

JESUS

SERVING SAVIOR | SAVING SERVANT

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9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Table of Contents

Introduction	i
Map	iii
Lesson 1 Mark 1:1–13 Preparations	1
Lesson 2 Mark 1:14–39 The King Has Arrived	3
Lesson 3 Mark 1:40–2:12 A Physician of the Soul	5
Lesson 4 Mark 2:13–22 Questionable Behavior	7
Lesson 5 Mark 2:23–3:12 One Sunday	9
Lesson 6 Mark 3:13–35 Friends, Foes, and Family	11
Lesson 7 Mark 4:1–34 Speaking in Stories.....	13
Lesson 8 Mark 4:35–5:20 Desperate Straits	15
Lesson 9 Mark 5:21–6:6 To Believe or Not to Believe	17
Lesson 10 Mark 6:7–56 On the Job Training.....	19
Lesson 11 Mark 7:1–23 False Religion	21
Lesson 12 Mark 7:24–37 Race or Grace	23
Lesson 13 Mark 8:1–26 Loaves, Leaven, and Light	25
Lesson 14 Mark 8:27–9:8 The Shadow of the Cross	27
Lesson 15 Mark 9:9–29 When Faith Fails	29
Lesson 16 Mark 9:30–50 Pride and Prejudice	31
Lesson 17 Mark 10:1–12 The Question of Divorce	33
Lesson 18 Mark 10:13–52 Kingdom People	35
Lesson 19 Mark 11:1–26 The King Takes Charge	37
Lesson 20 Mark 11:27–12:44 Good Answers to Bad Questions	39
Lesson 21 Mark 13:1–37 Things to Come	41
Lesson 22 Mark 14:1–26 Extravagant Love	43
Lesson 23 Mark 14:27–72 Without a Friend	45
Lesson 24 Mark 15:1–47 The Silent Lamb	47
Lesson 25 Mark 16:1–20 The Vindication of Jesus	51

INTRODUCTION

We are a generation of people who love action and drama. We are accustomed to TV news shows which offer on-the-spot coverage and instant analysis. We enjoy movies that are full of activity rather than long, drawn-out dialogue. We want heroic, larger-than-life figures rather than ordinary individuals who mirror our own existence. We prefer the communication of truth through narrative story and biography rather than the straightforward analysis of ideas.

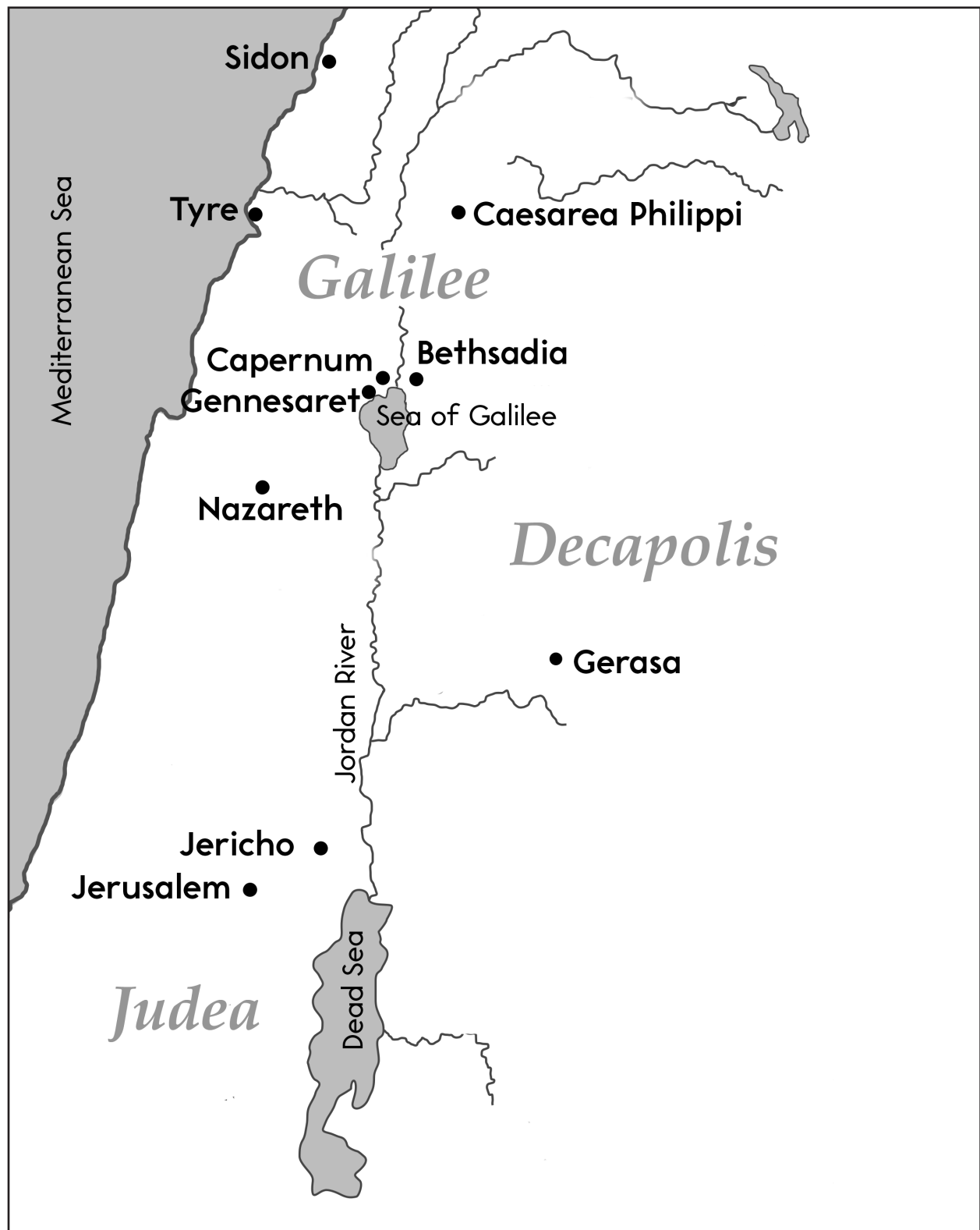
It is for this reason that the Gospel of Mark is so well-suited to this generation. Mark's Gospel is swiftly flowing and entertaining. It appeals directly to a non-analytical mind. It is a good story told with an economy of words, a forthrightness of style, and lots of action. Most of all, it centers on a heroic figure—Jesus—who appears completely in control of the plot. He strides across the Gospel with a singleness of purpose and a charismatic appeal that draws crowds and divides loyalties. Some people love Him, others hate Him, but no one who encounters Jesus in this story remains the same.

Mark, also called John Mark, is the author of this Gospel. As far as we can tell, he was well qualified to write this, the first Christian book about Jesus Christ to be written and circulated. Mark had close relationships with many of the people who knew Jesus well. His mother's name was Mary and it was in their home that early Christians met (Acts 12:12). Some even believe that it was this same home where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples. Mark's cousin was Barnabas, and Mark accompanied both Barnabas and Paul on part of their first missionary journey (Acts 13:13). Mark also developed a close relationship with Peter. As an old man Peter lovingly refers to Mark as "his son" (1 Peter 5:13). Tradition says that Mark was Peter's assistant in Rome and that he relied on information from Peter when writing his Gospel. Certainly the style of Mark's Gospel matches Peter's aggressive and active personality. Strangely, it also highlights Peter's own failure to follow the Master when the pressure was on. There is only one hero in this story.

In writing this Gospel, Mark was concerned for the Christian community in Rome, which consisted mostly of Gentiles. This group of people was suffering under the persecution of Nero which took place in AD 65. They needed to know why, if Jesus was indeed the Son of God who came into the world to inaugurate God's sovereign rule, such awful things were allowed to happen both to Him and to them. How could Jesus be the Son of God when He was crucified rather than crowned in Jerusalem? How could Jesus be sovereign King when His own followers were about to be fed to the lions in Rome? Mark sets out to show that Jesus was indeed the authoritative Son of God despite the fact that He was rejected by His own people. He shows this primarily in two ways. First, in the first half of the Gospel (1:1–8:26), he shows this by recording Jesus' public ministry in Galilee. As the Son of God He demonstrates His authority by calling the disciples, healing the sick, casting out demons, forgiving sinners, feeding the hungry, raising the dead, and telling practically everyone to be quiet about it! In short, He is depicted as the serving Savior. Second, in the last half of Mark's Gospel (8:27–16:20), he shows this by recording Jesus' journey to and ministry in Jerusalem. He presents Jesus, not as a passive victim of circumstances beyond His control, but as the One who made the conscious choice to go to Jerusalem in submission to the Father's will, knowing full well and predicting that it was there He would be handed over to sinful men to be crucified. But the story doesn't end there. Death could not hold Him down, and on the third day He rose from the dead as proof that His death was sufficient as a ransom for many. Jesus is not only the serving Savior, but He is the saving Servant.

In all of this, Mark wanted his readers to know that what was happening to them was completely consistent with who Jesus was and what He taught. It is as true for us as it was for them: true discipleship means following Jesus to the cross. Though the way is often hard, we can continue to trust Him, continue to serve, continue to believe that one day He will return, and then not only we but the whole world will know that He is “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Key Places in the Book of Mark



PREPARATIONS

Mark 1:1–13

Lesson 1

You can tell a great deal about a story by simply reading the opening paragraph. Mark's Gospel is no exception. He wants us to know right up front that this story is the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He show us how the way was prepared for Jesus, and how Jesus Himself became prepared for His public ministry. From the start, Mark demonstrates that Jesus was the perfect model for what God intends men and women to be.

WARM-UP Read 1:1–13

1. If you were given the job of preparing your neighborhood for a visit from Jesus Christ, how would you go about it?

PREPARATION FOR JESUS Read 1:1–8

2. What does the opening verse tell you about the central focus of Mark's Gospel?
3. Some believe "the beginning" of v. 1 refers to the entire Gospel of Mark. Others believe it is only referring to this opening section (1:2–13). What do you think? Why?
4. Why do you think Mark says nothing about the birth and childhood of Jesus?
5. Verses 2 and 3 suggest that preparations are being made for the coming of a king. Who is the king and who is preparing His way?
6. How does Mark characterize John? Why were people attracted to him? Why would a man like this be a fitting forerunner to Jesus Christ?
7. In what ways did John do his job and prepare the way for the coming of Jesus? How can we be effective "signposts" for Jesus?

PREPARATION OF JESUS Read 1:9–13

8. If Jesus was without sin, why did He submit Himself to baptism? What does this tell us about Jesus and about His mission?
9. How do you think this whole experience of baptism prepared Jesus for what was to come?
10. Notice how the Father was “well-pleased” with His Son before He even accomplished His mission. On what basis is the Father well-pleased with us?
11. Who led Jesus into the wilderness? Would you say it was God’s will that Jesus be tempted in the wilderness? If so, for what purpose?
12. Many of Mark’s readers were in Rome facing the possibility of being thrown into the arena with “wild beasts” as a form of persecution. How would this account of Jesus’ temptation have encouraged them?
13. Do you think God takes us through similar times of testing to prepare us for ministry? If so, how has He done this with you?

WRAP-UP

14. Where do you find yourself in this passage?
 - a) I am being prepared to receive Jesus by turning away from my sin,
 - b) I am being prepared to serve Jesus by hearing the Father’s affirmation, or
 - c) I am being prepared to serve Jesus by enduring the enemy’s temptation.

THE KING HAS ARRIVED

Mark 1:14–39

Lesson 2

The beginning of Jesus' public ministry begins with Him announcing the arrival of God's kingdom. The amazing thing is that He clearly sees Himself as the One to bring this kingdom about. To back up this claim He calls men into service, overthrows the demonic world, and heals the sick, all with the mind-boggling authority. In all of this we begin to get a glimpse of what it means for us to be ready for and to follow Jesus as our King.

WARM-UP

1. How do you feel about authority figures? Describe what true authority means to you.

THE MESSAGE OF THE KING Read 1:14–15

2. What might be the connection between John being taken into custody and Jesus going to Galilee?
3. Mark says Jesus was "preaching the gospel (good news) of God." What was the message of this gospel? Why was this "good news"?
4. Christ called His listeners to "repent and believe the gospel." In your own words, define what this means.

THE FOLLOWERS OF THE KING Read 1:16–20

5. What does the call of these four men tell us about Jesus?
6. What does Jesus require of these four men? What does He promise them? Is this similar or different than what He requires and promises each of us?
7. What are the things (nets) which Jesus requires you to drop in order to follow Him?

THE AUTHORITY OF THE KING Read 1:21–34

8. These verses offer us two portraits of Jesus. One takes place in a synagogue (vv. 21–28) and the other takes place in a home (vv. 29–34). What do these two portraits have in common? What do they reveal about Jesus and His character?
9. What do these two portraits tell us about the demonic world and its relation to Jesus Christ? Why do you think Jesus did not want the demons revealing who He was (vv. 25, 34)?
10. What is the significance of Peter’s mother-in-law “waiting on (serving) them” after being healed?
11. Notice the growing popularity of Jesus (v. 33). Why are the crowds coming to Him at this point? Do you think their interest is sincere?

THE PRAYER OF THE KING Read 1:35–39

12. How do these verses provide a contrast to vv. 32–34?
13. How do the details of vv. 35–36 reveal the priority Jesus placed on prayer? Why was prayer so important to Jesus?
14. Who is setting the agenda for Jesus’ ministry? How did prayer play a part in this?
15. What are some steps that you might take to develop your prayer life?

WRAP-UP

16. Based on what you have learned from this passage, what does it mean to be a follower of the king (Jesus)? In what area would you most like to grow?

A PHYSICIAN OF THE SOUL

Mark 1:40–2:12

Lesson 3

In our last study, we saw Jesus' clear-cut call to be King. The question is, what kind of king will He be? Will He be a king that rules the common people with an iron fist, or will He be a king that uses His authority to serve and care for others? In this passage, we see Jesus confronting two hurting people, people we might normally avoid, and treating them with compassion and tenderness.

WARM-UP

1. What kind of person in our society are you most uncomfortable associating with?

TOUCHING A LEPER Read 1:40–45

2. If you have a Bible dictionary, look up "leprosy" or "leper" and learn as much as you can about the disease in Jesus' day. How would this disease have affected this man physically, emotionally and socially?
3. Note how this man says, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Why would he doubt not the ability but the willingness of Jesus to heal him?
4. Are you more prone to doubt Jesus' ability to help you or His willingness to help you? Why?
5. What did Jesus feel towards this man?
6. Why did Jesus both touch this man and speak to him?
7. Why did Jesus "sternly warn him" to say nothing to anyone, but rather to show himself to the priest (see Lev. 14:1–32)?

8. Who are the lepers of today? What does Jesus teach us about how to relate to them?

FORGIVING A LAME MAN Read 2:1–12

9. What was Jesus doing as they gathered around Him at the home in Capernaum? Why were so many people eager to see Jesus?
10. What are some things you can learn from the paralytic's four friends? Note: the roof of most houses was flat and made of brushwood and clay. Typically there was also a stairway that led up the side of the house to the roof.
11. Notice how Jesus started by forgiving this man's sin. Do you think the man and his friends were disappointed by this statement?
12. How did the scribes react to this statement about forgiveness?
13. Which is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven" or "Take up your pallet and walk"? Why?
14. In what ways does this story show that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh?

WRAP-UP

15. Whom do you identify with most in these two stories? The leper? The lame man? The scribes? Jesus? Explain.

QUESTIONABLE BEHAVIOR

Mark 2:13–22

Lesson 4

In our last study, we saw how a growing controversy was developing between the religious leaders and Jesus, primarily because of Jesus' claim to forgive sins. As Jesus continues to minister in Galilee, the questions surrounding His ministry intensify. First, He chooses to hang out with what was considered bad company. Second, He refuses to engage in some of the religious disciplines that normally characterize the devout Jew. In all of this, Jesus challenges our views of what true religion is all about.

WARM-UP

1. As a child, what was your view of religion? How would you have described a “religious” person?

EATING WITH SINNERS Read 2:13–17

2. Who was Levi? What is the significance of his “sitting in a tax booth”? Note: use either a Bible dictionary or cross references to get information on tax collectors.
3. Do you think Levi left tax collecting for good? What does this teach us about true discipleship?
4. Whose house was Jesus in (v. 15)? Why do you think He and the others were invited to eat there?
5. Why were so many people of ill repute attracted to Jesus?
6. From the point of view of the Pharisees, why would it be bad for a religious teacher to eat with sinners? Does their argument have any credibility in your mind?
7. From the point of view of Jesus, why was it necessary to eat with sinners?

8. How can we as Christians mix with those like “tax collectors” without compromising our moral standards? Where do you draw the line?

FEASTING RATHER THAN FASTING Read 2:18–22

9. In what way was the Pharisees’ question in v. 18 a criticism of Jesus?
10. Who is the bridegroom? Who are the attendants of the bridegroom? When will the bridegroom be taken away?
11. In your own words, why didn’t Jesus require His disciples to fast?
12. Where does this leave us today? Should we celebrate because Jesus is here or fast because He is gone?
13. What is the point of the two brief parables in vv. 21–22? How does this relate to the issue raised in 18–20?
14. What are some ways we try to put new wine into old wineskins today? What is the remedy?

WRAP-UP

15. How does Jesus break all our categories about what it means to be religious? Is this ever hard for you? Why or why not?

ONE SUNDAY

Mark 2:23–3:12

Lesson 5

Jesus continues to “break all the rules” held sacred by the religious authorities. In two different incidents, Jesus breaks the cherished Sabbath customs. First, He allows His disciples to pluck ears of corn on the Sabbath, and then He heals a man with a damaged hand, again on the Sabbath. It seems that Jesus’ view of “a day of rest” differs from that of the Pharisees, who have now seen enough and begin to make plans to destroy the Son of God.

WARM-UP

1. Describe what “a day of rest” means to you.

IN THE FIELDS Read 2:23–28

2. Look up “Sabbath” in your Bible dictionary and summarize what you find.
3. Jesus defends His disciples’ actions by citing what David did. Go back and read that story in 1 Samuel 21:1–6. How does this story justify what Jesus and His disciples were doing?
4. According to v. 27, how were Jesus and the Pharisees different in their overall attitude towards the Sabbath?
5. What claim does Jesus make for Himself in v. 28? What does this mean?

AT THE SYNAGOGUE Read 3:1–6

6. Why were the Pharisees more concerned about a law being broken than a man being healed?
7. Do you think Jesus knew what they were thinking in v. 2? If so, why did He play right into their hands?

8. Can you think of a time when the requirements of your Christian faith appeared to conflict with meeting human needs? How did you respond?
9. Why did Jesus ask the man to a) get up and come forward, and b) stretch out his hand? How do you think the man felt about this?
10. Why did the Pharisees “keep silent” in response to Jesus’ question in v. 4? How would you answer this question?
11. Jesus was both angry and grieved at the Pharisees’ hardness of heart. What do each of these emotions tell us about Jesus?
12. Do you know people whose heart is hard? How do you react to them? Are you more prone to be angry or grieved at them?
13. The Herodians were friends and supporters of King Herod, ruler of Galilee, whom the Pharisees hated. Why would the Pharisees be willing to even join hands with these enemies against Jesus?

BY THE LAKE Read 3:7–12

14. Why do you think Jesus withdrew to the Sea of Galilee at this point?
15. What kind of portrait does Mark paint of Jesus in these verses? Why?

WRAP-UP

16. What have you learned about the Sabbath in this study? About Jesus? About religious hypocrisy? How can you apply these truths?

FRIENDS, FOES, AND FAMILY

Mark 3:13–35

Lesson 6

A new phase of Jesus' ministry opens, beginning with the calling of the Twelve. During this period of time, Jesus will continue to be misunderstood, not only by the religious authorities, but by His own disciples and family. In this study, after calling the Twelve Jesus is accused by the Pharisees of being in league with the devil, and by His family of being a bit "off his rocker." In all of this, we see something more of what it means to truly follow Him.

WARM-UP

1. If you were to start a worldwide movement that would change the course of history, what kind of people would you choose to do it with?

THE CALL OF THE TWELVE Read 3:13–19

2. Mark cites three purposes for which Jesus chose the Twelve. What are they?
3. What was going on in Jesus' ministry prior to this? Why do you think Jesus chose these particular men at this particular time?
4. Look over the list of men Jesus chose. Which of these men have we already met in Mark's gospel? Is there any significance to the order? Why choose just twelve? Why does He give some nicknames?
5. The call of Christ brought together former archenemies like Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot. How has Christ changed your attitude towards people with whom you previously wouldn't have associated with?

THE CONCERN OF HIS FAMILY Read 3:20–21

6. When it says that Jesus came home, to what house is he referring? (see 1:29, 2:1). Describe the situation at this home.

7. Why do you think Jesus' family thought he was crazy? Was their intent to do Him good or harm?

THE CHARGE OF HIS ENEMIES Read 3:22–29

8. Summarize the charge the scribes make against Jesus. Why would they have thought this about Him?
9. In your own words, how did Jesus refute these charges? Who is the “strong man” and who is the one who enters the strong man’s house?
10. Define what Jesus means by blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Why was this sin regarded as unforgivable? Had these scribes committed this sin or were they in danger of committing it?
11. Do you believe it is possible for a Christian to commit the “unforgivable sin”?

THE COMMENDATION OF HIS TRUE FAMILY Read 3:31–35

12. Mark has already told us that Jesus' family was on their way to take custody of Him (v. 21). Here Mark records their arrival. Why do you think Mark placed the account of Jesus and Beelzebub in between their departure and arrival?
13. Who were the people who were sitting around Him? In what way were they doing the will of God?
14. Do Jesus' words in vv. 34–35 comfort you or threaten you? Explain.

SPEAKING IN STORIES

Mark 4:1–34

Lesson 7

Up until now Mark has focused primarily on Jesus “in action.” In this study, the focus shifts to Jesus as teacher. With this new method of operation came a new way of a communication—parables. Jesus’ parables are spiritual time-bombs. On the surface they seem like simple stories, but to the one with “ears to hear” they soon explode with meaning. In these stories Jesus’ main subject is the Kingdom of God, and the surprising way the Kingdom comes to men and women.

WARM-UP

1. Outside of what is in the Bible, what is your favorite story of all time? What did you learn from that story?

THE SOWER Read 4:1–9; 13–20

2. This parable describes the sower (God), the seed (the word), and four kinds of soils (people). What would you say is the one primary truth that this parable teaches?
3. What specific things cause the first three soils to be considered bad? How have you seen this to be true in real life?
4. Why is the fourth soil different from the rest?
5. Some say that all but the first soil represent Christians. Others say only the fourth soil represents a true Christian. What do you think and why?
6. Does this parable comfort you or challenge you? Explain.

THE SECRET Read 4:10–12, 21–25, 33–34

7. To whom did Jesus explain the parable? Why did they get an explanation and the others did not?

8. According to vv. 11–12, why did Jesus speak in parables rather than just making simple statements of truth?
9. According to vv. 21–23 is the ultimate purpose of parables to conceal truth or to illuminate it?
10. What does Jesus tell us to do in v. 24? How does this relate to parables?
11. Jesus states a principle in vv. 24–25 that can be summarized in the following way: “to those who learn, and then use and share what they have learned, more truth will be given.” How are you doing at using and sharing the truth you have been given?

THE SEED Read 4:26–32

12. Jesus offers two more parables here, both of which are also about seed. Why is seed a surprising metaphor to describe the way the Kingdom of God works?
13. What does the first story teach us about the way the Kingdom of God grows (vv. 26–29)? Does this encourage you or discourage you?
14. What does the second story add to the first (vv. 30–32)? How might this story encourage you in your faithfulness to God?

WRAP-UP

15. In this passage we have seen Jesus teaching His disciples through parables about how the Kingdom of God grows. What lessons can you learn about evangelism from both His example and His teaching?

DESPERATE STRAITS

Mark 4:35–5:20

Lesson 8

How do you respond when you face a desperate situation? Most of us, if we're honest, respond in fear. Yet Jesus wants us to know that the appropriate response to crisis is not fear, but faith. In this section we see both the disciples and the Gerasene demoniac in desperate straits. In both situations, Jesus proves to be worthy of our faith, able to "still the roaring of the sea, and the tumult of the peoples" (Ps. 65:7).

WARM-UP

1. Describe a recent situation when you were in "desperate straits." How did you react?

DESPERATE STRAITS FOR DISCIPLES Read 4:35–41

2. Whose idea was it to "go over to the other side"? Do you think He knew the way would not be storm free?
3. The Sea of Galilee is about 680 feet below sea level. Winds often rise up suddenly from the surrounding hills, turning a calm lake into a dangerous squall within minutes. Describe the situation the disciples were in. How bad was it? What did they feel?
4. How could Jesus sleep during such a violent storm?
5. What do the disciples say to Jesus in v. 38? Is this an accusation or a request for help?
6. In the middle of the storms of life, have you ever felt like the disciples did? How did your fear manifest itself?
7. Imagine the contrast of instantaneously moving from the height of a violent storm to being "perfectly calm." What does this miracle teach us about Jesus?

8. In v. 40 Jesus questions the disciples about faith. If they did have faith, how would they have reacted?
9. How is the disciples' fear in v. 41 different from their fear during the storm? Is this a good kind of fear, or not?

DESPERATE STRAITS FOR DEMONS Read 5:1–20

10. Jesus crosses over to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee to the country of the Gerasenes, mostly inhabited by Gentiles, where He meets a man “with an unclean spirit.” Observe this man carefully. What does he teach you about the signs of demonic possession?
11. Summarize the demons' attitude towards Jesus.
12. How did Jesus react to the demons? Why do you think He allowed them to go into the pigs?
13. Why were the people from the city so afraid when they saw what had happened? Why did they want Jesus to leave after doing something so wonderful?
14. Why would Jesus not allow this man to accompany Him? What was he to do instead? What can we learn from his reaction?

WRAP-UP

15. Both of the incidents in this passage contrast fear with faith. What have you learned about each of these things that you can apply to your own times of desperate straits?

TO BELIEVE OR NOT TO BELIEVE

Mark 5:21–6:6

Lesson 9

In the last study we saw Jesus call people to exercise faith rather than fear in the midst of a crisis. In this study Mark continues to highlight the place of faith in the life of Jesus' followers. He places two stories side by side. The first story shows the real faith of two unlikely people and the blessings which this faith brings. The other shows the surprising unbelief of Jesus' friends from Nazareth. In all of this, we are led to examine the reality of our faith in Jesus.

WARM-UP

1. Define what it means to believe in Jesus Christ? How do you know when this belief is present?

TO BELIEVE Read 5:21–43

2. Jesus crosses back over to the western shore of Galilee (Jewish territory). He is approached by a synagogue official (not a priest or a scribe but a layman with administrative responsibilities around the synagogue). How does this man demonstrate his faith in Jesus?
3. Describe the condition of the woman who approached Jesus in v. 25. What does Leviticus 15:25–30 say that helps understand her plight?
4. In contrast to Jairus, how did this woman express her faith? Do you think her faith was greater than his?
5. Why did Jesus say, "Who touched my garments?" Why was it so important for this woman to step forward?
6. Do you think Jesus' words in v. 34 surprised her? How do these words comfort you?
7. What does the report of the messengers in v. 35 reveal about their concept of Jesus' power and its limits?

8. When Jairus heard the news about his daughter's death, how do you think he felt toward the messengers? Toward the woman? Toward Jesus?
9. Notice Jesus' exhortation to Jairus: "Do not be afraid any longer, only believe?" Believe what? How does this apply to us today?
10. This is Mark's first account of Jesus raising someone from the dead. Why did Jesus only allow these five people to witness the event? Why did He urge them not to tell anyone about what had happened?

TO NOT BELIEVE Read 6:1–6

11. Where was Jesus' hometown? Trace on a map His journey there from Capernaum.
12. Why did Jesus' family and friends take offense at His teaching in the synagogue?
13. Why is it so hard for people we have grown up with to believe our faith is real?
14. The issue in this passage is belief versus unbelief. How would you define unbelief? Is it the same as doubt? Is God really hindered by our unbelief?

WRAP-UP

15. Summarize what you have learned about belief and unbelief. In what areas do you want to grow in your ability to believe?

ON THE JOB TRAINING

Mark 6:7–56

Lesson 10

We have seen Jesus call His disciples from their nets in Galilee. We have seen Him formally identify the Twelve as His chosen Apostles. Jesus now puts these men through an intensive period of “on the job” training. They must have trembled as He prepared to send them out to preach. Among the many lessons they must learn is the crucial one of trusting Him as their Master. It is a lesson that disciples throughout the ages have had to learn.

WARM-UP

1. Describe how you were trained for your current role at home or at work. What were some of the most effective and/or ineffective methods of training?

MISSIONARIES Read 6:7–13

2. Why would Jesus send them out in pairs when they could cover twice as much ground as individuals? See Deut. 17:6.
3. What is the significance of Jesus telling His disciples to “travel light” during their preaching mission?
4. How would Jesus’ instructions in vv. 10–11 prepare them for what they would encounter as they went from village to village?
5. Describe the ministry these men had as they went out. What do repentance, anointing with oil, and healing have to do with one another? Compare this with James 5:14–15.
6. Jesus sent out a special group on a special mission with special authority. In what way is our mission similar or different?

MARTYRDOM Read 6:14–29

7. This flashback to the murder of John the Baptist interrupts the account of Jesus sending out the Twelve. What could the twelve disciples learn from John’s example?

8. Compare Herod Antipas (Mark 6:16–27) with his father, Herod the Great (Matthew 2:1–12) and with his nephew, Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1–4, 9–23). What character traits are common to the Herodian dynasty?
9. What do Herod's actions throughout this passage teach us about how sin operates within the human heart?
10. John paid the price for his outspokenness about Herod's sin. What are some of the issues believers should be outspoken about today?

MISUNDERSTANDING Read 6:30–51

11. What are the differences between how Jesus reacted to the crowds and how His disciples reacted? What was Jesus teaching His disciples through this experience?
12. Have you ever been faced with a need that you didn't have the energy or resources to meet? How did you react?
13. Do you think Jesus set the disciples up for this scary experience at sea? If so, why? Does He set us up in similar ways?
14. The response of the disciples to Jesus walking on water revealed that they hadn't learned a thing from the feeding of the 5,000. How can we avoid such hardheartedness?

MIRACLES Read 6:53–56

15. What does this brief cameo of the scene at Gennesaret tell us about Jesus? What does it tell us about the people of that area? How do these people compare with Herod? How do they compare with the disciples?

WRAP-UP

16. Summarize the way in which Jesus sought to train the Twelve. What was He trying to teach them? Where do you find yourself in this process?

FALSE RELIGION

Mark 7:1–23

Lesson 11

When we last met the Pharisees, they were plotting to kill Jesus (3:6). Now we learn more about why they were so deeply offended by Him and how they came to turn against Him. Jesus didn't "pull any punches" when it came to exposing their false religion. He exposed the hypocrisy behind their traditions, revealing how religious practices had become a substitute for really obeying God. It is no less true today. True Christianity's greatest competitor is not atheism, but legalism. It is this tendency towards legalism in all of us that is the focus of this study.

WARM-UP

1. What religious traditions and rules influence your life today? Has that influence been good or bad? Explain.

TRADITION OVER OBEDIENCE Read 7:1–13

2. What did the Pharisees and scribes observe about Jesus' disciples? Why was this so upsetting to them?
3. Why do you think Jesus didn't require His disciples to keep these traditions?
4. In vv. 6–8 Jesus responds to the question of the religious leaders in a rather indirect way. What does this quote from Isaiah say about the scribes and Pharisees?
5. Give one example in the present day church of how we "hold to the traditions of men" while "neglecting the commandment of God."
6. What does v. 10 say about Jesus' view of the Old Testament and the law of Moses?

7. “Corban” (v. 11) is money that is dedicated to God for use in the Temple. How did the Pharisees use this concept to avoid their duty to their parents?
8. How do you reconcile what Jesus says in vv. 10–12 with what He says about “hating” one’s mother and father in Luke 14:26?

EXTERNALS OVER INTERNALS Read 7:14–23

9. How does Jesus redefine the source of true defilement?
10. Why did Jesus say to the disciples: “Are you so lacking in understanding also?” What does this say about them?
11. According to Jesus, evil proceeds out of the heart of man. In what ways have you seen the very things Jesus mentions coming from your own heart?
12. How does one change an evil heart? See Ezekiel 36:26–27; Psalm 51:10; John 3:3–5; 2 Cor. 5:17.

WRAP-UP

13. Why is it so tempting to reduce the Christian life to “traditions of men” and external rules (legalism) like the Pharisees did? In what ways do you see the tendency towards legalism in your own life?

RACE OR GRACE

Mark 7:24–37

Lesson 12

In our last study we saw how Jesus said there was no contamination except that which comes from the heart. In this passage we see Jesus putting in to proactive what He proclaimed. He reaches out to Gentiles who were considered by Palestinians rabbis as religiously unclean. In doing this He proclaims that God's grace stretches beyond the borders of one particular race. It's something every generation of believers has struggled to put into practice.

WARM-UP

1. What are some of the natural barriers that people place between themselves and God?

GRACE FOR A GENTILE WOMAN Read 7:24–30

2. Notice where Tyre is on a map. Why would Jesus go up to a city inhabited primarily by Gentiles (non-Jews)?
3. Why was Jesus trying to escape notice? Why wasn't He successful?
4. How does Mark describe the woman who comes to Jesus? What do her initial attitude and actions reveal?
5. What surprises you about Jesus' response to this troubled woman in v. 27?
6. What is the meaning of this mini parable about children, bread and dogs? How does Romans 1:16 shed light on this?
7. What was it about the woman's answer that was so impressive to Jesus?

8. What can you learn from this woman about prayer and about faith?

GRACE FOR A GENTILE MAN Read 7:31–37

9. Trace on a map Jesus' travels from Tyre north through Sidon and then south to the region of Decapolis. Decapolis was a part of Galilee that was primarily inhabited by Gentiles. What had happened there earlier in Jesus' ministry (see Mark 5:1–20)?
10. Describe the condition of the man brought to Jesus in these verses.
11. Why did He take him aside, put His fingers into his ears, and touch his tongue with saliva? Were these things necessary for this man to be healed?
12. Look up the following verses from Isaiah which describe the Messiah: 29:18; 32:3; 35:6. How does Jesus fulfill the Messianic expectation?
13. Imagine being this man—able to speak plainly for the first time in his life, yet ordered (along with others) to stay quiet about the One that healed him! Why would Jesus give such an order? Can you blame them for not keeping their mouths shut?
14. Notice what the people of Decapolis say about Jesus: "He has done all things well." Compare this with Genesis 1:31. How is this a telltale sign that Mark's Gospel proclaims Jesus as God?

WRAP-UP

15. What does this passage teach you about how God views the natural barriers between people and Himself (race, gender, geography, etc.)? What can you do to cross some of those same barriers as Christ's representative?

LOAVES, LEAVEN, AND LIGHT

Mark 8:1–26

Lesson 13

Jesus continues to minister in the Gentile region. For the second time in Mark's Gospel, Jesus miraculously provides bread for a large crowd, only this time they are most likely Gentiles. But the real issue in this passage is not Jesus' ability to perform miraculous signs, but rather the unwillingness of people to believe in Him with or without signs. No amount of "proof" will convince a person who has already made up his mind. Even the disciples struggle to see the truth. In the end, true faith is discovered in the most unlikely places, like the case of a blind beggar who comes to Jesus for help.

WARM-UP

1. Why is it so difficult for some people to believe in Jesus? How would most people today finish this sentence, "I would believe if..."

THE MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES Read 8:1–10

2. Mark begins in v. 1 by saying, "In those days again..." Where has Jesus been and to whom has He been ministering in this time period? See Mark 7:24, 26, 31.
3. What does Jesus feel toward the multitudes and why? What does this teach us about how He feels toward those in need?
4. Even though they had already seen Jesus feed the 5,000 (Mark 6:33–44), the disciples have a hard time believing Jesus can feed the 4,000. Why is it that yesterday's miracles don't always guarantee today's faith?
5. Can you think of any reasons why Jesus performed the same miracle twice? What is different about this one?

THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES Read 8:11–21

6. What was the Pharisees' attitude toward Jesus after this miracle? Why did they demand a "sign from heaven"?

7. Why do you think Jesus “sighed deeply in His spirit” in response to their request?
8. Why will Jesus not give them a sign? See Matthew 12:39 and Luke 16:31.
9. Have you ever demanded a sign from God? How did He respond? What place should “signs and wonders” have in our presentation of the Gospel today?
10. The words “leaven” or “yeast” in the Bible are usually a symbol for evil. What is the “leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod” which Jesus warns them against?
11. What was it that the disciples failed to understand and why?

THE LIGHT OF THE BLIND MAN Read 8:22–26

12. Mark places this story of healing the blind man right after Jesus twice asks His disciples, “Do you not yet understand?” How does the two-staged healing of the blind man shed light on the slowness of the disciples to understand?
13. In what ways do you feel you need to be cured of spiritual blindness or slowness to understand?

WRAP-UP

14. Some people say, “Seeing is believing.” Others say, “Believing is seeing.” Which do you think is true when it comes to faith in Christ? Explain.

THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

Mark 8:27–9:8

Lesson 14

The passage before us constitutes a major turning point in Mark's Gospel. Jesus comes to Caesarea Philippi, His furthest journey away from Jerusalem. After an important encounter with His disciples about His true identity and mission, He turns southward. He set his face toward Jerusalem to confront the final events of His earthly life: betrayal, arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection. From here on out, everything He does will have the shadow of the cross hanging over it. Lagging behind are the disciples, who must learn the hard lesson that, for them as with their Master, there is no crown without the cross.

WARM-UP

1. What kind of “turning points” have you had in your life?

THE QUESTION JESUS ASKED Read 8:27–30

2. Caesarea Philippi is a Roman city located in the northernmost part of Israel (see map). Why would Jesus take His disciples way up there at this point in time?
3. Why would Jesus ask His disciples these two questions about His identity?
4. The people of Jesus' day thought He was John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. Who do people today say that He is?
5. When Peter said, “You are the Christ,” he was saying that Jesus was the Messiah. Look up “Messiah” in your Bible dictionary. What kind of Messiah were the Jews looking for? Did Peter understand the kind of Messiah that Jesus was?

THE DESTINY JESUS ACCEPTED Read 8:31–38

6. This is the first time Jesus has spoken of His death. Why would Jesus go right from talking about His identity as Messiah to the reality of His coming death?
7. How could Peter go from being so right in v. 29 to being so wrong in v. 32? What lessons can we learn from this?

8. Why does Jesus call Peter “Satan”? How did Satan try to use Peter in this incident and how could he use us in similar ways?
9. What three things does Jesus say we must do if we are to “come after” Him? What does it mean to “take up your cross”?
10. How would you answer the two questions Jesus poses in vv. 36–37?
11. In v. 38 Jesus speaks of the one who is “ashamed” of Him. Why would anyone be ashamed of Him?

THE GLORY JESUS DISPLAYED Read 9:1–8

12. Some say Jesus’ statement in v. 1 refers to the Second Coming at the end of time. Others say it refers to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). Still others say it refers to the transfiguration recorded here in vv. 2–8. What do you think?
13. Imagine being Peter, James or John up on that mountain. What did they see and hear? Why would this have been a great encouragement to them after all Jesus had said to them six days earlier?
14. God replied to Peter’s request with a statement and a command. What is the statement? What is the command? How does this relate to what we learned about Jesus in 8:27–38?

WRAP-UP

15. In 8:27–33 Peter wanted a victorious Messiah without the cross. In 8:1–8 he wanted to preserve a glorious experience without the cross. How do we fall into the same trap? What is the antidote?

WHEN FAITH FAILS

Mark 9:9–29

Lesson 15

In our last study we saw Jesus up on the Mt. of Transfiguration. It would have been just one short step for him to enter heaven from there, as Moses and Elijah did, but He had a mission to fulfill first. He heads down the mountain, seeing even more clearly his appointment with destiny as the suffering Son of Man. Once again, the disciples just don't get it. Their hardheadedness is illustrated at the bottom of the mountain, where Jesus must once again confront their lack of faith. He says to them, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you?" What Jesus looked for long ago — faith, simple faith—he still looks for today.

WARM-UP

1. Can faith ever coexist with doubt? Explain?

THE QUESTION OF ELIJAH Read 9:9–13

2. In v. 9 Jesus tells Peter, James and John not to tell anyone what they had seen. What had they seen?
3. The disciples' question in v.11 reflects the fact that Jews believed Elijah would return before the Messiah came and set up His kingdom. In response, Jesus says, "Elijah has indeed come." Who was He referring to? What had happened to Elijah and how was this a pattern for what would happen to Jesus? See also Matthew 17:9–13.
4. What did Jesus say about His own future in these verses? How would hearing this test the faith of these three disciples?

THE FAILURE OF THE DISCIPLES Read 9:14–19

5. What do you think the scribes were arguing about with the disciples as Jesus and His three friends came down the mountain?
6. Jesus had already given the disciples authority to cast out demons, which they had done (Mark 6:7,13). Why were they unable to cast this one out?

7. What is Jesus feeling in v. 19?
8. Who does Jesus have in mind when He says, “O, unbelieving generation”? The crowd? The disciples? The scribes? Us? Everyone?
9. At this point, whose faith is being tested more –the disciples’ or the boy’s father? Who can you relate with more?

THE FAITH OF JESUS Read 9:20–29

10. Why do you think Jesus asked the father this question in v. 21 when He probably already knew the answer?
11. Look carefully at vv. 22–24. How does this father display both belief and unbelief? In what ways does your own faith waver back and forth?
12. Jesus implies in v. 23 that nothing is impossible if our faith is strong enough. Was the boy healed on the basis of the father’s faith or on the basis of Jesus’ faith? Explain.
13. How do you think the father felt when the boy lay still like a corpse? Do you think this was a further test of this man’s faith?
14. Look at v. 29. Do you agree with the statement: “We have to exercise faith, cultivate it, live by it, and promote its growth by prayer and fasting.” Explain your answer.

WRAP-UP

15. How is God testing your faith these days? In what areas are you displaying faith and in what areas are you displaying unbelief? How can you cultivate your faith in response to this study?

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Mark 9:30–50

Lesson 16

As Jesus returns to Galilee on His way south to Jerusalem, He must confront an ugly tendency within His own disciples towards pride and prejudice. Despite Jesus' second announcement of His impending death, they still cherish ambitious plans for their individual greatness. This proud attitude also displays itself in a haughty exclusivism which looks down on those who are not a part of their company. Jesus does not deal lightly with these things, and calls His disciples of all ages to carve pride and prejudice out of their lives regardless of cost.

WARM-UP

1. What is the relationship between pride and prejudice? Where have you seen these two things displayed?

FEARFUL RELUCTANCE Read 9:30–32

2. This is the second time Jesus predicted His death and resurrection in the presence of His disciples. The first time occurred in Mark 9:31–32. He will do it again in Mark 10:33–34. Why did Jesus keep repeating Himself?
3. Notice how the disciples reacted to Jesus' prediction? Were they "afraid to ask" because they feared His reaction or because they feared His answer?

PRIDEFUL DISCUSSION Read 9:33–37

4. Why did the disciples "keep silent" when Jesus asked them what they were discussing on the way? How do you think they felt when the question was asked?
5. What prior events might have prompted the Twelve to fight over which of them was the greatest?
6. Define what Jesus means by being "last of all" and "servant of all." Give an example.
7. What point was Jesus trying to make by setting a child before them?

8. Take a minute and pray about this issue of servanthood. How is God calling you to be a servant? In what areas is pride rearing its ugly head?

PREJUDICIAL QUESTION Read 9:38–50

9. What is the logical connection between John's question in v. 38 and Jesus' statement in v. 37? Why would the disciples feel the need to hinder the man?
10. How is Jesus' perspective in vv. 39–41 different than John's? How does this apply to differences among Christians today?
11. It's important to see the connection between the child (v. 37), the one casting out demons (v. 38), and the "little ones who believe" (v. 42). What are the consequences of rejecting, hindering or causing such people to stumble?
12. Is Jesus speaking literally or figuratively in vv. 43–48? What point is He trying to make and how does this relate to the attitude displayed in v. 38?
13. What are some attitudes and actions you need to cut out of your life to be the person God wants you to be?
14. Jesus seems to make two points about salt in vv. 49–50. "Salted with fire" is a reference to the testing of the disciples through suffering in order to purify their lives. Remaining "salty" is a reference to the disciples being the purifying influence in society that they should be. How are these two ideas connected?

WRAP-UP

15. Think about these two issues of pride and prejudice and how Jesus dealt with each of them in this passage. What misconceptions of your own has Jesus challenged in this passage? What can you do to change?

THE QUESTION OF DIVORCE

Mark 10:1–12

Lesson 17

His Galilean ministry over, Jesus now heads south towards Jerusalem. As He sets foot on Judean soil, the religious leaders raise the issue of divorce. The question of divorce was a burning issue in Jesus' day, as it is today. What does Jesus have to say about divorce? In typical fashion Jesus refuses to deal with the technicalities of the issue, but instead focuses on God's original blueprint for marriage. In a society where over half of all marriages end up in divorce, we desperately need to hear these words today.

WARM-UP Read 10:1–12

1. From your observations, what are some of the primary causes of divorce in our society?

THE QUESTION OF THE PHARISEES 10:1–2

2. What, if anything, is significant about the information Mark gives in v. 1?
3. Why did the Pharisees question Jesus regarding the lawfulness of divorce? Were they sincere?

THE RESPONSE OF JESUS 10:3–9

4. The question regarding what Moses commanded goes back to Deuteronomy 24:1–4. Read that passage. On what grounds did the law permit a man to divorce his wife? Could a woman divorce her husband for the same reason?
5. The Jews of Jesus' day were divided over the meaning of the word "indecency" in Deuteronomy 24:1. One group understood these words to refer to adultery only. A more liberal group believed "indecency" could refer to anything a man didn't like about his wife, such as her cooking or her looks. In what way were both groups missing the point?
6. In v. 5 Jesus says this law was given "because of the hardness of your heart." What does this mean? What is the difference between a command and a concession?

7. In vv. 6–9 Jesus takes them all the way back to “the beginning of creation.” Why does He do this?
8. According to Jesus, what happens when a man and a woman get married? Why is this point so critical in the issue of divorce?
9. Why do you think our society has lost this sense of the permanence in the marriage relationship?

THE INSTRUCTION OF THE DISCIPLES 10:10–12

10. Why did the disciples question Jesus further about this in v. 10? What were they feeling? See Matthew 19:10.
11. Compare vv. 11–12 with Matthew 19:8–9 and 1 Corinthians 7:10–16. On what grounds does Scripture allow for divorce which are not mentioned here? When divorce is permissible (as in the case of adultery), is it mandatory?
12. Is divorce the “unforgivable sin”?
13. Look carefully at vv. 11–12. How does Jesus give woman a higher status than what they had in the law?
14. How can the church maintain God’s high standards for marriage and yet still show compassion for those who have been through divorce?

WRAP-UP

15. How can you, your group, and your church help and support those who are preparing for marriage and those who are struggling to keep their marriage covenant?

KINGDOM PEOPLE

Mark 10:13–52

Lesson 18

Mark's Gospel opened with the theme of God's Kingdom. The first word Jesus ever uttered in public promised that the Kingdom—God's rule over humanity—was near. But the Jews misunderstood the nature of this Kingdom, how it would be brought into being, and the kind of people it would include. In this study, Jesus seeks to clear the fog about the Kingdom of God, teaching us how to enter it and what it looks like to live under His rule.

WARM-UP

1. Describe what you think Jesus meant by “the kingdom of God”?

KINGDOM PEOPLE ARE LIKE CHILDREN Read 10:13–16

2. What is the difference between how the disciples viewed children and how Jesus viewed them?
3. What does it mean to “receive the Kingdom of God like a child”? What is the difference between childlikeness and childishness?
4. Is there anything keeping you from receiving the Kingdom like a child? If so, what?

KINGDOM PEOPLE TRAVEL LIGHT Read 10:17–31

5. Describe the man who approached Jesus in vv. 17–31. How is he different from the little children whom Jesus just talked about?
6. What did Jesus tell this man was necessary for him to do to inherit eternal life? Does this surprise you?
7. Why is it so difficult for the wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God? How does Jesus drive home this point?

8. How does Jesus reassure the disciples in vv. 26–31? Does this reassure you?
9. Does Jesus ask the same kind of renunciation of riches and other earthly treasures of us? Is it possible to have riches and remain a faithful follower of Christ?
10. In vv. 32–34 how does Jesus model the very thing He just taught the disciples? Why were they “amazed” and why were they “fearful”?

KINGDOM PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO SERVE Read 10:32–45

11. What was driving James’ and John’s request? In what ways do you see this same drive in people today?
12. What did Jesus mean when He said, “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?”
13. It’s easy to laugh at James and John, but have we really grasped the servant principles of Jesus? What are some ways Christians fall prey to power models of leadership?

KINGDOM PEOPLE SEE WHAT OTHER’S DON’T Read 10:46–52

14. Describe the attitude and actions of Bartimaeus. How does he compare with the little children Jesus commended in vv. 13–16? How does he compare with the rich man in vv. 17–31? How does he compare with James and John in vv. 35–45?
15. Jesus said to Bartimaeus, “Your faith has made you well.” How had he shown true faith?

WRAP-UP

16. What have you learned in this study about a) entering the Kingdom of God, b) living in the Kingdom of God, and c) the rewards of the Kingdom of God?

THE KING TAKES CHARGE

Mark 11:1–26

Lesson 19

The time has come for Jesus to put His cards on the table. Throughout His ministry He has been reluctant to reveal His true identity as Messiah and King, but now it is time to make a public statement. Jesus enters Jerusalem in a way that fulfills prophecy, but not popular expectation. He comes to the Holy City as King to bring deliverance, but He finds a people deserving of judgement instead. The King is angry, and how He deals with that anger serves as a lesson for us all.

WARM-UP

1. What kind of things make you angry? How can you tell the difference between righteous and unrighteous anger?

THE KING ENTERS JERUSALEM Read 11:1–11

2. Look at the instructions Jesus gives His disciples in vv. 2–3. Do you think He had made arrangements beforehand, or was this the result of His miraculous power?
3. Read Zechariah 9:9. In what ways does Jesus fulfill this prophecy about the Messiah?
4. What was Jesus telling the crowds about His Kingdom when He chose to ride a donkey (a symbol of peace) into Jerusalem instead of a war horse?
5. How did the crowd react to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem? ("Hosanna" means "Save now!"). Do you think they understood who He was and what He was up to? Explain.
6. Jesus teaches us that true power and strength require humility and gentleness. Do you think we understand today any better than the crowds in Jerusalem? Explain.

THE KING JUDGES JERUSALEM Read 11:12–26

7. Fig trees around Jerusalem leaf out in March or April and don't produce figs until June. In vv. 12–14 Jesus curses this fig tree for looking good but having no fruit. Why would He be angry at it when it wasn't even the season for figs?

8. What is the symbolic meaning of the cursing of the fig tree? See Hosea 9:10 for a possible clue.
9. What is the connection between the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the Temple?
10. Explain what Jesus saw in the Temple. Why was He so angry? Was this righteous or unrighteous anger?
11. The Jews expected the Messiah to cleanse the Temple FROM foreigners. Instead, he cleanses it FOR foreigners, calling it “a house of prayer for all the nations.” Why would this have angered the chief priests and scribes?
12. In what way is it possible for the church, meant as a house of prayer for all the nations, to become a “robber’s den”?
13. In vv. 22–26 Jesus also uses the fig tree as an object lesson for prayer. What does Jesus teach us about prayer here?
14. Why is forgiving others so critical when it comes to prayer?

WRAP-UP

15. Jesus has cursed Israel for its fruitlessness. He has also called His people to bear fruit of humility, gentleness, faith and forgiveness. In which of these areas do you need to pray for growth?

GOOD ANSWERS TO BAD QUESTIONS

Mark 11:27–12:44

Lesson 20

Some people ask questions because they are sincere seekers of the truth. Others take malicious pleasure in posing questions that will trip up an opponent. Jesus was a master at looking behind questions to motives and posing effective counter-questions to reveal those motives. In the last week of His life, Jesus dealt with a number of questions, mostly from those trying to find grounds for accusation. Jesus deals with these questions with great skill, causing His critics to retreat for a more direct attack.

WARM-UP

1. If you could ask Jesus one question, what would it be?

THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY Read 11:27–12:12

2. What do you think prompted the religious leaders to ask this question? What are “these things” to which they refer in v. 28?
3. Why does Jesus refuse to answer their question directly? Are there times when we shouldn’t answer questions?
4. What was Jesus trying to communicate in the parable of the tenants? What stands out to you the most —the patience of God or the wickedness of Israel?
5. How can we avoid being like the wicked tenants in the parable?

THE QUESTION OF TAXES Read 12:13–17

6. The Pharisees disliked the Roman tax while the Herodians supported it. What were these two groups trying to accomplish when they asked Jesus if one should pay taxes to Caesar?
7. What does Jesus’ response say about the relationship between the Christian and the State? See also Acts 5:29, Romans 13:1–7, 1 Timothy 2:1–4, 1 Peter 2:13–17.

THE QUESTION OF THE RESURRECTION Read 12:18–27

8. The Sadducees were an aristocratic group of Jewish leaders who accepted only the first five books of the Old Testament and thus denied the resurrection from the dead because they found nothing in those books to support it. According to Jesus, the Sadducees failed to understand two things (v. 24). What were they and how did Jesus demonstrate their ignorance?
9. What does Jesus tell us in these verses about life in the age to come? Does this disappoint you or excite you? Explain.

THE QUESTION OF THE LAW Read 12:28–34

10. Do you think this scribe was sincere in his quest for truth? Explain.
11. The Pharisees had worked out that there were 613 commandments in all, some considered “greater” and others “lesser.” According to Jesus, what is the greatest commandment? How did Jesus come up with this answer?
12. Augustine once summarized the Christian life as “Love God and do what you like.” Do you agree?

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION Read 12:35–44

13. Now Jesus Himself asks a question (v. 37). In what way does this question cut right to the heart of the issue?
14. In vv. 38–41, how does Mark skillfully turn our attention away from the loaded theological questions to the nitty-gritty of what true faith is all about?
15. Evaluate your own giving. Do you give out of your surplus or out of your poverty? How can you learn from the poor widow and still live a responsible life?

WRAP-UP

16. What have you learned in this study that you can apply to your life this week?

THINGS TO COME

Mark 13:1–37

Lesson 21

Few things have preoccupied Christians throughout the ages more than details relating to the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world. In a farewell message to His disciples, Jesus speaks to them about the future. He does so not to satisfy their curiosity but to encourage steadfast faith and alertness in facing the challenges that lie ahead. Most of all, Jesus want them (and us) to know that they future lies in His hands.

WARM-UP

1. When you think of the end times, what kind of feelings do you have? Fear? Excitement? Confusion?

THE BEGINNING OF THE END Read 13:1–13

2. What did Jesus predict about the Jerusalem Temple in v. 2? How do you think the disciples felt about this?
3. In vv. 5–13 Jesus paints a grim picture of what the disciples could look forward to. What does He say will happen? Why do you think He wanted His disciples to know this?
4. What does Jesus mean when He says, “These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs”?
5. In light of what Jesus says will happen, what are the things Jesus says the disciples are to do?
6. Jesus closes this section with the words, “the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved.” What does this tell us about the meaning of true Christian faith?

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM Read 13:14–23

7. What does Jesus say will happen in these verses? What does Jesus mean by “the abomination of desolation” (see Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4)?

8. Christians disagree about how to interpret vv. 14–23. Some say Jesus is talking about the fall of Jerusalem and the events leading up to it which took place in A.D. 70. Others believe this refers to “the Great Tribulation” which is still future. What do you think?
9. What evidence do you see that God is looking out for His people in this time of distress?

THE END OF THE AGE Read 13:24–27

10. What does Jesus say will happen in these verses? What is the main event to which these verses refer?
11. Does Jesus tell us in these verses when He will return or how He will return?
12. Jesus says that in the end He will “gather together His elect.” Who are the elect? Why do you think Jesus chose this term?

SO WHAT? Read 13:28–37

13. Jesus tells two parables in this section. What is the main point of each?
14. Verse 30 is a rather bold prediction. What do you think Jesus meant by “these things”? What did He mean by “this generation”? How did this prediction come true?
15. In light of Jesus’ words in v. 32, how should we respond to those who try to predict when Christ will return?

WRAP-UP

16. Over and over again, Jesus tells us in these verses to “be alert” and to “keep watch.” Are you doing this? If not, why not? How can you keep watch for Jesus’ return and yet live a responsible life?

EXTRAVAGANT LOVE

Mark 14:1–26

Lesson 22

This passage marks the beginning of the end. In just a few short hours, Jesus will offer Himself as the sacrificial Passover lamb of God in an unparalleled act of love. In preparation for the cross, Jesus is anointed with oil by an unnamed woman as a act of extravagant love. He also celebrates the Passover meal with His disciples, showing them through that meal the true meaning of the events to follow. In the midst of this, we see the dangers of love, as one close to Jesus betrays Him.

WARM-UP

1. What is the most wonderfully extravagant gift you have ever received? How did it make you feel?

EXTRAVAGANT LOVE DISPLAYED Read 14:1–9

2. What is the connection between the Passover and the religious leaders planning to kill Jesus?
3. What might have motivated this woman to anoint Jesus with this costly perfume? Note: three hundred denarii is roughly equivalent to a year's salary.
4. How did those who watched this woman respond to her actions? Who were they? How would YOU have felt had you witnessed the same thing?
5. On what basis does Jesus defend her actions? What did she understand that the disciples didn't?
6. This woman's act is, in a sense, an expression of worship. What, if anything, does this incident teach us about the place of beauty and extravagance in our worship?

EXTRAVAGANT LOVE DENIED Read 14:10–11

7. Compare and contrast Judas Iscariot with the woman who anointed Jesus.

8. What are some of the things that might have motivated Judas to betray Jesus? See also John 6:70; 12:6; 13:27,29. Do you see any of these factors in your own life?
9. How could Judas be so near to Jesus in one sense and yet so far removed from Him in spiritual sensitivity? How does this apply to us today?

EXTRAVAGANT LOVE DEPICTED Read 14:12–26

10. What did the Jews celebrate at Passover time? See Exodus 12 and Deuteronomy 16 for background, if needed.
11. Why did Jesus make such careful advance preparations for the celebration of the Passover with His disciples?
12. What do you think Jesus was feeling towards Judas as He made the announcement and spoke the words in vv. 18–21? Was Judas a villain or a victim?
13. When Jesus says, “This is My body...This is My blood...” what does He mean? Why was it so important for the disciples to eat the bread and drink from the cup?
14. What does the Lord’s Supper mean for you personally?
15. In what way would v. 25 have given the disciples hope in the midst of the coming trials they would face? How can the Lord’s Supper help you not just look back at Christ’s sacrifice but also look forward in hope to your reunion with Him?

WRAP-UP

16. What have you learned from this passage about the nature of extravagant love? How will you apply these lessons in your relationship with God, and also in your relationship with others?

WITHOUT A FRIEND

Mark 14:27–72

Lesson 23

It is one thing to be betrayed and rejected by your enemies, but quite another to be abandoned by your friends. As the swirl of events leading up to the crucifixion begins, Jesus is both abandoned and denied by those closest to Him. As we read this story, we can't help but wonder how we might react under similar pressure. Will we follow Jesus to the cross? Will we stand up to the pressures and demands of discipleship? How do we react when, despite our best intentions, we find that we have failed the Lord?

WARM-UP

1. Can you think of a time when you failed the Lord? How did you feel? What did you learn about yourself?

“YOU WILL ALL FALL AWAY” Read 14:27–31

2. In v. 27, Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7. Why would He tell His disciples beforehand that they would fall away?
3. How would the words, “after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee,” have encouraged the disciples?
4. Why was Peter so sure of himself? What can we learn from Peter's example?

“ARE YOU STILL SLEEPING?” Read 14:32–42

5. What did Jesus ask of God in v. 36? Why did He ask it? Why didn't God grant His request?
6. In v. 34 and again in v. 38 Jesus encourages His disciples to watch and pray. Was this for His sake or for their sake?

7. How do you watch and pray instead of falling asleep? Why is this so hard?

“AND THEY ALL LEFT HIM AND FLED” Read 14:43–52

8. Why did the religious leaders bring an armed multitude to arrest Jesus? What does this tell you about how they viewed Him?
9. See John 18:10. What was Peter trying to prove when he drew his sword and cut off the man’s ear? In what ways do we do the same thing?
10. Why do you think Mark includes this description of the unnamed young man in vv. 51–52?
11. What factors helped Jesus face this moment of crisis with courage, while His best friends fled in fear?

“AND THEY ALL CONDEMNED HIM” Read 14:53–65

12. As Jesus is brought before the high priest (Caiaphas), we are told in v. 54 that, “Peter followed Him at a distance.” Is this to Peter’s credit, or not?
13. What does Mark emphasize about the testimony brought against Jesus?
14. Why did Jesus choose to “keep silent” when false charges were being made against Him? Should we do the same when it happens to us?
15. What was Jesus claiming about Himself in v. 62? See Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:14.

I DO NOT KNOW THIS MAN” Read 14:66–72

16. What is the significance of Peter denying Jesus three times?

17. In what circumstances are you most inclined to deny Jesus, or at least to be ashamed of Him?
Is there forgiveness available for such a sin?

WRAP-UP

18. What has this passage taught you about Jesus? About yourself? How is it possible for us to be faithful to Christ in the time of testing when even His original disciples all failed?

THE SILENT LAMB

Mark 15:1–47

Lesson 24

On three different occasions Jesus had predicted His own death. Now the day has come. On the day of the cross, Jesus is strangely silent and submissive. It almost seems as if He is a passive victim. Let the reader beware! Though Jesus seems passive, He is in fact still Lord. His passion is action, action in holy submission to the Father, action in holy love for sinful people. In describing the cross, Mark focuses not just on the silence of Jesus but on the words and reactions of those around Him. He wants us to know how they viewed the cross because they teach us something about what the cross meant for Jesus, and they mirror our own responses as well.

WARM-UP

1. How do you react when people treat you unfairly?

JESUS AND PILATE Read 15:1–15

2. As you Read through this section, what can you tell about the kind of man Pilate was? Why did he finally capitulate to the crowd?
3. Pilate was a weak figure who allowed his actions to be determined not by what he knew was right but by what was politically expedient. To what extent are you tempted to do the same thing?
4. In what sense is Barrabas a stand-in for every Christian?
5. What can you learn from Jesus by the way He handled Himself before Pilate? See Isaiah 53:7.

JESUS AND THE SOLDIERS Read 15:16–21

6. Why do you think Mark made so much of the mockery and abuse Jesus suffered at the hands of the soldiers?
7. Why did the soldiers recruit a passer-by to carry the cross? What does this say about the condition Jesus was in?

8. Notice how Mark gives us not only the name of Simon, but also the names of his sons. Why would Mark do this. See Romans 16:13. How would this “chance encounter” change Simon’s life?
9. Go back and Read Mark 8:34. In what way does Simon of Cyrene symbolize what we are all called to do? How would this encourage Mark’s Readers who were suffering persecution in Rome?

JESUS AND THE ONLOOKERS Read 15:22–41

10. In this section, Mark tells how a number of different onlookers reacted to the cross. Note the reaction of each: the two robbers, those passing by, the religious leaders, the by-standers, the centurion, the women. Out of all these people, who got it right?
11. The wine “mixed with myrrh” was a narcotic offered to victims to help them endure the terrible pain of crucifixion. Why would Jesus refuse this?
12. Why did Jesus cry out, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” Does this surprise you? What does it teach us about prayer? What does it teach us about the meaning of the cross? See Deuteronomy 21:23 and Psalm 22.
13. What factors caused the centurion to see that Jesus was indeed the Son of God?

JESUS AND JOSEPH Read 15:42–47

14. What qualities does Joseph demonstrate in this section. What can you learn from him?
15. What inhibits you from acting courageously on Christ’s behalf as Joseph did?

WRAP-UP

16. Take some time to just meditate and pray over the cross. What is there about how Jesus dies that we might apply to how we should live?

THE VINDICATION OF JESUS

Mark 16:1–20

Lesson 25

Over the years, Christians have stood by the fact that Christianity stands or falls on the historical fact of the resurrection. The Gospel of Mark ends with a simple and matter of fact report of the resurrection: the tomb was empty; the Lord was seen. These two facts provide irrefutable evidence that Jesus Christ is alive. But why is this so important? The resurrection proves something about Jesus Christ which Mark has been trying to show all along. It is the vindication by the Father of Jesus as the Son of God. It is God's stamp of approval not only on His life but on His death. It is assurance to the believer that in Christ there is life beyond the grave. Without the resurrection, Paul says, "your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

WARM-UP

1. What does the resurrection mean to you personally?

THE TOMB WAS EMPTY Read 16:1–8

2. Who were these three women who came to the tomb on Sunday morning? How had they already shown their love for Jesus? See Mark 15:40–41, 47.
3. Why do you think Jesus' female disciples went to anoint the body, while most of His male disciples remained in hiding?
4. Describe how the women felt as they approached and then entered the tomb.
5. Who was the young man they met at the tomb? See Matthew 28:2–3.
6. What is the significance of the angel's words, "Go tell His disciples and Peter"? How do you think Peter felt when he heard those words?
7. Why was it so important that the disciples meet Jesus in Galilee? What had happened there? See 1:14–20; 16:15–20.

8. Note: Most modern editions of the New Testament show that Mark's Gospel ends at v. 8 because the last 12 verses are not in the two oldest Greek manuscripts. It is likely that these last 12 verses were later added by the early church as a summary of Jesus' resurrection appearances. If it was Mark's intention to finish his Gospel in v. 8, why would he end it with a report of the women being afraid? Is this a good kind of afraid or a bad kind?

THE LORD WAS SEEN Read 16:9–20

9. Verses 9–14 tell of Christ's appearance to Mary, to two disciples on the road, and to His disciples. To whom else did Christ appear? See 1 Corinthians 15:5–8. Why is it important that the risen Christ was seen by more than one person or one group?
10. Why do you think the first disciples found it so hard to believe that Jesus was alive? Why do people find it so hard to believe it today?
11. Compare Jesus' words to His disciples in vv. 15–18 with the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16–20. How are they similar and how are they different?
12. Was the Great Commission just for the original disciples or is it for all of us in succeeding generations?
13. Verse 19 records what is called the "ascension" of Christ. Why is this event so important? See Acts 1:9–11, 1 Timothy 3:16.
14. Verse 20 says that as the disciples went out and preached, the Lord "worked with them, and confirmed the word by signs that followed." What does this mean? In what ways can we expect the living Lord to work as we spread the good news?

WRAP-UP

15. One writer says, "The story of the resurrection is much more than a happy ending to a novel. It is richer even than the rewarding of Jesus for His obedience unto death. It is the vindication of who Jesus is." Why is this true? See Romans 1:3–4.