's role as the omniscient narrator ("inspired by God") of the Gospel of Mark. When an editorial comment like this appears, it often gives us the key to understanding the section as a whole. How does this comment help us understand the big picture of this passage?

#7 By the end of this passage, we find out that "they all ate and were satisfied" (v.42). Presumably this includes Jesus' own followers. Most people believe that Mark's source for these stories was the Apostle Peter. You can imagine Peter regaling Mark with the stories of his time with Jesus, and this one certainly would have stuck out as being especially noteworthy. What truths do we see being taught through Jesus' actions in this story?

To the disciples:

To the crowd:

#8 What do you think his followers learned about what it means to be a shepherd of God's people?

WEEK NINE

DAY THREE

Mark 6:45-56

READ Scripture

As we prepare to study today's passage in Mark, let's take a moment to praise God through **Psalm 71**:

¹ *In you, O LORD, do I take refuge;*

let me never be put to shame!

² *In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;*

incline your ear to me, and save me!

³ *Be to me a rock of refuge,*

to which I may continually come;

you have given the command to save me,

for you are my rock and my fortress.

⁴ *Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,*

from the grasp of the unjust and cruel man.

⁵ *For you, O Lord, are my hope,*

my trust, O LORD, from my youth.

⁶ *Upon you I have leaned from before my birth;*

you are he who took me from my mother's womb.

My praise is continually of you.

PRAY

The passage for today's study is **Mark 6:45-56**. Begin by reading through the passage several times, and reviewing the previous passage (6:30-44) once. Remember that it's more important to spend time in the text and let God speak to you there than to make sure all of your answers to the questions are correct. When you have sufficiently soaked in this passage, move on to these questions.

STUDY Scripture

#1 Make a timeline of the narrative by filling out the table below:

Verse(s)	Subject	Action/Dialogue
45	Disciples	
46-47	Jesus	
48	Jesus	
49-50	Disciples	
50	Jesus	
51	Wind	
51-52	Disciples	
53	Disciples and Jesus	
54	Gennesaretites	
55-56	Gennesaretites	

#2 In our previous study, we focused on the experience of the Apostles. This passage also focuses on the Apostle’s perspective of Jesus’ mighty acts and ministry. What do you think it was like for the Apostles to experience these three incredible events back-to-back-to-back?

#3 This story begins with the disciples being forced to forego rest and food in order to minister to Jesus' largest crowd yet. It continues with the story of them staying up all night rowing. It ends with them finally making it to shore (v. 53) and yet another enormous crowd meets them. How you think they felt by the end of this experience?

#4 Verses 51 and 52 give us an insight into the minds of the Apostles. What do we learn about them from this insight?

#5 It seems strange that the omniscient editorial note in v.52 tells us that the disciples were astonished by Jesus walking on water **because they did not understand about the loaves**. What do you think this means?

Going Deeper: The "I AM" and the Dense Disciples

Mark's Gospel, more than any of the other three accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, portrays the disciples in an almost completely negative light. This fact is made all the more fascinating when you consider that the source for Mark's Gospel was Peter. Can you imagine Peter sitting down with Mark over the course of weeks or months as Mark asked him questions about his time with Jesus? In the chronology of

Mark's Gospel, we have not yet gotten to the point in Mark's Gospel where a human finally recognizes who Jesus is (8:29). And who is it who finally recognizes Jesus? Peter. But before Peter's moment of clarity comes a slew of stories where the disciples look incredibly dim. Up to this point, Jesus has:

- taught authoritatively (1:22; 2:18-28; 6:2)
- cast out demons (1:23-27; 1:34)- even as many as 6000 at once (5:1-20)
- Been correctly identified as the "Holy One", "Son of God" by demons (1:24; 5:7)
- healed many (1:34)
- healed a leper (1:40-45)
- healed a paralyzed man (2:1-12)
- answered his adversary's questions perfectly (2:18-3:6; 3:22-30)
- healed a man with a withered hand (3:1-6)
- reenacted the Sinai covenant with himself as 'God' (3:13-19)
- rebuked the wind and the waves and they obeyed him (4:35-41)
- healed a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (5:25-34)
- raised the dead (5:35-43)
- fed ~10-15,000 people using only 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish (6:30-44)
- walked on water (6:45-52)

And at the climax of this ever-increasing display of His divine identity, Jesus gives them His clearest sign yet.

The story of Jesus walking on the water is correctly understood to be a miracle. Jesus shows His command over the natural world by subverting the "laws" of gravity and/or displacement, revealing his supernatural identity. That is true. But the scene is much deeper than that. The text explicitly tells us that Jesus intended to **"pass them by"** (v.48). This is a clear Old Testament reference to God making His presence known to His people, most significantly with Moses (Ex. 33:12-23).

Even clearer is an element that is unfortunately lost in English translation. When Jesus speaks to His disciples as He stands where only God could stand, His words would be more literally translated, "Take heart; I AM. Do not fear." Jesus, for the first time, is ascribing the divine identity to Himself, referencing again to God's self-revelation in the Old Testament (Ex. 3:14); and yet His closest followers still don't recognize who He is. Our passage today develops this theme to a point unlike any other in Mark's Gospel. This sequence of three stories portray Jesus' power and divinity with incredible clarity. And yet, their reaction is to be astounded, yet still hard-hearted (6:52).

Now, where do you think Mark received this editorial comment in 6:52? It really puts a bow on this whole sequence of stories, highlighting the development (or lack of development) in the disciples. The most likely case is that Peter himself, while recounting these stories to Mark, added this insight, lamenting his own inability to realize who Jesus was from the beginning.

Have you ever watched a movie that had a huge plot twist at the end; the kind of plot twist where, if you miss an important detail you might misunderstand the entire film? At the end, you're left thinking, "I think I understood what happened." But most of the important foreshadowing and details really went over your head. Then you watch it again, but with the ending in mind, and suddenly everything makes sense. Scenes that seemed insignificant suddenly become crucial to the plot. Details that you had glossed over become indispensable. Surely this is how Peter felt after he came to understand who Jesus really was. The greatest plot twist of all time had been unveiled.

Journal and Reflect:

Instead of heaping scorn on the Apostles for their lack of understanding, we must remember that faith is a gift, and that we all have misunderstandings and doubts living in us because of sin. Have you ever experienced something difficult in life and then, in retrospect, realized what God was trying to teach you through it?

If you could go back in time and give a word of wisdom to your younger self, what would you tell him/her? Why?

In 5 years, how do you think you would answer that question about yourself now? What truths about God do you desperately need to cling to now?

As creatures made in God's image, we are always **becoming**-always in a state of change and transition. The question is what (or who) we are becoming more like. In light of these reflections, what aspect of Jesus do you most long to experience more fully over the next few months?

Take some time to pray for God to reveal himself in a fresh way through his Spirit, then make a plan for how to search out these truths about God, and let someone in your Community Group know about it.

Week Nine

COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION

As you prepare and lead the discussion, remember to make it accessible:

- 1) There may be unbelievers in your midst.
- 2) There may be young, immature believers in your midst.

Another way to think about leading a discussion is creating a culture. You want to create a culture of love, honesty, and vulnerability. Don't be afraid to tell your group the goal for the discussion and be sure to model what you desire.

Begin your discussion by asking the group about their individual study of God's Word and hearing God's Word preached. The Spirit is working among you! Spend some time asking the group about what God is teaching them. If this is challenging, or if no one is sharing, take some time to remind the group about God's abiding presence in them through the Holy Spirit to help them understand truth and convict them of sin.

Specifically ask people to share some of their reflections for the **Going Deeper** section in the third individual study called "The 'I AM' and the Dense Disciples."

Orient Your Minds to God's Word

- Read Mark 6:30-56, or select a specific passage (6:30-44 or 6:45-56)

Ask some basic questions:

- Can anyone paraphrase this passage in their own words?
- What surprises you?
- If you gave these verses to someone who had never heard of Jesus before, what do you think their response would be?

- Share some observations about the disciples' experience. What is Jesus trying to teach them?
- As the disciples are seeking rest, they are asked to step up and help Jesus minister to the hungry crowds. How do you think they reacted? How do you react when you're tired and fatigued?
- How does Jesus rest in this passage (v. 46)?
- What is Jesus showing us about His abilities?

Application for the Heart and Life

(This section is designed for Formation Groups = small (2-3) gender-specific groups for confession of sin and reminding one another of Gospel truth)

Gospel growth: Confession and Repentance

As we study this passage, we see a very real application in the area of perseverance and sacrifice. Often God calls us to love our neighbor, spend time with our family, or have an exhausting conversation when we are already tired and have zero energy. Our response in those moments often reveals an idol of comfort.

- How do you struggle with laziness, apathy, and comfort?
- In moments of fatigue, how could you find strength to persevere? Where does Jesus find it?
- Denying the idol of comfort is not always neglecting rest. What are some ways you rest in the Lord vs. resting in the flesh?

Gospel promise

Jesus calls us out of comfort and into intimacy with God. Encourage one another that Jesus is better than earthly comforts, and remember He always “gives more grace” (James 4:6). Rest in His grace and fight to lean into discomfort for His glory.

WEEK TEN

DAY ONE

Mark 7:1-23

READ Scripture

Before we begin today's study of Mark's Gospel, take a moment to meditate on this simple exhortation from the end of **Psalms 40**. Let it lead you to worship God, who rescues the poor and needy in his perfect timing.

¹⁶ *But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, "Great is the LORD!"*

¹⁷ *As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God!*

Now, let's turn to our study of the book of Mark. Today's passage is printed below. Take 10 minutes or so to become familiar with this passage, writing notes on the page, and examining the passages before and after it briefly.

Mark 7:1-23

¹ Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, ² they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. ³ (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, ⁴ and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) ⁵ And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"

⁶ And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

*“This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
⁷ in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’*

⁸ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

⁹ And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ ¹¹ But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)—¹² then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, ¹³ thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

¹⁴ And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.” ¹⁷ And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸ And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰ And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

STUDY Scripture

#1 This passage features a lot of background information given by Mark to clarify the situation before the conflict is actually presented. Use a highlighter or circle the background information in the passage. (see v.3)

#2 The main focus of this passage is a conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. What is the Pharisee's criticism of Jesus?

#3 What is Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees?

#4 Is Jesus criticizing their hand-washing practice per se? Or is there a deeper flaw that He is identifying? What is it?

#5 Jesus never seems to answer questions directly, and His responses always cut to the core of the issue at hand. What does Jesus' response to the Pharisee's question reveal about the real issue at hand?

#6 When Jesus gathers his followers back together, He gives them the inside scoop on what God's commandments are really about. What do we learn about God's commandments from this explanation?

LIVE Scripture

Our actions are always a revelation of our inward beliefs. What belief do you think might be leading you to elevate other things above God? Ask God to show you, through His Spirit and His Word, places where disbelief has led to disobedience.

Ask God to cut these things out of your life by showing you His goodness and love yet again, and giving your heart the ability to respond to Him in truth. Share these things with someone in your Community Group.

WEEK TEN

DAY TWO

Mark 7:1-13

READ Scripture

As we turn to our study of Mark's Gospel, let's center our hearts by meditating on this portion of **Psalms 40**:

Psalms 40:4-8

- ⁴ *Blessed is the man who makes
the LORD his trust,
who does not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after a lie!*
- ⁵ *You have multiplied, O LORD my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you!
I will proclaim and tell of them,
yet they are more than can be told.*
- ⁶ *In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted,
but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.*
- ⁷ *Then I said, "Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:*
- ⁸ *I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart."*

Ask God to illuminate your mind and soften your heart to understand His Word today.

The focus of today's study is **Mark 7:1-13**. Take 5-10 minutes to reacquaint yourself with this passage, focusing on the details given and the dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees and Scribes.

STUDY Scripture

#1 What do you think is the main point of this passage?

#2 How does the passage teach this main point?

#3 Take a moment to try to relate to the Pharisees. While we generally just think of them as the ‘bad guys’ of the New Testament, they function as more than simple antagonists. In this time in Jewish history, the Pharisees were like the pastors of their day and it was a tumultuous day they lived in. The Jews were in occupied territory (the Romans ruled their country), and there was always a threat that their spiritual community would be destroyed. In Jesus they saw a radical teacher who was directly contradicting time-honored customs that had given their oppressed community meaning and a shared identity for centuries. Why does Jesus go after them so firmly?

#4 When we read a story like this, we should always try to see it from the perspective of the ‘bad guys’, because that’s how we learn what our sin looks like. All of our hearts have a shadow of the Pharisee in them. Washing your hands before dinner isn’t a bad thing, but they had transformed their custom into a form of self-righteousness. We all have parts of our lives that we maintain because they give us a sense of self-righteousness...forgetting that our righteousness is given as a

gift. Jesus is our righteousness. The most dangerous forms of self-righteousness are spiritual disciplines like prayer, Bible reading or scripture memory. All are good things, but not ultimate things. We think God loves us more because we obey Him, instead of believing that God could never love us more because He loves us because of what Jesus did, not what we do.

What is a practice in your life that tends toward self-righteousness rather than Jesus-righteousness? What do you fall back on when you're feeling unworthy? (i.e. ...**but at least I...** am a good parent... read my Bible... don't cuss... don't drink... tithe... etc.)

Ask God to send His Spirit into your heart, reminding you of His love for you- the perfect love that comes through what Christ has done, not what you have done or will do. It might be time to reevaluate some of your habits in light of this.

Discarding plainly sinful habits and re-establishing your spiritual disciplines as a product of relationship with God, not the other way around. Be sure to bring this to Community Group to share what God has laid on your heart with those close to you.

WEEK TEN

DAY THREE

Mark 7:14-23

READ Scripture

Before we begin our study of the Gospel of Mark, let's meditate on another portion of **Psalm 119**. Let each line push you to respond in prayer, thanking God for each truth revealed and asking Him to open the eyes of your heart.

- ⁷³ *Your hands have made and fashioned me;
give me understanding that I may learn your
commandments.*
- ⁷⁴ *Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice,
because I have hoped in your word.*
- ⁷⁵ *I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous,
and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.*
- ⁷⁶ *Let your steadfast love comfort me
according to your promise to your servant.*
- ⁷⁷ *Let your mercy come to me, that I may live;
for your law is my delight.*
- ⁷⁸ *Let the insolent be put to shame,
because they have wronged me with falsehood;
as for me, I will meditate on your precepts.*
- ⁷⁹ *Let those who fear you turn to me,
that they may know your testimonies.*
- ⁸⁰ *May my heart be blameless in your statutes,
that I may not be put to shame!*

The focus of our study today is **Mark 7:14-23**. Take 5-10 minutes to bask in this passage, noting the details. Take a few minutes to review the preceding passage (7:1-13) as well.

STUDY Scripture

#1 How does this passage relate to the section that immediately precedes it?

#2 There is one editorial comment in this passage- a verse or note that doesn't fit ***within*** the actual narrative but gives additional information. This is often information that couldn't be obtained apart from the narrator's omniscient perspective. What is it?

#3 As we have said, noting these special comments often gives special insight into the meaning of the passage as a whole. How does this verse help you make sense of what Jesus was teaching?

#4 Take some time to notice the intricacies of the scene that Mark has painted by filling out the table below:

Verse(s)	Scene	Audience
7:1-13	Confrontation at dinner	
7:14-16		
7:17-23		

Going Deeper: Missing the Point

Jesus' disagreement with the Pharisees and Scribes is not just a simple matter of whether Jesus' disciples washed their hands before they ate. It was just one more example of the blindness and hypocrisy of the religious leaders of the day. And yet Jesus uses this moment to reveal something incredible about the laws of God and His connection to the Old Testament.

God made a covenant with the nation of Israel after He had led them out of Egypt (Ex. 19:4-6). A covenant is an agreement between two parties that determines the relationship between them. It is like a contract, but it is never-ending. Part of the covenant between Israel and God was that Israel was to obey God's commandments.

God's commandments functioned in a number of ways. One of the elements of God's commandments was to remind the fledgling nation that their God is Holy, unlike humans. Therefore, God prohibited His people from eating certain foods, touching certain things, or even wearing certain types of clothing! All of this was a daily reminder that the God of Israel is not like the God of the nations. He is completely different, completely transcendent, completely Holy.

The "tradition of the elders" that Jesus is confronting in this passage is likely related to the laws of God's covenant with Israel that had to do with touching unclean things (see Leviticus 11:24-28 for an example). This is a legitimate law of God that deserves observation. If you touch something that God has called unclean, you must wash yourself, and you will be unclean until you do so. God is holy.

Mark goes into severe detail to explain the practices that the religious leaders observed. Not only did they wash when they had touched something unclean, they ceremonially washed their cups, pots, copper vessels and dining couches (7:4). They went beyond what the commandments of law required. Seems unnecessary, but maybe they just wanted to be sure that they remembered how holy God is.

But that's where Jesus takes issue. He has seen the religious leaders meticulously cleaning couches and dishes, propounding their meticulous regard for God's holiness. And He has seen something else as well. Old men and women begging in the streets, whose children have told them that instead of caring for their needs, they have been exceedingly generous to God. And Jesus won't have it. Their generosity and careful cleaning, combined with their neglect of the poor, shows that their religious observance is not really focused on God at all, but on themselves.

Jesus' explanation of His parable is meant to awake His hearers to the very truth that the religious leaders had missed. While they were trying to clean themselves from the outside in through their meticulous religious observance and tradition, Jesus reminded them of the entire point of God's laws, and the ultimate promise that God's law was pointing to.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹ *"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."*

Week Ten

COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION

As you prepare and lead the discussion, remember to make it accessible:

- 1) There may be unbelievers in your midst.
- 2) There may be young, immature believers in your midst.

Another way to think about leading a discussion is creating a culture. You want to create a culture of love, honesty, and vulnerability, so don't be afraid to tell your group the goal for the discussion and be sure to model what you desire.

Begin your discussion by asking the group about their individual study of God's Word and hearing God's Word preached. The Spirit is working among you! Spend some time asking the group about what God is teaching them. If this is challenging/no one is sharing, take some time to remind the group about God's abiding presence in them through the Holy Spirit to help them understand truth and convict them of sin.

Orient Your Minds to God's Word

- Read Mark 7:1-23 together and discuss it.

Ask some basic questions:

- Can anyone paraphrase this passage in their own words?
- What surprises you?
- If you gave these verses to someone who had never heard of Jesus before, what do you think their response would be?
- What's the main point of the passage?

Application for the Heart and Life

(This section is designed for Formation Groups = small (2-3) gender-specific groups for confession of sin and reminding one another of Gospel truth)

Gospel growth: Confession and Repentance

We all tend to default towards religion, which is putting our obedience before our acceptance. The heart of religion is justifying yourself via obedience. If we are bad at studying the Bible on a regular basis or bad at evangelism, we feel like terrible Christians and are unable to enjoy God's love.

The Gospel is altogether different because it rightly puts acceptance before obedience. The Gospel meets us in our failures with forgiveness and grace, and it enables us to be set free from religious rules. Our obedience through the Gospel ought to be an overflow of joy from being justified by Christ and accepted by the Father.

- Are there areas of your spiritual life where you feel like a terrible Christian?
- In what ways do you turn the Christian life into religion?
- **Encourage one another with the Gospel:** There is nothing you can do to earn God's favor. God loves you fully today because of Jesus' perfect life, His love is not dependent on your performance.

WEEK ELEVEN

DAY ONE

Mark 7:24-8:13

READ Scripture

Before we begin today's study of the book of Mark, take a few moments to ask God to prepare your heart to engage deeply with His Word.

PRAY

Read the passage in its entirety, then follow the instructions that follow.

Mark 7:24-37

²⁴ And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. ²⁵ But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophoenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸ But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹ And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter." ³⁰ And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³² And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³ And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. ³⁴ And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." ³⁵ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ And

Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷ And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Mark 8:1-13

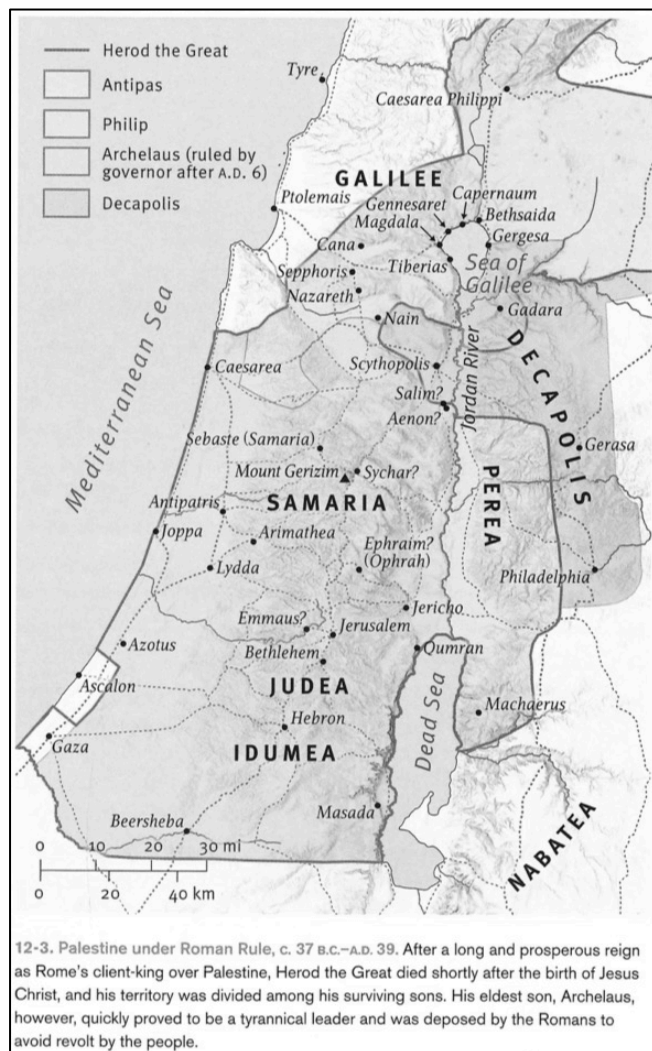
¹ *In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, ² "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. ³ And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away."* ⁴ *And his disciples answered him, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?"* ⁵ *And he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven."* ⁶ *And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. ⁷ And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. ⁸ And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ⁹ And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. ¹⁰ And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.*

¹¹ *The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. ¹² And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation."* ¹³ *And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.*

STUDY Scripture

#1 This passage mentions a number of locations. Circle them as you see them and then fill out this table with the information in the text.

Verse(s)	Traveled from...	Traveled to...
7:24	Genesaret	
7:31a		
7:31b		
8:10		Dalmanutha (near Magdala)



On the map, draw a line that traces Jesus' journey described in this passage.

The messages that Mark is communicating in this section rely heavily on cultural understanding that is not easy to discern without a bit of background information. Verses 7:24-8:10 all take place in non-Jewish cultural contexts. This is the first time that Jesus' ministry has taken place outside of an Israelite context. Not only are the areas that he is visiting non-Israelite, they are also areas that have historically been enemies of Israel.

#2 What do you notice about the route of Jesus' journey?

#3 What does this tell you about Jesus' purpose in His travels?

#4 In the case of the Syrophoenician woman's request, we are certainly meant to learn something about the followers that Jesus is looking for. Jesus is very impressed by this woman's response to Jesus' somewhat insulting comment. What do you think impressed Jesus about her response?

#5 What virtue does this woman exhibit that we ought to imitate?

#6 In 8:1-13 we read about another feeding miracle. Remembering Mark 6:30-44, what is surprising as you read about the disciples?

LIVE Scripture

It's easy to sit back and be frustrated with the disciples. Did they forget about the feeding of the 5,000? Why are they so slow to understand and rely on Jesus' power? If we look closely at our lives, we can probably find situations and/or circumstances where we lack faith in Jesus' power, even though He has shown us His divine abilities in the past.

Can you remember a situation or circumstance where Jesus showed up in a powerful way?

How might remembering and relying on Jesus' power help you today? Is there a current situation or circumstance where you need to rely on Jesus' power instead of your own ability?

WEEK ELEVEN

DAY TWO

Mark 7:24-30

READ Scripture

Before we begin today's study in Mark, take some time to meditate on **Psalms 22**. Use this passage to silently focus on God's character and orient your heart to study His Word by praising Him.

²⁷ *All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.*

²⁸ *For kingship belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.*

²⁹ *All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
even the one who could not keep himself alive.*

³⁰ *Posterity shall serve him;
it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;*

³¹ *they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people
yet unborn,
that he has done it.*

The passage for study today is **Mark 7:24-30**. Turn there and read the passage through several times, taking time to notice all the details of the story. Spend enough time reading it closely that you would be able to give a detailed retelling without looking back at the text.

STUDY Scripture

#1 This passage represents a new dimension to Jesus' ministry as He begins to engage with a woman outside of the nation of Israel. In your own words, what's happening in this passage?

#2 Vs. 24 tells us that Jesus went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon (non-Israel) to get some rest, but even people outside of Israel are seeking Jesus. What can you conclude about Jesus from this? What can you conclude about people in general? (Hint: Deep down, what do people desire?)

#3 Read v.25-26 and briefly describe this woman's posture before Jesus?

#4 The exchange between Jesus and this woman in vs. 27-28 is strange without a little background. Jesus was a Jewish Messiah, He is a Savior first sent to the nation of Israel (Rom. 1:16). His ministry is initially focused to the Jews (Mt. 15:24), but this doesn't mean He is a Savior exclusively to the Jews. The nation of Israel was always supposed to be a light to the nations, and for this reason Jesus fulfills that role by being a Savior to the nations. We see this clearly as Jesus engages the Syrophoenician woman. When Jesus says, "**let the children by fed first**" He is referring to the nation of Israel, and trying to tell this woman that her time will come in the future. But her

response is so insightful and persistent that Jesus heals her daughter! The woman's answer in vs. 28 again demonstrates her understanding and humble posture. What can you learn from this woman's posture before God?

LIVE Scripture

What would a faithful response to this passage look like in your life?

What is a concrete step that you can take to embody the truths described in this story?

WEEK ELEVEN

DAY THREE

Mark 8:1-13

READ Scripture

Before we begin our study of the book of Mark, let's take a moment to reflect on your previous studies. Flip through the prior weeks and reflect on how God is shaping you, your heart, and your life. How have you grown in your understanding of who God is? How have you been able to grow in obedience to God's Word?

Make some notes to recount God's faithfulness in your study.

Today's passage is **Mark 8:1-13**. Read through the passage a few times, and reflect on similarities from **Mark 6:30-44**.

STUDY Scripture

#1 Compare some similarities and differences with the two feeding miracles in Mark.

SIMILARITIES:

DIFFERENCES:

Mark 6:30-44

Mark 8:1-13

#2 Jesus tells the disciples about the compassion He has for the crowds, and the need to feed them. The disciples respond, ***“How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?”*** Why do you think the disciples fail to remember, or rely on Jesus’ power? How can you relate to them?

#3 Jesus is patient with the disciples. Notice that He doesn't reprimand or scold them for their unbelief and self-reliance. Reflect on Jesus' patience with you. In what ways has God been patient with you in coming to faith, or in seeking to follow Him?

#4 In vs. 11-13 Jesus concludes He will not provide a sign for the Pharisees. Why does Jesus refuse? What were the Pharisees' motives (v. 11)? What's the irony in this exchange?

Week Eleven

COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION

As you prepare and lead the discussion, remember to make it accessible:

- 1) There may be unbelievers in your midst.
- 2) There may be young, immature believers in your midst.

Another way to think about leading a discussion is creating a culture. You want to create a culture of love, honesty, and vulnerability. Don't be afraid to tell your group the goal for the discussion and be sure to model what you desire.

Begin your discussion by asking the group about their individual study of God's Word and hearing God's Word preached. The Spirit is working among you! Spend some time asking the group about what God is teaching them. If this is challenging, or no one is sharing, take some time to remind the group about God's abiding presence in them through the Holy Spirit to help them understand truth and convict them of sin.

Orient Your Minds to God's Word

- Read **Mark 7:24-8:13**, or select a specific passage (7:24-30 or 7:31-37 or 8:1-13)

Ask some basic questions:

- Can anyone paraphrase this passage in their own words?
- What surprises you?
- If you gave these verses to someone who had never heard of Jesus before, what do you think their response would be?
- What's the significance of the exchange between Jesus and Syrophenician woman?
- This is the second time Jesus feeds the crowds. What do you learn from this feeding miracle?

- Why does Jesus perform another feeding miracle, but He refuses to give the Pharisees a sign?
- **Always try to move the discussion towards real life application.** It's very common and easy to fall into "information transfer" mode vs. hearing and doing the Word. Press into here, often.
- Based on this passage, how should my life look different?
- What is one concrete step you can take to live out this Scripture?

Spend some time praying for one another and implementing accountability to apply the Scripture.

WEEK TWELVE

DAY ONE

Mark 8:14-38

READ Scripture

Before we begin studying the Gospel of Mark, spend some time in prayer to orient your heart towards God and His will. Thank God for His Word, and ask Him through His Spirit to guide you to understand and apply it in your life.

PRAY

Read through today's passage a few times to get familiar with it. Here are a few simple study methods that might help:

- Circle anything that you have a question about and write a brief note to investigate later or ask someone in your Community Group to help you understand it.
- Draw a box around verses that seem crucial to the passage and make a note of what you see there.
- Trace out themes that develop in the passage by noting when the same idea, word, or character reappears.

Mark 8:14-38

¹⁴ Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵ And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." ¹⁶ And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. ¹⁷ And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?" ¹⁸ Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, "Twelve." ²⁰ "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven." ²¹ And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

²² And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. ²³ And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" ²⁴ And he looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking." ²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ And he sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."

²⁷ And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." ³⁰ And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

STUDY Scripture

#1 What themes do you see in this passage?

#2 Go through each section of this passage and make a note about something we learn about what it means to follow Jesus. What is Jesus teaching the disciples?

Passage	In order to follow Jesus a disciple must...
V. 14-21	
V. 22-30	
V. 31-33	
V. 34-38	

#3 Now work back through the chart above, and think about what it might look like for a Christian today to believe and practice these truths. Write some ideas below:

#4 Peter's confession in vs. 29 is a monumental breakthrough, especially with Jesus' rebuke from vs. 17-18 in mind. But Peter quickly falls back into confusion and unbelief in vs. 32 as he attempts to correct Jesus' plan. What causes Peter to think he should correct Jesus? (Hint: Look at what Jesus says at the end of vs. 33)

LIVE Scripture

What is one concrete step you could take from this passage to follow Jesus more faithfully?

WEEK TWELVE

DAY TWO

Mark 8:14-21

READ Scripture

Before we begin our study of Mark today, spend some time meditating on God as your Shepherd. Use **Psalm 23** and **John 10:11-18** to fill your prayers.

Psalm 23

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.*

PRAY

Now let's turn to **Mark 8:14-21**, our text for today's study. Work through the passage several times, making notes as you go. If you need to re-read the feeding miracles referenced in

this passage, do so now. You can find them here: **Mark 8:1-10** and **Mark 6:30-44**.

STUDY Scripture

#1 Jesus warns the disciples about the dangerous influence of the Pharisees. What have you learned about these Jewish leaders? The best place to look is the previous passage in vs. 11-13, but also look at 2:15-17 and 3:1-6. Or consider contacting your Community Group for further insight.

#2 The Disciples completely misunderstood what Jesus was saying with the yeast metaphor, and this prompts Jesus to lament the disciples' lack of understanding. To address their lack of "hearing and seeing," what does Jesus direct their attention to (vs. 19-21)? What are these stories meant to display? (Hint: If you need help, look at Peter's confession in vs. 29)

#3 Jesus is warning the disciples that the Pharisees could corrupt their understanding of who Jesus is as the Messiah because they are too busy protecting themselves and the religious system they worship. Who will ultimately help the disciples understand and protect them from corruption? (See **John 14:16, 25-27**)

#4 What can you learn from the disciples' lack of understanding and the Helper who indwells you?

LIVE Scripture

What is one concrete step you can take to be obedient to God's Word? Who might you invite into this concrete step to keep you accountable?

WEEK TWELVE

DAY THREE

Mark 8:31-38

READ Scripture

Before you begin your study in Mark, spend some time silently meditating on God's character. Use **Psalm 145** to guide your mind. Spend 5-10 minutes silently before God, remembering and celebrating His Being.

Psalm 145:8-9

*The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
The LORD is good to all,
and his mercy is over all that he has made.*

PRAY

Now let's turn to our passage today. The passage has been printed with plenty of space for you to make notes, circle important words or phrases, and underline key points. Read through the passage several times, so that you feel you could retell it briefly but faithfully to a friend.

Mark 8:31-38

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but

whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospel's will save it.³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul?³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

STUDY Scripture

#1 This is Jesus' first prediction of His death and resurrection. Looking at v. 31, what words or phrases jump out at you? What groups are mentioned, and what do you know about those groups?

#2 Why does Peter totally miss it? (v.33)

#3 When Jesus calls Peter "Satan," we assume Peter has made a major mistake. And yet, it's not the last major mistake Peter will make in the story. Why do you think Jesus uses such strong language to rebuke Peter? (hint: think about where Peter is trying to lead Jesus)

#4 Verses 34-35 represent the heart of what it means to follow Jesus. What does Jesus require from His disciples?

#5 Following Jesus is a daily battle, and denying self and giving up your life are not easy things to do. Do you feel like you have genuinely given up your life?

If not, what are you holding onto and why? If so, what areas do you struggle with? What areas in life do you try to take back?

Spend some time reflecting on your answers to #5. Ask God to help you in daily dependence and self-denial. Invite someone from your Community Group into this struggle.

Week Twelve

COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION

This is your last discussion with the Mark study guide. One of the themes throughout this study has been the heavy emphasis on application. It's so easy to get stuck in "information transfer" mode where we learn more about who Jesus is and what He is calling us to do, but there's never any real life change. Use this opportunity to have a pointed conversation towards the practical application of the first eight chapters of Mark. We've seen Jesus do miraculous things, reshape expectations about what it means to follow God and meet us in our fears.

"Family Business" Conversation

It would be a mistake to miss this great opportunity without challenging one another and your Community Group towards growth. Spend some time talking about how your lives and your group will look different based on your study.

Questions to Guide the Conversation:

1. What has God taught you? What is He convicting you about? What is He calling you to do? (We tend to assume things in church world. Like, we know God is calling us to trust Jesus with our lives. Encourage your group: this is worth saying out loud!)
2. How do you plan to obey His Word? What are simple, practical ways you can remember and practice these truths? (Ex. Schedule time to reflect and pray, ask a friend to remind you of a specific passage, begin engaging your neighbor)
3. What needs to look different about our Community Group? As a group, how might we live out the Gospel of Mark?
4. Consider implementing new aspects to your meeting, or maybe a new structure to the meeting.

Have someone take notes during this conversation, and revisit it in the future. As God's people, we are called to be doers of the Word (James 1:22-25). Too often, in church world, we have missed the importance of applying the Scripture. It may take some time, but be persistent in calling your group to apply God's Word.

Appendix

Guidelines for Leading a Discussion

PREPARE FOR THE DISCUSSION

- Pray for God to illuminate the study/prep time, and for the Spirit to work during the discussion.
- Prepare for the discussion. Study important passages and think critically about how the Gospel influences the topic. Find ways to connect passages/themes/struggles to the work of Jesus.
- Write out a list of questions. Identify which questions are most important to ask, and use the others as back up in case the discussion runs dry. One of the best ways to lead a good discussion is to ask follow-up questions in order to take the conversation deeper.
- Think about writing an objective. What is your goal? What truth do I want people to remember? What action do I want people to implement?
- Pray that God would give you a heart to love your Community Group. Consider the people in your group, their needs and their maturity level. Remember the important discipleship principle: meet people where they are, then challenge them to take another step towards Christ.
- **TIP:** Don't let your plan dominate the discussion. It's important to balance the flow of the discussion with your desired outcome. Be sensitive to the questions/concerns people are uncovering in the discussion and discern whether it is necessary to pursue them.

LEAD THE DISCUSSION

- Remember your role is to lead the discussion, not to lecture.
- Give people an overview of the discussion time, so they can have a framework of where you'd like the discussion to go. It will help people support you in leading and assure them the discussion won't go all night.
- Focus the discussion on meaning and application. Tie everything back to discipleship. We study the Bible to follow Jesus better!
- Don't be afraid to redirect the discussion if things get off track (they always do!). It's okay to say, "That's a great question; could we talk about that after this discussion?" or "Okay, let's get back to the passage. What do you think Paul means in v. 2?"
- Always allow freedom for different personalities in discussions. Some people process things internally and may rarely say anything...that's okay! The more you get to know the members of your group, the more you will learn the ones who need to be prodded.
- Creativity always generates interest. Consider using short video clips, music, food, etc. to create new ways to interact as a Community Group.
- Be prayerful throughout the discussion. The Spirit is alive and will help you with insight and confidence!

REFLECT ON THE DISCUSSION

- Think about what went well, what went poorly, and use your reflection to improve your leading skills!
- Identify anybody who needs follow-up.
- Think about ways to keep everyone accountable and/or ways to revisit the passage or topic.

