



THE
GOSPEL
of MARK

The Gospel *of* Mark

Written by
Cathy Hardage and Bryan McNeely

Edited by:
Curtis Froisland and Liz Cohn

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Groups will discuss the prior week's reading. For example, during the group meeting of Week 2, groups will discuss Week 1's devotional readings. Groups will meet Week 1 to discuss an overview of the Gospel of Mark, material discussed at the Mark Kickoff on Thursday, Feb. 3rd, and have time for fellowship.

Visit www.graceanglican.church/markgroups to learn more about this study and to sign up for a group.

Introduction to Mark

Who is Jesus? What did he do? Why does any of that matter? These questions have captivated the minds and hearts of people in every age going back to Jesus' ministry in the towns and seaside of ancient Galilee.

Very early on, the closest followers of Jesus began to record their experiences with him, and their reflections on why his life and deeds are "good news" for the world. The book in your hands was written to help you understand and experience the good news of Jesus by spending time with one of the earliest Christian writings: the Gospel of Mark.

The text of the Gospel of Mark doesn't name its author, but from the earliest days of its circulation (and in every ancient copy we have) it has been known as "the Gospel of Mark." According to a tradition going back to Papias from around 100 A.D., Mark was the secretary and ministry partner of the Apostle Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples. The Gospel of Mark is a record of Peter's experiences, and a compendium of his understanding of Jesus, his teaching, his life, his death, and his resurrection. It is likely that Mark wrote this Gospel in the early 60s A.D., though perhaps earlier, giving us an exceptionally early, eyewitness account of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1:1).

Mark's work is called the "Gospel" of Mark, because the gospel is Mark's focus, but also because the term gospel became a shorthand way of describing these early biographies of Jesus. Like other ancient biographies, the Gospels in the Bible are historically minded, but also artfully structured. The Gospel of Mark can be divided essentially in half. Mark 1:1-8:26 focuses on Jesus' miraculous deeds and his authoritative teaching. Chapter 8:27-16:8 lead up to and focus on Jesus' death on the cross. As you read Mark, keep this big picture in mind, and try to resist the urge to refer to the other Gospels too quickly. Instead, do your best to listen to the gospel as Mark tells it.

Our hope and goal is that when you finish this book, you will have grown in your knowledge of Scripture, your spiritual discipline, and (most importantly) your personal knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Using this Book

This book is written by two members of Grace Anglican Church (Bryan McNeely: Weeks 1, 2, 3, and 5 and Cathy Hardage: Weeks 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10). There are five daily readings per week. Read these on whatever five days work best for you. You'll need approximately 30 minutes each day to read, reflect, and pray. This is a big commitment, but we encourage you to keep with it. Consistency will be key to getting the most out of this study. Also, be sure to read the allotted week's devotionals before your group gathering so you can fully participate with your group.

Each day includes:

1. An opening time of reflection
2. A passage from Mark
3. A short reflection to help you understand the reading
4. 2-3 questions to help you reflect on the Gospel
5. Prayer

Space is provided each day for you to write out your prayers and responses to the reflection questions. The material of this book is to help you encounter God through his Word in the Gospel of Mark, so use this material as flexibly as necessary for that purpose and goal!

May the Lord bless you as you read, meditate, and discuss his Word, and may you come to see and know for the first time, or ever more deeply, that "Truly this man is the Son of God" (Mark 15:39).

Curtis Froisland

Feast of Christ the King, 2021

Additional Recommended Resources:

Bible Project

Helpful videos of overviews on books of the Bible and biblical themes.

www.bibleproject.com

Bible Study Tools Dictionary

If you don't recognize a word, name, or place, check this online dictionary of Bible terms. Bible Study Tools also has many other free resources online.

www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary

Catena Bible

This contains quotations from the commentaries of the early Church Fathers on the Bible. Be sure to click settings in the top right and choose "Early Fathers."

www.catenabible.com/mk/1

ESV Bible

The ESV Bible is available online for free, including the Global Study Bible, which has a useful introduction and verse by verse comments on Mark.

www.esv.org

Week 1, Day 1

(Week of Feb. 6th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

With a friend in mind, if you were to write down their life-story, where would you begin? How would you show how meaningful your friend's life is to everyone who reads it?

Read: Mark 1:1-8

The life story of Jesus is known as the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. As we read the Gospel of Mark, you'll discover what is "good" about the Good News, and what it means for you and every person you know.

The story of Jesus begins with a messenger. More than seven hundred years before John was born, the prophet Isaiah wrote that a messenger would come in the wilderness to "prepare the way of the LORD" (Isaiah 40:3).

In our English Bibles, "LORD" in all caps is the conventional way of rendering the personal name of the God of Israel, Yahweh. So, in Isaiah's day, the messenger was unknown, but the LORD who was coming was not. It was Yahweh coming back to his people to save and dwell with them.

Mark tells us the true meaning of the prophecy: John is the long-awaited messenger who prepares the way for Jesus, the Son of God, the LORD coming to his people.

Questions to Consider:

1. In this passage, who is the messenger? What is the message?
2. In the course of a single day you may receive several messages. How do you decide which messages to believe or respond to?
3. In life, how do you decide which messengers to trust? Why should you trust the message of Scripture?

Pray:

Write a prayer asking Jesus to give you an awareness of the trustworthy message of Scripture.

[illegible]

Week 1, Day 2

(Week of Feb. 6th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

In the course of writing your friend's life-story, would you include a time when they tried to become a better person, or wished they could start over? Would you overlook their flaws?

Read: Mark 1:9-15

When people came to John, he told them to repent. In effect, he was telling them to admit their flaws and turn back to God. These imperfections prevented them from being prepared to meet the "One" John said would "baptize [them] with the Holy Spirit."

Baptism (ritual cleansing with water), along with admitting their flaws, was the prescribed means for starting over. Admitting their faults and failures helped the people to recognize the truth, that their relationship with God was broken and in desperate need of mending. John's baptism was a sign showing a desire to be reconciled to God. By the time Jesus came to John for baptism, "all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem" had been baptized by John.

Unlike everyone baptized before him, Jesus did not have any faults or flaws. Instead, God was "pleased" with him and called him his "beloved Son," and sent his Holy Spirit to confirm Jesus as his Son and our Savior King.

When we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God speaks his word of promise over us: "This is my beloved [child]." Through faith, baptism signifies the inward reality of the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts. Together these realities confirm that we are accepted into the family and kingdom of God.

When Jesus began preaching that "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel," he was saying that the relationship between flawed and faulty human beings and God, their Creator, would soon be mended. The message Jesus was calling attention to was his own life. It was an invitation to witness and believe that

the life he lived, and the work he was doing, would be sufficient to mend the relationship between God and all who believe his message.

Questions to Consider:

1. What flaws (or sins) are you aware of in your heart and life?
2. How do those flaws damage your relationships with others and with God?
3. Ask God to show you your sins, and his mercy.

Pray:

Write a prayer below asking Jesus to teach you how he responded to the flaws he saw in the people around him.

[illegible]

Week 1, Day 3

(Week of Feb. 6th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Within your version of your friend's life-story, would you include their teachers and influences? Would you conduct interviews with those your friend taught and mentored? What would they say your friend taught them?

Read: Mark 1:16-20

In this reading, we see Jesus calling his first followers, who eventually became the main source material for the four Gospels. Jesus often used figures of speech to describe the kingdom of heaven as a place where people are gathered in from everywhere, even the most remote places on earth, and from the most obscure clans, tribes, and nations. He called men like Simon, Andrew, James, and John to teach them how to do this work and become "fishers of men." They no longer needed their fishing nets. The gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ, would be the instrument for gathering all people into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus taught them the ways of his kingdom - what is true, beautiful, and good. He made them witnesses to his gospel, and taught them about the kingdom of God, so that they could tell everyone that Jesus has made it possible for all people everywhere to join him in the kingdom.

While the net is most often associated with entrapment and the denial of freedom, it may also be used as a means for rescue. As a net, the gospel is used to rescue all people from their mistaken notions of what is valuable, sacred, and good. It is the means of establishing the truth about the human condition, of Jesus doing for every human being what none can do for themselves, mend their broken relationship with God.

When the people in Capernaum heard Jesus teach, they were "astonished" that he taught as if he had "authority." Jesus taught as if he had no predecessor, no mentor. When he taught, he did not use the teaching of any other person as a reference like the scribes did. Jesus taught them as if he was the source, the original teacher.

Week 1, Day 4

(Week of Feb. 6th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

As you continue to write your friend's life-story, consider their interactions with people. How do they interact and respond to people?

Read: Mark 1:21-45

Notice how drastically different Jesus' treatment of the leper is from the unclean spirit.

Demons are unclean spirits aligned with the Devil, oppressing and tormenting people, and for this reason they are repugnant to Jesus. The unclean spirit that confronted Jesus in the synagogue shouted at him, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?" Jesus responded with absolute authority and commanded the unclean spirit to be silent and leave, provoking it to cry out in frustration and grief at losing its host.

On the other hand, the leper (who had an unclean and perhaps disfiguring skin disorder) approached Jesus begging, "If you will, you can make me clean." Jesus had pity on him, and reached out to touch him.

The unclean spirit was rebuked with authority; the leper was shown pity. The unclean spirit knew Jesus as the one with authority, "the Holy One of God," but the leper knew him as the one with mercy who "can make [him] clean." Jesus does have all authority and is full of mercy toward us.

Questions to Consider:

1. In Mark 1:27, the people are astounded that even the unclean spirit obeys Jesus. What does this interaction with the demon tell you about the authority and identity of Jesus?
2. How does Jesus interact and engage with the needy, oppressed, sick, and poor?
3. Over the next 24 hours, take note of how you think about or interact with God. Do you think primarily of his authority or also of his mercy?

Pray:

Write your own personalized version of *The Leper's Prayer*:
 "Jesus, if you will, you can make me clean."

[illegible]

Week 1, Day 5

(Week of Feb. 6th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

As you finish your friend's life-story, would you recount a time when they were caught up in a scandal? Or was there a time your friend said or did something that changed how people saw or thought about them?

Read: Mark 2:1-12

"Son, your sins are forgiven." What's wrong with this statement?

As the scribes sat, indignant that Jesus would presume to have equal authority with God to forgive sins, Jesus asked them, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk?'" In that setting, both statements had the potential for scandal.

If Jesus tells the paralytic to get up and walk in front of the scribes and everyone else, and the paralytic is unable to get up and walk home, everything Jesus has said and done up to now will be meaningless. His reputation will be destroyed, and the gospel he teaches will be discredited.

If Jesus tells the paralytic, or anyone else, their sins are forgiven, he makes himself equal with God, which in that time and place, risks being stoned to death for blasphemy (Leviticus 24:16).

Even though he provides a sign (healing the paralytic) to show them that "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins," and even though everyone who saw it is "amazed and [glorifies] God," it will be insufficient to convince the scribes that Jesus is innocent of blasphemy. Forgiving sins will cost Jesus his life. But he will not recant or admit that he has committed any crime against God. Unwilling to deny or relinquish his prerogative to heal and forgive, Jesus sets himself at odds with the scribes.

This is the beginning of the scandal of Jesus Christ.

Questions to Consider:

1. Have you ever quit following a person, ended a relationship, or quit buying a corporation's products because they were involved in a scandal? How do you respond when you hear of or witness a scandal?
2. The paralytic wanted to be healed, but more deeply he needed forgiveness. What are the pressing needs in your life?
3. Consider whether Jesus has the right to forgive sins. Have you received his forgiveness?

2. The paralytic wanted to be healed, but more deeply he needed forgiveness. What are the pressing needs in your life?

3. Consider whether Jesus has the right to forgive sins. Have you received his forgiveness?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask Jesus for assurance that your sins are forgiven.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Week 2, Day 1

(Week of Feb. 13th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

What is the purpose of Old Testament Law? Who has the authority to say how the Law is to be understood and lived out?

Read: Mark 2:13 - 3:6

When the scribes, Pharisees, and their disciples compared the actions of Jesus and his disciples to their own standards for righteousness, they could not help but call attention to Jesus' lack of conformity to their understanding of the Law. But the problem wasn't with Jesus and his disciples, it was with the Pharisee's and scribe's interpretation and application of the Law.

Jesus often refers to himself as "the Son of Man." This is a reference to the figure in the vision of Daniel 7 who rules alongside "the Ancient of Days" (God) and has been given an eternal kingdom and all authority. So, as the Son of Man, Jesus is the Lord of the Law. He interpreted the Law in light of the command written in Deuteronomy, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." It is a commandment that was very familiar to the Pharisees. They recited it twice daily. They had it written on the doorposts of their homes. Yet the Pharisees interpreted the Law, not in light of this "Great Commandment," but always with an eye to restriction, boundaries, and distancing God's people from "sinners."

Legalism produces ever more exacting rules about behavior, and yet misses the heart of the Law. It cannot tolerate mercy or grace. Ironically, it ignores justice and dumbly tramples common sense. In all of their rule keeping and enforcement, these Pharisees were blind to the mercies of God. They viewed everyone in the light of their own self-approving righteousness, a murky light in which even the Son of God appeared criminal.

Questions to Consider:

1. Read Mark 3:1-6 again. What are the effects of legalism?
2. What did Jesus teach by healing on the Sabbath?

Pray:

Write a prayer asking Jesus to teach you the difference between being legalistic and being righteous.

[illegible]

Week 2, Day 2

(Week of Feb. 13th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Have you ever seen someone behave in a bizarre or inexplicable way?

Read: Mark 3:7-21

When word got out that there was a man who was making lepers clean, causing the lame to walk, and restoring withered hands, every diseased person in the country set out to find Jesus. Once they found him, they followed him relentlessly. The hope generated by his acts of compassion would not allow them to rest. And, like a wartime surgeon, Jesus would not rest or eat until he had satisfied the hope of all who came to him for mercy and relief from their sufferings.

Meanwhile, his own family was saying that Jesus was “out of his mind.” The spectacle Jesus created left him open to insinuations about the source of his power. He extended the love and mercy of God to everyone who had crowded into and surrounded his home; they took it for lunacy. Jesus found himself surrounded by people who were full of faith. They believed that if they could only touch him they would be healed of their diseases and freed from their demons. The intensity of their collective faith grew exponentially as one by one Jesus liberated them. In that moment, they witnessed Isaiah’s words from chapter 35 brought to life:

Say to those who have an anxious heart,
“Be strong; fear not!
Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you.”
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

These people were not strangers to Jesus. These were the people he came into the world to heal, forgive, and save. In fact, as they became his followers, they also became part of the new family of God (Mark 3:35).

Questions to Consider:

1. When was a time in your life when you bonded with others over a shared mission or purpose?
2. What does this passage tell you about Jesus' heart and purpose?
3. How does obedience to Jesus cause a spectacle and scandalize the wider world in our day?

Pray:

Write a prayer below and ask Jesus to make you more profoundly aware of God's presence in your reading of the Gospel, in the lives of your neighbors, and in your own life. Journal about any ways you've sensed God's presence in those areas.

[illegible]

Week 2, Day 3

(Week of Feb. 13th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

What is the most ridiculous accusation you have ever heard?
How was it disproven?

Read: Mark 3:22-27

In an ill-conceived plot to discredit Jesus, the scribes tried to tie his good works to an alliance with Satan (here called Beelzebul, the “prince of demons”). The scribes did not whisper their accusation, saying, “By the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” They spoke loudly and distinctly to the crowd that had gathered around the house, and to the witnesses who could testify that Jesus had healed their diseases and cast out their demons. In effect, the scribes told them they had been duped—Jesus was not sent from God, but Satan, and their praises to God were misdirected. Satan had oppressed and afflicted them and then allowed Jesus to cast off their afflictions and cast out their demons. The scribes believed it was a demonic conspiracy aimed at deceiving the people into following Jesus and forsaking God.

In his parable, Jesus illustrated that far from working with Beelzebul, he had bound him, and was going to set the people free from all that oppressed them. Jesus’ parable served both to rebuke the scribes and to assure the people that the grace they had received from him was not a deception. It was in fact an honest gift, given for the sake of the pure and holy love of God.

Questions to Consider:

1. As you look back at your readings of Jesus (and previous study or experience you may have with Jesus), how would you describe who he is?
2. Has there been anything or anyone that has caused you to question the truth or reality of your experience with Jesus?
3. How do you respond to challenges and doubts about Jesus?

Pray:

Write a prayer asking Jesus to teach you how to respond to doubts about him.

[illegible]

Week 2, Day 4

(Week of Feb. 13th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Is there anything that is unforgivable?

Read: Mark 3:28-30

In their attempt to turn the crowd against Jesus, the scribes wanted to form in the minds of the people a revolting psychological association between Jesus and the satanic and demonic powers.

As they continued to blaspheme him, Jesus called out to the scribes with a promise and a warning. He promised that their sins and blasphemies would be forgiven. He warned, however, that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would render their souls “guilty of an eternal sin.” To blaspheme the Holy Spirit means to firmly reject and form a judgment against Jesus, despite the evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work through him. It is to take on a settled disposition in your heart what the scribes have expressed with their lips.

Questions to Consider:

1. What about Jesus might cause people to “blaspheme” against him in our day?
2. Are you attentive to the Holy Spirit in your life? In what ways do you sense the Holy Spirit working in and around you?

Pray:

Spend a few minutes listening to the Holy Spirit.

[illegible]

Week 2, Day 5

(Week of Feb. 13th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Is there a distinguishing characteristic that unites the members of your family?

Read: Mark 3:31-35

The distinguishing characteristic that unites the family of God, as Jesus says, is doing the will of God. Jesus concisely defined God's will when he told his disciples in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

This distinguishing trait that unites the family of God is, according to St. John, the assurance that "we have passed out of death into life" (1 John 3:14). It serves as both a private and public testimony that everyone who bears this trait does the will of God.

The command to "love one another just as I have loved you" is unique to Jesus. No other religious teacher embodied and taught self-giving love the way Jesus did. Obedience to his command is only possible for his "brother and sister and mother," the family of God who has received forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Questions to Consider:

Refer to Mark 1-3 to answer the following.

1. Which of Jesus' actions model the way we should love one another?
2. Are there any areas or people in your life where you find it hard to love in this way?

Pray:

Think of a hard situation or relationship you are in right now. Write a prayer and ask Jesus to show you how to love like he loves.

[illegible]

Week 3, Day 1

(Week of Feb. 20th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Have you ever been in a large crowd? How do people today draw and keep an audience?

Read: Mark 4:1-12

From the time that the leper made it known that Jesus had cleansed him of his disease (Mark 1:40-45), people began to come. They were motivated by the message that there was a rabbi who had authority over unclean spirits, and who restored the health of everyone who came to him in faith. The crowd was now so numerous and pressing that Jesus had to get into the boat to be able to be heard by all.

To our worldly eyes, it seems like Jesus had “arrived.” And yet his next move is to begin teaching in parables. The parables were certainly interesting, but they were unintelligible to the crowd apart from supernatural help. In fact, in quoting Isaiah 6:9-10, Jesus shows he realizes that his teaching will often be met with unbelief just as Isaiah’s was. The people of Israel in Isaiah’s day could not hear the message of restoration and forgiveness until after the destruction of Jerusalem. Many people in Jesus’ day would have to wait for the judgment on Calvary to “hear” the parables.

Nevertheless, there were some who because of their ignorance drew closer to Jesus, asking him to explain the parables. To these, he explained the secret of the kingdom, the spiritual significance of his parables.

Questions to Consider:

1. When you don’t understand something you hear or read, what do you do?
2. Have you ever had the experience like Israel in Isaiah’s day of reaching spiritual clarity through calamity?
3. Since spiritual insight doesn’t come from within us, but is given by God, how should you respond to him?

Pray:

Write a prayer asking God for help understanding and applying his Word.

[illegible]

Week 3, Day 2

(Week of Feb. 20th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Why is it that some people respond and take to heart wisdom or knowledge, and yet others reject it?

Read: Mark 4:13-20

Jesus uses *The Parable of the Sower* to illustrate both how the gospel is preached and how it is heard. As the sower's seed fell upon ground ill-suited to supporting a healthy crop, so Christ's Word—God's Word—fell upon the ears of people whose hearts were ill-suited for growing the fruit of the gospel.

In the ancient world, the images of the sower, seed, and soil were commonly used to describe a teacher's relationship to his students. Culturally, it was assumed that the determining factor for whether the teacher's message would bear fruit was the student's aptitude and ability. This is what makes Jesus' parable confounding. There are many reasons for infertile soil, and they can't be boiled down to the wit or intelligence of the student. Rather Satan, suffering, and worldly desire, are what make soil infertile.

Yet, there is soil that welcomes the Word and bears fruit, and so Jesus continued to preach. In time, *The Parable of the Sower* would illustrate the work of the disciples as they broadcast the gospel and testified to its truth to all people in every nation.

Questions to Consider:

1. In today's world, where do you see examples of the four soils Jesus describes in v. 13-20?
2. Which soil do you think best defines you right now? Prayerfully consider where there may be spiritual warfare, lack of faith in suffering or persecution, or obsession with worldly concerns that is choking out the Word of God in your life.

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask God to help you receive and bear fruit in keeping with God's Word.

[illegible]

Week 3, Day 3

(Week of Feb. 20th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Have you ever taken something for granted and ended up losing it?

Read: Mark 4:21-25

Jesus compared the Word (the gospel) to a lamp that cannot serve its purpose by being hidden away. He desires that through his parables many will come to know about his kingdom. He tells the disciples that “nothing is hidden except to be made manifest.” Even though the gospel may be contained in parables, or other figurative language, it is meant to be made plainly understood by people (as they are willing to hear and accept it). The difference is not in whether someone hears, but in how they hear.

Jesus soberly advises to “pay attention to what you hear.” This reminds us that we risk losing what truth we have heard if we fail to pay attention. Actively guard the gospel that abides within you; actively keep it free from the thorns of worldly care, the deceit of riches, and the desire to satisfy the body’s appetite for sin, which as Jesus explained in *The Parable of the Sower*, chokes out the Word.

On the other hand, the one who “leans in” to understand and apply the parables of Jesus will be rewarded. They will see the spiritual reality of the kingdom, and come to know and love Jesus more deeply.

Questions to Consider:

1. In your life, who is someone you know who shares God’s love and light with others so it is clear for people to see?
2. What keeps you from sharing the light of God’s truth with others?
3. What are ways you could “actively guard the gospel that abides in you”?

Pray:

Jesus calls us to “pay attention to what you hear.” Write a prayer to God asking him what he wants you to pay attention to in your life right now.

[illegible]

Week 3, Day 4

(Week of Feb. 20th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Do you ever feel weighed down by thinking the most important things in life ultimately depend only on you?

Read: Mark 4:26-29

In his first letter to the Corinthian Church, Paul, though not expressing it as his intention, provided the interpretation of *The Parable of the Growing Seed* by writing,

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

The man in *The Parable of the Growing Seed*, as Paul writes, is a "fellow worker" with God, and yet it is God who gives the growth. Disciples are called to cooperate with God in the work of expanding his kingdom through the preaching of the same gospel that Jesus preached, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand repent and believe in the gospel."

Yet, as Jesus says in the parable, "the seed sprouts and grows," but the man does not know how it is done. The seed of the gospel is planted and watered by God's workmates; we do our work, we do not know how God does his. Thankfully, the power of the kingdom of God is not found in anything we bring to the table, but in God himself. It is our job to be faithful, his to be fruitful.

Questions to Consider:

1. Are you naturally more of a planter (someone who shares your faith with people who aren't Christians) or a waterer (someone who helps new Christians grow)?
2. Who is someone you believe God has placed in your life to share his gospel with?

Pray:

Write a prayer below for the person God has placed in your life to share him with.

[illegible]

Week 3, Day 5

(Week of Feb. 20th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

How do you envision the kingdom of God?

Read: Mark 4:30-34

Jesus began *The Parable of the Mustard Seed* with a question, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God?” He decided that the kingdom of God is best compared to what he called “the smallest of seeds on earth,” that once it is “sown it grows up” to become the largest plant in the garden. His point is not to assert that the mustard seed is absolutely the smallest seed, but to point out the amazing growth that comes from a tiny seed. Like a mustard seed which in just a season grows into a plant over 10ft tall, the kingdom of God is dynamic. It is sown; it grows seemingly out of nothing and it becomes a place where we can make our home in the kingdom of God. Where the kingdom is sown, it is a vibrant and life giving; capable of supporting and protecting all who seek shelter in its shade. David sang, “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety” (Psalm 4:8).

And Paul wrote to the Roman Church that:

... the kingdom of God is ... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit ... So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. (Romans 14:17,19)

The branches of the kingdom of God are ever growing and will continue to grow until the whole population of the earth resides faithfully, joyfully, and above all, charitably in the protection of its shade.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways did Christianity start with small beginnings? What is its reach today?
2. What are some blessings of the kingdom that we've received by faith? How is the kingdom being made known in the world through Christians?

3. Have you noticed growth of the kingdom in your own heart, relationships, and family?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask God to shelter and protect you from challenges you face this week.

[illegible]

Week 4, Day 1

(Week of Feb. 27th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Mark 4:39, “Then he arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace be still’.”

Read: Mark 4:35-41

These few verses are packed with so much meaning. Mark has included this account in his Gospel so that we can know, without a doubt, that Jesus rules over all nature. For his Jewish audience, this account will remind his hearers about the story in Jonah 1, as well as the account in Exodus 14, when God opened the Red Sea and his people crossed over on dry land to freedom and salvation.

For the ancient Jews, the sea represented and was symbolic of the dark power of evil, threatening to destroy God’s good creation. Just as God exercised power over the sea in the Old Testament, so we see that Jesus has complete control of the sea and everything in it. This miracle which provokes the question, “Who is this that the wind and sea obey him?” is actually the answer—he is the Son of God.

We can be assured the Lord calms the turbulent seas in our lives today and stays beside us in the boat.

Questions to Consider:

1. What makes you fearful?
2. How do you handle your fears and anxieties?
3. What in this account of Jesus calming the sea speaks to your heart?

Pray:

Write a prayer asking God to show you his power and to give you faith in his sovereign care.

[illegible]

Week 4, Day 2

(Week of Feb. 27th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations."

Read: Mark 5:1-20

In today's reading, Jesus recognized the unclean spirit in the man immediately and ordered the unclean spirit to come out of him. The unclean spirit or Legion, for there were many spirits in the man, knew exactly who Jesus was. They bowed before the Son of God.

Legion begged Jesus not to send them into the country. Instead Jesus sent them into a herd of swine feeding near the mountain, and the herd ran violently into the Sea of Galilee and drowned. Though pigs were unclean, in the time of Christ, Israel was not completely inhabited by Jewish people. The area of Decapolis, where this miracle took place, was populated by many non-Jewish people, or Gentiles.

Now the man is clean, healed, and in his right mind. The man is so grateful to Jesus! He begs the Lord to allow him to follow him. The Lord does not allow him to do this, but tells the man to stay at home and tell his friends what the Lord has done for him.

Mark wishes for his Jewish readers to see that Jesus has control and power over the demons and unclean spirits. Through the miracles he reports, Mark is proving to his readers that Jesus is the Messiah.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you find this account disturbing?
2. Can Jesus heal us physically, spiritually, and emotionally today?
3. What would it mean in your life to stay where you are and tell others what Jesus has done for you?

Pray:

Write a prayer asking the Lord to give you the same zeal for following him, and for telling others about him, as the man in the story.

[illegible]

Week 4, Day 3

(Week of Feb. 27th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Psalm 37:7, “Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him.”

Read: Mark 5:21-34

Jesus leaves the region of Decapolis and crosses the Sea of Galilee to the small town of Capernaum, located on the shore with only a few hundred inhabitants. He is greeted by a large crowd, probably people from Capernaum, as well as the surrounding countryside.

In this chapter, Mark records two miracles. Both miracles recorded in Mark 5:21-43, show Jesus’ power over sickness and death. Mark is showing his readers, without a doubt, that Jesus is the Messiah sent from God. In both miracles, we see fear and faith. Let’s look at the woman with the issue of blood.

The woman is all alone, weak from her affliction, and cut off socially from her community. She is rejected and frustrated with nowhere to turn. Her status as a woman makes her a second-class citizen in the Jewish society of that day. More importantly, she is ritually unclean because of her issue of blood. She would be avoided by all of those around her. She must be almost without hope. However, she has heard about this Rabbi Jesus, and she makes her way to Capernaum to try and be healed. She secretly reaches for the hem of Jesus’ garment. Immediately she is healed! Jesus senses power going out of him and asks who touched him. The woman is fearful, she has been found out. She would like to slink away quietly through the crowd. She must confess that she touched the Lord. Jesus treats her kindly and with compassion. Her life is forever changed by Jesus’ power over sickness.

Questions to Consider:

1. Have you ever felt shunned or treated as an outsider for an extended period of time? What effect did this have on you?

2. What might have happened to the woman if Jesus hadn't confronted her about touching his hem?

3. Where do you need healing and compassion?

Pray:

Write a prayer asking the Lord to fill your life with his Life.

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, leaving small margins at the top and bottom. There are no vertical margin lines, text, or other markings on the page.

Week 4, Day 4

(Week of Feb. 27th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Psalm 62:5, “My soul waits silently for God alone. For my expectation is from him.”

Read: Mark 5:35-43

For today’s reading, it is helpful to put ourselves in Jairus’ place for a moment and try to imagine his personal crisis. His precious little girl is dying.

In verse 5:21-24, Jairus has already come to Jesus, begging for his help. Jairus is a well-respected and probably wealthy member of the Capernaum community. He is, after all, the ruler of the synagogue there. In ordinary circumstances, he might have kept his distance from Jesus. Word was getting around about this strange rabbi. Jairus represented the establishment and the status quo. Jesus was most definitely a threat to that.

However, Jairus is having a personal crisis, so he humbles himself and begs Jesus to come and heal his child. Imagine Jairus’ state of mind and his anxiety. Precious time is being wasted as his daughter dies. I can almost imagine Jesus’ look at Jairus when word is received that the girl is dead. “Do not be afraid; only believe,” Jesus says.

Jesus enters the house with only three of his followers and the little girl’s parents. He assures them that the child is not dead, but only sleeping. Then, taking the little girl’s hand, he says to her, “Little girl, get up.” At the power of his word, she arose and walked. Then Jesus warns that no one should know it.

Mark has shown us what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah and Son of God: Jesus has power over nature, power over demons and demonic spirits, power over sickness, and even power over death.

Questions to Consider:

1. In this account, Jesus directed those present to tell no one. This is not the first time this has happened in Mark. Reflect on this.

2. How have you reacted to a personal crisis in your life? Do you immediately go to Jesus?

Pray:

Write a prayer asking for faith to believe the power of God's Word.

[illegible]

Week 4, Day 5

(Week of Feb. 27th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Psalm 27:14, “Wait on the Lord; Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart.”

Read: Mark 6:1-6

It is not uncommon for us to feel that we are treated differently when we return to the town or even the home where we grew up. But it is not because of condescension that Jesus was not accepted in his home town of Nazareth.

The people of Nazareth were astonished at his wisdom, words, and mighty works, but were ultimately offended at him. In fact, in the Gospel of Luke’s version of this event, it says those in the synagogue were filled with wrath and wanted to kill him (Luke 4:28-30). You can almost hear them muttering to each other, “Who does this carpenter’s son think he is?” Rather than asking what this authority and power in Jesus mean, they are preoccupied with wondering where he got it. Jesus, himself, marvels at their unbelief.

It is also likely that Jesus’ own family was offended when he showed up in Nazareth, given that they tried to retrieve him and thought him mad earlier in the Gospel. Mark is showing us the rejection of Jesus by those who knew him well. This rejection foreshadows the total rejection he will later experience in Jerusalem, when he is nailed to the cross. Today’s reading warns us that proximity and familiarity don’t automatically make us disciples. Rather, we must submit to Jesus’ authority and worship him.

Questions to Consider:

1. Reflect on the statement in this reading, “He could do no mighty works there.”
2. We know that James, the brother of Jesus, changed a great deal from being a doubter, to becoming a pillar of the early church. How did this happen?

Pray:

Write a prayer asking the Lord to help you not just be fascinated by Jesus, but submit to his Lordship in your life and help you to truly worship him.

[illegible]

Week 5, Day 1

(Week of March 6th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Have you ever been sent on a special assignment? What parameters, preparation, and credentials were you given?

Read: Mark 6:7-13

The Twelve were responsible for testifying to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ from “the beginning.” Here we see them deputized by Jesus to preach the gospel and have authority over unclean spirits. The Lord was preparing them to be his Apostles who would be firsthand witnesses, and take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Some are called to the type of groundbreaking gospel work the Twelve take on here, but every Christian has a role to play in firmly establishing, building up, and maintaining a strong and vibrant church. We are all called to make disciples. Often discipleship takes place in ordinary ways, including in our own homes and neighborhoods, with our own family, neighbors, and friends. There are many ways we can be intentional about discipling our children, sharing our faith with others in our circles of influence, and living our lives in a way that displays the good news of the kingdom of God.

Whatever we do, we are to do it with the same humility and dependence on God that Jesus called for when he sent them out with nothing but the barest of necessities.

Questions to Consider:

1. Are there any of the instructions that Jesus gave the Twelve that you believe apply to you?
2. Consider the people you have read about in Mark. Do you have anything in common with one or more of them? What is it?
3. Over the next 24 hours consider where you live. What opportunities are right around you to demonstrate and declare the gospel?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask Jesus to prepare you for your assignment as a citizen and ambassador of his kingdom.

[illegible]

Week 5, Day 2

(Week of March 6th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Do you know someone you could describe as righteous or holy? Do they arouse anxiety in you or others?

Read: Mark 6:14-29

The Herod family's relations and politics were complicated enough without John the Baptist condemning their marriage as a violation of Jewish Law. The motive behind the marriage, all romance aside, was to increase the validity of their claim as rightful heirs to the throne of Judea, something they could not accomplish without leaving their spouses. Herodias could see their conspiracy unraveling, but apart from verbally harassing him, she was powerless to prevent Herod from falling under John's influence.

John was relentless and unapologetic in ordering everyone, including the king, to repent from sin and be baptized. He did not single out Herod and Herodias because of their sin, he included them. Their family name, political position, and power did not exempt them from the Lord's command to Israel to repent of their sins. If it appeared as if John was picking on them, it was only because they chose to continue in their sin and refused to be included in John's call to "prepare the way of the Lord."

Although "he heard [John] gladly," and regarded him as "a righteous and holy man," Herod did not receive the gospel. Herod respected John, and he may have even liked him and what he had to say, but liking the preacher and his sermons falls far short of repenting from sin.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you know anyone who should be exempt from repenting of their sins? If so, why?
2. How does the message of God's kingdom conflict with the kingdoms of the world?

Pray:

Herod's barrier to enter the kingdom was his own desire for power. Ask God to show you ways in which your desires might form a barrier to receiving the fullness of the kingdom.

[illegible]

Week 5, Day 3

(Week of March 6th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Have you ever been told, “Do it yourself”? What was the first emotion you felt?

Read: Mark 6:30-44

Early that day, Jesus and the disciples traveled by boat to an out of the way place where they could talk and rest without being disturbed. Somewhere along their way they are seen and recognized. Thousands of people find out where they’ve been spotted and run out from their towns to try to meet them when they come ashore.

When Jesus reaches shore, he sees them waiting there, looking like a giant herd of bewildered sheep who have never known the satisfaction and comfort of having a good and attentive shepherd. Seeing this, he is moved to compassion and begins to teach them.

Later that day, Jesus is still teaching. The disciples notice the time and consider that everyone must be hungry and that it’s too far to walk for food. They approach Jesus and bring this to his attention, but when he calls them to feed the crowds, the disciples can only see the situation from their human perspective.

Jesus performs a miracle, fulfilling the image of the shepherd of the Twenty-third Psalm. He tells the people to sit down on the green grass (making them to lie down in green pastures). He blesses and breaks the loaves (preparing a table for them). And finally, these neglected and abandoned sheep lie about on the grass, satisfied and comforted by a good and attentive shepherd.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you think that Mark 6:34-42 and Psalm 23 are describing the same person? Why? Why not?
2. Does this comparison reveal something about Jesus’ character you hadn’t noticed before?

3. When Jesus told the disciples, “You give them something to eat,” how was this a way of shepherding his leaders?

Pray:

Write a prayer to Jesus asking him to provide for your needs as the Good Shepherd, the One who provides for his flock. Ask him if there are any ways he wants to lead you out of your comfort zone.

[illegible]

Week 5, Day 4

(Week of March 6th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

When was a time you tried to rest between interruptions?
Were you able to relax?

Read: Mark 6:45-47

Jesus was tired. He sent everyone away—the disciples, the crowds, everyone. Then he sought an out-of-the-way place where he could rest (undisturbed). He was already in a desolate place, far out of town. The crowds had dispersed, but nothing would prevent them from returning. Jesus inspired persistence. Everyone knew that if they asked to be made well, Jesus would not refuse. His compassion was immense; no one had even come close to testing its limits. All they had to do was find him.

The mountain offered quiet solitude where a weary Christ could find rest in the company of his Father. Jesus did not choose to pray on the mountain because it was sacred; he chose the mountain because it was available. Before he could pray, Jesus had to intentionally make space where he could be still.

In prayer, we exchange weariness and restlessness for restfulness and strength in the Lord. When we pray, sometimes we speak. Other times we read Scripture. And sometimes we listen. Regardless of our mode of prayer, we need sufficient time to complete the exchange. Then, we can return to the work the Lord has given us to do with renewed vitality and keen awareness that his grace and mercy are with us because of the (gospel) truth within us.

Questions to Consider:

1. Can you think of a time when you had a deeper time to rest and pray?
2. How often are you able to make the opportunity and find a place to be still?
3. Over the next 24 hours, consider the value of making an opportunity and seeking out a place to pray.

Pray:

Take 5 minutes to just rest in God's presence.

[illegible]

Week 5, Day 5

(Week of March 6th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

What is something that you are certain that you understand?
How did you come to understand it?

Read: Mark 6:48-56

Clarity is often the result and reward of an intentional pursuit of understanding. Sometimes though, clarity comes as a sudden flash of revelation when independent objects and events click together to form a single revelation.

Jesus repeatedly exerted his power. He demonstrated many times over that he is the source of life, health, peace, and freedom. However, his miracles seem to be interpreted by the disciples as independent (unrelated) events that were only significant in the place and hour they occurred. It was never clear to the disciples that day by day, hour by hour, they were watching and listening, working, and walking with the Son of God, the King of God's kingdom. "Their hearts," Mark says, "were hardened," meaning that they were dense and unable to fully comprehend the consequences of living with the Son of God.

Every miracle Jesus performed was a revelation of what would happen if the Creator, the Lord of all, took on flesh and entered his ruined and distorted creation for the purpose of restoring it, and making it new again. Every miracle was a moment through which the kingdom of God was revealed on the earth.

Questions to Consider:

1. If someone were to ask you, "Who is Jesus? How would you respond in two or three sentences?"
2. If someone were to ask you, "What is the gospel?" How would you respond in two or three sentences?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask Jesus to help clear up any misunderstandings you might have about him and his gospel.

[illegible]

Week 6, Day 1

(Week of March 13th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Psalm 62:1, “Truly my soul silently waits for God, from him comes my salvation.”

Read: Mark 7:1-23

In this passage, we turn from healings and miracles to a discussion and a confrontation Jesus has with the Pharisees and the scribes. The Pharisees and the scribes confront Jesus with his disciples’ behavior. They eat with defiled hands.

There are prescriptions for ritual washing found in the Old Testament Law. These washings helped ensure the people of Israel were not defiled by sin, death, or any other pollution which would prevent them from being able to commune with God at the temple. Additional ritual washing rules developed over the centuries and were well known by the Jews of that day. Like many traditions, these additional washings were well intended (to keep the people ritually clean), but went beyond God’s Word and eventually became a source of pride and division. Jesus confronts the Pharisees and scribes with the passage from Isaiah, which deals with the real problem, the heart of man.

He ends this discussion by saying, “Nothing that enters a man from the outside can defile a man, but the things that come out of a man defile him.”

Jesus’ disciples need a more detailed explanation. He speaks to them away from the crowd. Man’s heart is the problem. That is where sin comes from. Jesus has come to make it right, and he is the only one who can cleanse our hearts and heal them. This was a revolutionary teaching then and it still is.

Questions to Consider:

1. Consider the motives of the Pharisees and scribes. What do you think is going on when they confront Jesus?
2. Have you ever made an assumption about someone’s character based on external marks or behaviors?

3. What is Jesus saying to us about our hearts?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to open your eyes to any ways in which you are comfortable with your exterior “righteousness” rather than the deeper issues in your heart.

[illegible]

Week 6, Day 2

(Week of March 13th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Habakkuk 2:20, "But the Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him."

Read: Mark 7:24-37

Today's reading about the Syro-Phoenician woman and the healing of the deaf man offer us much to consider.

Jesus has retreated to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Tyre and Sidon are located on the northern coast of Israel on the Mediterranean Sea. Jesus is seeking rest and retreat. The crowds in Galilee have continued to grow and press around him. It is of interest to note the Syro-Phoenician woman is a Gentile, and this area of Israel was predominantly Gentile at the time of Christ.

The woman is desperate for her daughter's healing, just as Jairus was desperate for his little girl's healing. In her desperation to see Jesus, she breaks all social boundaries. She is a woman, she enters a Jewish home, and she approaches a Jewish rabbi. Her daughter is possessed by a demon, which makes her daughter unclean. But, she begs for her daughter's healing and won't take no for an answer.

Jesus' reply, in some ways, confuses our modern ears. It seems so harsh coming from Jesus. Jesus challenges the woman, stating that he came "first" for the children (the Jewish people). The woman shows her humility and wisdom, and insists that even "the dogs" get the crumbs.

Jesus came as the Messiah of Israel, but as the Messiah of Israel he would also fulfill God's promise to Abraham to "bless all the nations" through Abraham's offspring. Jesus sets her daughter free from the demon as a sign of the kingdom of God for all people.

Questions to Consider:

1. Did the woman behave as a victim when she approached Jesus? How would you have acted in this situation?
2. What stands out to you in Jesus' words to the woman?

3. Jesus came for “both” kinds of people (Jews & Gentiles). How does this relate to social, ethnic, and racial divisions in our culture?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to give you humility and boldness in your relationship with him.

[illegible]

Week 6, Day 3

(Week of March 13th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate Isaiah 40:31, “But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.”

Read: Mark 8:1-21

Mark’s Gospel begins to speed up in Chapter 8 as the action becomes more intense. Jesus begins to head in the direction that will lead to his impending death on the cross. In *Jesus the King*, Tim Keller calls this chapter of Mark, “The Turn.”

We begin with Jesus feeding a multitude with a few loaves of bread and a few fish, but there are some differences with the previous miracle of feeding 5,000 in Mark 6. This multitude of 4,000 has been following Jesus for three days in the wilderness. There are no villages or towns nearby. Jesus has concern and compassion for the people, and this time he initiates the discussion about feeding the crowd. The setting, like the previous stories, seems to emphasize that Jesus’ ministry is for the benefit of those outside of Israel as well.

The disciples are slow to understand, and Jesus questions them about having eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear. You can almost sense the Lord’s frustration with them. This passage can remind us of our own spiritual eyes and ears that may often not see or hear, and our need for the Lord to open them.

Questions to Consider:

1. What differences and similarities do you notice between the feeding of the five thousand in Mark 6:33-44 and the feeding of the four thousand in chapter 8?
2. What can we learn from the way Jesus involves his followers in the feeding of the four thousand?
3. What does it mean to you personally to have eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to give you eyes that see and ears that hear.

[illegible]

Week 6, Day 4

(Week of March 13th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on John 16:33, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Read: Mark 8:22 - 9:1

We now come to the climax of the entire first part of Mark, as Jesus asks, "Who do men say that I am?" Peter, in answering for all the disciples, confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. In their minds, Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah prophesied in Scripture. They believe he will set up his kingdom, defeat the Romans, and drive them out of Israel.

Now Jesus speaks very plainly to his disciples about his mission, where he is going, and that he will be killed. This is not the Messiah his disciples were expecting. Peter rebukes Jesus in an impetuous manner, and Jesus says to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!" Even after following Jesus this long, they are still struggling to let go of their own vision of the kingdom and instead embrace Jesus'.

Now their conflicting visions of the kingdom have been brought into the open. Jesus calls us to him and to true life, but the only way to life is through death. By following him in self-denial, we will gain what is most valuable. Nothing this earth has to offer is worth such a high prize. The way of Jesus the King can only be through the cross, and he asks his disciples to come with him to Jerusalem.

Questions to Consider:

1. Compare the healing of the man who was blind with the spiritual blindness of Jesus' disciples.
2. What does it mean for you to take up your cross and follow Jesus?
3. Where is it the most difficult for you to profess Jesus?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to show you any ways you are tempted to resist self-denial.

[illegible]

Week 6, Day 5

(Week of March 13th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Lamentations 3:25, "The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him."

Read: Mark 9:2-13

The transfiguration of Jesus is such a well-known event in the life of Christ that we may be tempted to read it and move on to the next section. Let us allow this amazing event fill our hearts and souls with awe and wonder. Peter, James, and John accompany Jesus to a high mountain. This is most probably Mt. Hermon in the northern part of Israel. Mt. Hermon is fairly close to Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus and the twelve had just been. It is a huge mountain, definitely not an easy afternoon walk or stroll.

Jesus is transfigured before his disciples, and we have a clear and detailed account of what this looked like. It is as if the veil of the spiritual realm is rolled back, and the disciples are allowed to get a glimpse into heaven. For just a brief moment, we are able to see with human eyes the eternal. Of course it must have been awesome, but also terrifying. Not only was their rabbi transfigured before them, but they also saw Moses and Elijah.

Peter's idea of building three tents is to completely miss the point. Moses and Elijah met with God on the mountain in the Old Testament, but Jesus was not there as an equal to Moses or Elijah. The Father's voice confirmed Jesus is not merely a prophet, but "my beloved Son." Jesus stood transfigured as the very God whom Moses and Elijah had met.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why do you think these three disciples were chosen to accompany Jesus on the mountain?
2. How does who you believe Jesus is determine how you respond to the call to take up your cross?
3. The Father says we must listen to Jesus. What does this say about Jesus' authority?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask God to help you see the glory and authority of Jesus so that you will be empowered to follow him.

[illegible]

Week 7, Day 1

(Week of March 20th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Read: Mark 9:14-29

This reading opens with Jesus' return from the mountain where the transfiguration occurred. Imagine the mountain top experience for Peter, James, and John. As they descend from this time where Jesus was revealed to be Almighty God, they meet chaos. Everyone is running around in great confusion.

This is a reminder that a mountain top experience, or an intimate time with the Lord, is often preparation for ministry and service opportunities God has for us. The disciples who remained below are unable to cast out the mute spirit in a young boy. The boy's father is distraught and begs Jesus to heal his beloved son.

Though he isn't sure Jesus "can" cast the demon out, the father is honest with Jesus saying, "I believe, help my unbelief!" We may find ourselves in this dilemma at times as well. Jesus encourages us to bring our doubts to him, and to trust him to help us even as we struggle to believe.

Questions to Consider:

1. Reflect on the father's statement to Jesus. Have you ever felt like that father? ("Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!")
2. If you are a follower of Jesus, do you think the way becomes easier or more difficult as you continue your walk with him?
3. When you have doubts, where do you take them?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to increase your faith in his power to change your life and the lives of those around you.

[illegible]

Week 7, Day 2

(Week of March 20th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Psalm 37:5, “Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.”

Read: Mark 9:30-50

This reading contains several different teachings of Christ, which are connected by the themes of pride and humility.

As Jesus and his disciples walk to Jerusalem, he speaks of his betrayal. His disciples don’t understand, but they are afraid to ask him about this. Ironically, as Jesus was telling them that he was to fulfill his role as the Son of Man by dying and rising, the disciples were arguing on the same journey about who is greatest among them. To emphasize this point, he brings a little child into their midst. To serve a small, weak, and humble child is to receive Jesus and embody his vision of the kingdom.

Eager to save face, John tells Jesus they have rebuked someone who was casting out demons in Jesus’ name. Again they’ve missed the point. They’ve made it about their own pride and power rather than rejoicing that people are delivered and Jesus is glorified.

In the final section, which most of us find quite shocking, Jesus speaks hyperbolically about removing our eye or hand if they cause us to sin. Jesus wants us to understand how serious sin is—the disciples are clearly consumed with pride while their Master has been telling them of his humility and suffering love. Rather than worrying about what others are doing, they should check their own hearts and be diligent in living out God’s call in their lives.

Questions to Consider:

1. How do you react to Jesus’ teaching about being the least and the greatest?
2. How do you understand Jesus’ teaching about cutting off your arm or blinding your eye?

3. There is strong language in this passage about hell, “Cast into hellfire where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:44,46, and 48). Why is this language so disturbing to us today?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to help you root out pride in your heart, and serve him and others with humility.

[illegible]

Week 7, Day 3

(Week of March 20th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Psalm 73:23, “Nevertheless I am continually with you; you hold me by my right hand.”

Read: Mark 10:1-16

The Pharisees are eager to test Jesus and see where he stands in the religious debates of the day. This time, they want to know Jesus’ teaching on divorce. Jesus tells them that while there are biblical grounds for divorce (Mt. 5:32), God’s intention for marriage is that a man and woman are joined together for life. What God desires is that what he has joined should not be separated.

Because of our sinful nature, we all tend to be hard-hearted and selfish. Rather than allow our hard hearts to rule us and lead us to sin, the next scene tells us we must become like a child. If we want to become his disciples, our mindset and hearts must become like a child’s heart—dependent on Jesus, eager to be in his presence and do his will.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does Jesus’ teaching about divorce challenge our assumptions about the meaning of marriage?
2. What are the implications for the church body if “the kingdom of God belongs to” children?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to show you any situation in which you are more hard-hearted or self-centered rather than dependent and eager to do his will.

[illegible]

Week 7, Day 4

(Week of March 20th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Job 42:2, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."

Read: Mark 10:17-31

Today's reading is one which should cause us to look inside our own hearts. In the West, we have many possessions, and we enjoy them. We love our homes and may even have a second home. We have cars and enjoy shopping. We have the luxury of showing our love for others giving gifts to family and friends. We have access to excellent medical care. The average American is wealthier than 90% of the people who have ever lived on this earth, probably richer than the man with whom Jesus spoke.

The man in today's reading was a good man. Jesus saw directly into his heart and loved him. Jesus must have already known what the good man's answer would be. Was he able to leave his many possessions, follow Jesus, and have great treasures in heaven? He was not. This is a sad conclusion to the good man's meeting with Jesus. As we reflect on this passage, we must be honest about our relationship to wealth, security, and possessions.

Questions to Consider:

1. What do you think Jesus means when he says, "It is hard for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God?"
2. How does this passage about the good man's meeting with Jesus affect you?
3. What do the words of Jesus, "many who are first will be last, and the last first" mean?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to show you where you may be storing up treasure on earth rather than in heaven.

[illegible]

Week 7, Day 5

(Week of March 20th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Psalm 56:3, "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you."

Read: Mark 10:32-52

Today's reading begins with a continuation of Jesus' walk to Jerusalem. Jesus tells them exactly what is going to happen when they reach Jerusalem, down to very specific details. Yet, James and John ignore what the Lord has to say. They have their own agenda. They are jockeying for the number one and number two positions in his kingdom. James and John had the typical understanding in their day of expecting that Jesus would set up an earthly kingdom in Israel and throw the Romans out of their land. They wanted to be ruling with Jesus.

Naturally, the other disciples are angered by James' and John's request. It should encourage us to know that these twelve men, who spent the last three years with Jesus, are still learning to be his disciples. Again, Jesus uses this opportunity to teach them what his kingdom is like: "Whoever desires to be great must become a servant."

The scene ends with Jesus asking the blind beggar, Bartimaeus, the very same question he asked of James and John, 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus gladly responded to the need of the humble beggar while he admonished the power hungry disciples.

Questions to Consider:

1. Jesus' words in Mark 10:33-34 are prophetic of what will happen in Jerusalem. Why did the disciples treat his words so casually?
2. How is Jesus calling you to be a servant?
3. What do you want Jesus to do for you?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask God to guard you from using Jesus as a means to an end, and instead to help you see yourself as a beggar who humbly depends on his grace.

[illegible]

Week 8, Day 1

(Week of March 27th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Isaiah 26:3, “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you.”

Read: Mark 11:1-26

As we read today’s Scripture, we begin to the walk with the Lord through the final week of his life. After these events, the religious leaders in Jerusalem are intent upon destroying Jesus, “for they feared him, because all the people were astonished at his teaching.”

As Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem amidst cries of “Hosanna!” from the crowds, there is no doubt he was greeted as a king. The Jews present that day were very aware of this. They would be familiar with Zechariah 9:9, “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, O Daughter of Jerusalem! Behold your king is coming to you; he is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

He is not only the king according to the flesh, but the LORD returning to his temple. And yet, Jesus was not met with fanfare and celebration when he arrived at the temple mount. Instead the place was empty, and when he returned in the morning to find the money-changers, he pronounces judgment on the temple.

Jesus cursing the fig tree is interspersed on the journey to and from the temple, which confirms this judgment as a visual lesson and parable of what is to soon come. Just as the fig tree had no fruit and was cursed, Israel and the temple did not have the fruit of righteousness and would be judged.

Jesus’ cleansing of the temple was the final straw. Now, the religious leaders were convinced he must be killed.

Questions to Consider:

1. At this point in the Gospel of Mark, do you think Jesus' disciples understood his mission? Why or why not?
2. Imagine yourself in Jerusalem as part of the crowd when Jesus came riding in on a colt. Describe yourself.
3. Consider Jesus' cleansing of the temple. What do you think would arouse the Lord's anger in churches today?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to help you bear the fruit of the Spirit in your life (Gal 5:22-26).

[illegible]

Week 8, Day 2

(Week of March 27th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Isaiah 30:15, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

Read: Mark 11:27 - 12:12

Now, things really begin to escalate. We are at the temple in Jerusalem and the religious leaders begin to confront Jesus on several issues, attempting to back him into a corner and catch him. Their questions, of course, are sly tricks designed to cause his downfall. What they really want to know is, "Who in the world do you think you are? Where did you get this authority from?" At the beginning of Mark, the crowds were flocking to Jesus because he spoke with authority. Now the religious leaders are challenging him about his authority.

There is a parable immediately after this confrontation between the religious leaders and Jesus. This parable is so clear and transparent in its meaning, no private interpretation is necessary. It is obvious who plays each part, and the religious leaders understood that Jesus told it against them. Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22-23, which foretells that the events of the coming days would mysteriously result in the founding of a new people of God built on him as the Cornerstone.

Questions to Consider:

1. Who do you identify with in this reading? How do you relate to Jesus' authority?
2. In this passage we again see the theme of bearing fruit. Where are you bearing fruit for the Lord?
3. What do you think the passage Jesus quotes (Psalm 118:22-23) means?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to help you submit to his authority and bear fruit for his kingdom.

[illegible]

Week 8, Day 3

(Week of March 27th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Psalm 40:1, "I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me, and heard my cry."

Read: Mark 12:13-44

The religious leaders want to trap Jesus. It was common practice in Jesus' day for leaders and teachers of various Jewish groups to question and challenge one another, but here their hope is to trip up Jesus.

The first test is whether the Jewish people should pay the tax to Caesar. Interestingly, the question was posed by the Pharisees and the Herodians. These two groups would have disagreed about how to answer the question. Jesus slips the trap by rejecting a simple "either/or," and by refusing to make politics ultimate. Instead, Jesus points to the deeper issue. Just as the coin is made in the image of the emperor, each of us is made in the image of God. So, give yourself to God in all that you do.

The second test comes from the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the righteous at the end of history. Jesus proves them wrong by reflecting on how God has revealed himself as the God of the living. A third question comes from a scribe who wants to know which is the most important commandment. The scribe is pleased with Jesus' answer, and Jesus is pleased with his reply in return.

The final cluster of teachings show that the Old Testament itself anticipated the Messiah who was both human and Divine. It is also a warning against using a position of religious authority for personal gain. Finally, in a fitting call back to the opening question, Jesus praises the widow who exhibits faith without trying to gain from it, and who has clearly given herself to God.

In each of these instances, Jesus pushes past their questions to get to the heart of what matters most - who God is and how we relate to him.

Questions to Consider:

1. In which of the tests do you feel resistance to Jesus: being overly focused on or too binary in politics, the authority of Scripture, or expecting faith/obedience to result in temporal blessing?
2. What would be the questions of our times that might be brought to trap Jesus?
3. Is there an area of your life where you find it difficult to submit to Christ's Lordship?

2. What would be the questions of our times that might be brought to trap Jesus?

3. Is there an area of your life where you find it difficult to submit to Christ's Lordship?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to give you deep insight into Scripture and wisdom to face the issues of today.

[illegible]

Week 8, Day 4

(Week of March 27th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Revelation 3:20, "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with me."

Read: Mark 13:1-23

At the beginning of the chapter, Jesus begins a discussion with his disciples as they praise the glory of the temple. For Jews, the temple represented the Presence of God. Jesus' response shocks the disciples, "Not one stone shall be left upon another." They then ask Jesus two questions: "When will these things be?" and "What will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?" Both questions are about the temple. In their minds, the end of the temple meant the end of the world as they knew it. Jesus then begins to give them some of the signs of this impending destruction.

Sincere and honest Christians disagree on the meaning of this chapter. There are different interpretations as to the timing of the catastrophic events that Jesus prophesies in this reading. Many Christians believe that we are in the last days now and that this text proves it. Others understand this passage to refer to horrors preceding the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 A.D.

There are two very clear lessons we can take from Mark 13 that transcend all history and all times. The first lesson is patience and perseverance, and most especially, practicing these values in times of persecution. Christ will come again and he knows his own and he will care for them. The other lesson from this chapter we can take is to be watchful and ready. We do not know when Christ will return. We must live our lives in such a way that we will be ready when he returns.

Questions to Consider:

1. Have you ever been persecuted for your faith?
2. What role does the Holy Spirit play in helping us persevere and be prepared until Christ returns?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to give you bold faith that perseveres through persecution and judgment.

[illegible]

Week 8, Day 5

(Week of March 27th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Psalm 25:4-5, "Show me your ways, O Lord; Teach me your paths, Lead me in your truth and teach me."

Read: Mark 13:24-37

Today's reading continues with the prophecy Jesus began at the beginning of Mark 13. Jesus, himself, calls this time the tribulation.

In verse 24, the focus changes from events that will happen during the tribulation to what will happen after. Jesus describes heaven being shaken. We read of stars falling, the sun being darkened, and the moon not giving its light. "Then, they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory." Jesus is drawing on Daniel 7:13, which foretells "the Son of Man" coming to God to receive everlasting authority, an eternal kingdom at the end of history. Jesus appears to be teaching his disciples about the cataclysmic events that will happen at his second coming and the judgment.

This prophecy is notoriously hard to interpret, but notice again the application Jesus makes: "Be ready." Jesus even says that (according to his human nature) he does not know the time of the end; it has not been given to him to reveal to us. But the application for us fits exactly with what we see throughout the Bible when it speaks of judgment that is to come. We are admonished not to predict when Jesus is coming, but to "stay awake" and "be ready."

Questions to Consider:

1. How does v. 27 give you encouragement in an otherwise bewildering and scary passage?
2. What does it mean to you when Jesus says "stay awake" or "be ready"?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask God to help you be awake and ready for Jesus' return.

[illegible]

Week 9, Day 1

(Week of April 3rd)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Isaiah 41:10, "Fear not, for I am with you: Be not dismayed, for I am your God."

Read: Mark 14:1-11

This week's readings take us up to the cross.

It is interesting to note, more than a quarter of the Gospel of Mark occurs during the last week of Jesus' life. This is true for the other three Gospels as well. This week's readings move quickly through the final days of Jesus' life - from the anointing at Bethany to his betrayal and trial.

Notice in Mark 14:1 the chief priests and scribes are intent on putting Jesus to death. However, they know it must be done in a secret manner due to the crowds of people in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover.

Jesus is staying in Bethany, a suburb of Jerusalem. He may be staying at the home of his friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Scripture tells us he is having dinner at the home of Simon, the leper. A woman anoints Jesus with very precious oil of spikenard. It was valued at a laborer's wages for one year. Obviously her great love for Jesus prompted her to make this huge sacrifice. The woman did not realize the deeper significance of what she was doing, but Jesus reveals that she is anointing his body for burial.

Ironically, this woman's beautiful act of love for Jesus is the final provocation that sends Judas off to the chief priests to betray Jesus.

Questions to Consider:

1. If you were one of the guests at Simon's table, how would you have reacted to the anointing of Jesus?
2. How do we show our love for Jesus today?
3. Why do you think Judas betrayed Jesus?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask God to give you such deep faith and love for Jesus that your life is a precious offering to him.

[illegible]

Week 9, Day 2

(Week of April 3rd)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear."

Read: Mark 14:12-25

Today's reading takes us to the upper room where Jesus celebrates the Passover meal with his disciples. The Passover celebration is the Jewish feast that celebrates the Exodus of God's people from Egypt. This Jewish feast is fulfilled and reshaped as Holy Communion by Jesus.

There are many parallels between the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt and what Jesus will accomplish through his death. At the first Passover, the blood of a slain lamb was to be sprinkled on the doorpost of every house to protect those inside from death. Without the blood of the lamb, the first born in every family (Hebrew or Egyptian) would be slain.

When Jesus leads the Passover meal he departs from the traditional Passover script. This meal is refocused on him as he says, "Take, eat, this is my body," and "This is my blood of the covenant." The day after the Supper, the blood of God's Lamb, Jesus Christ, would be shed on the cross. His death and resurrection were a new Exodus, setting us free from sin and the Devil. His blood was poured out for the forgiveness of sins, covering our guilt and shame. His death established the New Covenant, which allows all people to be reconciled to God by faith.

Now when believers partake of the Lord's Supper, our faith is strengthened, our souls nourished, and we are assured that the many blessings of the gospel are ours through Christ.

Questions to Consider:

1. Reflect on the difference between knowing something that you have only heard of versus being able to touch, taste, and smell it.
2. Jesus said, "I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." What do you think he meant?

2. Jesus said, "I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." What do you think he meant?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to give you a deeper appreciation for the Lord's Supper and how it strengthens our faith.

[illegible]

Week 9, Day 3

(Week of April 3rd)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Romans 12:12, “Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer.”

Read: Mark 14:26-42

In concluding the Passover meal, the disciples and Jesus sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives is outside the city gates of Jerusalem. It is on the top of a small mountain, which overlooks all of Jerusalem.

Knowing the weight of what he is about to do, and that his followers will all desert him, Jesus prays. Jesus knows what he is going to do and he also knows all of his followers will desert him that night. As they enter the Garden of Gethsemane, located at the base of the Mount of Olives, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with him to pray. He says to them, “Stay here and watch.”

It is here where Jesus seems to lose his calm presence. He was greatly distressed and troubled - “sorrowful, even to death.” Jesus knew he was going to die a physically torturous death, but he was “sorrowful, even to death” because he was going to bear the sins of the world. The cup which he was so distressed to “drink” was the cup of God’s wrath in full strength against sin. Yet, he submits his human will to God’s.

While Jesus prayed the same prayer multiple times (v. 39), steadying himself for the hours ahead, the disciples are oblivious to the harrowing events to come, and so they sleep.

Questions to Consider:

1. What does it mean when Jesus says, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”? What does that mean to you personally?
2. What disturbed Jesus so much when he requested that the cup be removed? (cf. Isaiah 51:17, 22)

Pray:

Write a prayer and give Jesus thanks for his faithful love and willingness to suffer and die for you.

[illegible]

Week 9, Day 4

(Week of April 3rd)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Psalm 130:5, “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I do hope.”

Read: Mark 14:43-65

It happens. Judas enters the garden with a crowd armed with swords and clubs. He betrays Jesus with a kiss. The well-known phrase “the kiss of death” comes from this scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. The guards and soldiers lay hands on Jesus and take him.

In Mark 14:50, we read, “Then they all forsook him and fled.” Even though these men were with Jesus for three years and loved him as their teacher and rabbi, they fled and left him. They feared for their own lives. One man even fled naked when one of the soldiers grabbed his linen covering.

Then Jesus is led away to the high priest, the chief priests, the elders and scribes. Elsewhere called “the Sanhedrin,” this group was like the Jewish Supreme Court. It had seventy members. They did not have the power of execution; that was left to the Romans. So while the Jewish court accused Jesus of blasphemy, it was Jesus’ claim to be king that provoked the Romans to crucify him.

The entire scene is a perversion of justice. The court violates the Law by hearing false and contradictory witnesses. The fact that this was done in secret and in the dark further emphasizes the darkness and corruption of human sin and rebellion, and it leads to the murder of God’s own Son.

When Jesus says he is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of Man whom they will see reigning with God, the council has what they need. He is condemned to be deserving of death. Mysteriously, their actions fulfill Jesus’ own prophecies and accomplish God’s plan of redemption through the death of his Son.

Questions to Consider:

1. What do you think you would have done in the Garden of Gethsemane, when the guards and soldiers arrived to arrest Jesus?
2. If you are a follower of Jesus, when do you find it most difficult to say you are his follower?
3. How does the injustice and darkness of these events make you think differently about your own sin?

2. If you are a follower of Jesus, when do you find it most difficult to say you are his follower?

3. How does the injustice and darkness of these events make you think differently about your own sin?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to help you turn from the darkness in your own heart and receive his grace.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

Week 9, Day 5

(Week of April 3rd)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Isaiah 41:13, "For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'"

Read: Mark 14:66-72

The reading for today is very brief, but it ties together a few threads concerning the Apostle Peter.

Jesus foretold Peter's denial of him (v. 31). Peter's reply and his falling asleep in the Garden seems to indicate a certain self-confidence and lack of spiritual understanding. He does have the courage to follow Jesus and his captors into the courtyard of the high priest. But, given multiple opportunities to prove his allegiance, he folds. Three times Peter rejected Jesus. As he heard the rooster crow the second time, he "broke down and wept."

Peter's "trial" is the inverse of Jesus' own. Jesus is under tremendous pressure and remains resolute, even saying the very thing that leads to his conviction. Meanwhile, Peter is only questioned by a servant girl. He lies and even pronounces curses so that he can avoid association with Jesus. The pride he exhibited in the upper room has turned to utter shame.

Questions to Consider:

1. Can you relate to Peter's denial of Jesus?
2. What does this teach you about the danger of pride?
3. The disciples closest to Jesus abandoned him. What does this teach us about our need for the Holy Spirit's work in our lives?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask the Lord to humble you and give you quiet confidence in him.

[illegible]

Week 10, Day 1

(Week of April 10th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on 1 Peter 5:7, “Cast all your anxiety upon him, because he cares for you.”

Read: Mark 15:1-15

Very early in the morning, the chief priests with the elders, scribes, and the whole council, lead and deliver Jesus to Pilate. They have to go to Pilate because he is the only person who has the power to execute Jesus. The Romans allowed the Jews to handle many of their own judicial issues, but not capital crimes.

Since Caesar was considered to be the only king, any person in the Roman Empire who proclaimed himself as king was liable to be executed. So, when Jesus acknowledges the question and answers Pilate that he is the King, his fate is sealed. Even though Pilate doesn't appear to think Jesus is a threat, and understands it is out of envy that the religious leaders have brought Jesus to him, Jesus is now “on record” as a political rival to the emperor.

Since it was Pilate's custom to release one prisoner during the Passover feast, he attempts to release Jesus. Though Pilate seems to know Jesus is innocent, he wants to satisfy the crowd—perhaps to prevent any unrest that could land him in hot water with Rome. So he releases Barabbas instead. He has Jesus scourged (beaten with a whip with pieces of stone, metal, or bone attached to the “tails”) and delivers him to be crucified.

Here we have a vivid depiction of the gospel. Jesus is condemned to die instead of the convicted rebel, Barabbas. At the cross, Jesus is crucified for our sin. He died in our place so that we can be forgiven and set free from sin and judgment.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why do you think Jesus answered Pilate's question about who he was, but he remained silent when the Jewish leaders accused him?

2. Do you think the crowd calling for Barabbas' release and for Jesus' crucifixion is the same crowd who cried "Hosanna!" in Mark 11? Why or why not?

3. Read Isaiah 53. How do you see Jesus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah?

Pray:

Write a prayer and give God thanks that Jesus died in your place.

[illegible]

Week 10, Day 2

(Week of April 10th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Isaiah 53:5, “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; and by his stripes we are healed.”

Read: Mark 15:16-24

Now, we observe and endure the great humiliation and abuse of Jesus Christ. Crucifixion was the common form of execution by the Romans, especially for political prisoners. Everyone in Israel was well aware of this. The people in Jerusalem had seen hundreds of people crucified by the Romans. The crosses were lined up on roads in Israel with the victims hanging on them as an example. The cross was a torturous execution; it often took several days for the person being crucified to die, and it served as a powerful reminder of the inevitable outcome of anyone who rebelled against Rome.

Because crucifixion was designed to humiliate, victims for crucifixion were hung on the cross completely naked. The soldiers abuse and mock Jesus for the same reason - to humiliate him. Yet again, the darkness of sin and wickedness of humans is mysteriously fulfilling the purpose of God. As they clothe him in purple, crown him with thorns, and crucify him under the charge “King of the Jews,” they are, in fact, accomplishing his victory and crowning him Lord of all.

Questions to Consider:

1. Consider Simon, a Cyrenian. How do you think carrying the cross of Jesus affected his life?
2. Reflect on Jesus rejecting the cup of sour wine and his willingness to drink the cup of God’s wrath.
3. How does the humiliation, mockery, and abuse Jesus faced change how you think about the cross?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask God to show you how to live in the kingdom of the Crucified King.

[illegible]

Week 10, Day 3

(Week of April 10th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Isaiah 53:3, "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

Read: Mark 15:25-39

And so they crucified Jesus at 9:00 AM in the morning. Two revolutionaries were crucified on either side of Jesus. The inscription Pilate wrote was, "The King of the Jews." The religious leaders protested greatly and told Pilate to write, "He said he was King of the Jews." Pilate said, "What is written is written," and so the truth was proclaimed down through the centuries - Jesus is King.

As the crowds continued to mock Jesus, darkness came over the land from Noon to 3:00 PM in the afternoon, symbolizing the judgment of God being poured out on Jesus (Amos 8:8-10). The massive temple veil, a curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple, which a priest entered once a year to make atonement, was torn from top to bottom. This symbolized that through Jesus' sacrifice all who have faith have access to God.

Finally, after so many years of almost no one recognizing who Jesus is or what he came to do, the Roman centurion (of all people) confesses, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" This confession forms a frame around the book of Mark (which began by calling Jesus the Son of God), and emphatically tells us Jesus is God's Son. The cross is the place we see that most clearly.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the significance of "The King of the Jews" inscription Pilate made for Jesus' crucifixion?
2. Reflect on the meaning of each of the signs that accompanied the crucifixion.
3. Read Psalm 22 and take note of the ways it is fulfilled in the crucifixion.

Pray:

Write a prayer and give God thanks for the gift of his Son and the access you now have to the Father.

[illegible]

Week 10, Day 4

(Week of April 10th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Isaiah 53:12, “He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Read: Mark 15:40 - 16:8

While the twelve disciples abandoned him, the women were there and stayed with Jesus through the entire ordeal. They were with Jesus at the cross. We know the mother of Jesus, Mary, was at the cross from John 19:25. Mary Magdalene was there. In addition, the names of some other women are mentioned.

Joseph of Arimathea moves quickly to request the body of Jesus. This act was incredibly courageous. In doing this, Joseph puts his own life at risk and most certainly his reputation among the influential Jews. Joseph was allowed to take the body of Jesus. He wrapped Jesus’ body in a linen cloth as the women observed.

The Sabbath is over and the Marys return to the tomb very early on the first day of the week to anoint the body with spices. The women are shocked and amazed at what they didn’t find - Jesus is risen! The resurrection of Jesus validated his words that he had given his life as a ransom for many, and that he did bring in the kingdom of God.

The women are told to return to Galilee and tell the disciples and Peter. Now is no longer the time for silence, but for telling the world about what God has graciously done in Jesus Christ. The inclusion of Peter alone by name shows just how gracious God is—even the one who abandoned and denied him is welcomed back and anointed for the mission.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why do you think the women stayed near Jesus during his crucifixion and did not flee?
2. Consider Joseph of Arimathea. What could have happened to him when he went to Pilate to ask for Jesus’ body? How do you think this event affected his life?

3. Who is God calling you to tell that Jesus is risen?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask God to help you know the power of the resurrected Christ so you can join in his mission.

[illegible]

Week 10, Day 5

(Week of April 10th)

Center on Jesus:

Begin in silence and stillness for 2 minutes.

Opening Reflection:

Meditate on Mark 16:6, “He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.”

Read: Mark 15:40 - 16:8

Verses 9-20 are not found in the earliest manuscripts, and are likely not original to the Gospel of Mark. However, they reflect an early tradition about the events after the resurrection, and they are an attempt to provide a resolution since Mark leaves us in suspense at 16:8.

These verses essentially agree with the endings of the other Gospels about the post-resurrection appearances and events. Jesus appears to his disciples, sends them on mission, ascends to heaven, and works mightily through their ministry by the Holy Spirit. While the climactic events of the gospel were Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Ascension and Pentecost are like his coronation and his beginning to rule. In the Ascension, he takes up the throne in heaven; on Pentecost he poured out his Spirit, spreading his kingdom throughout “all creation.”

All disciples of Jesus are citizens of the kingdom and laborers for the kingdom, doing the work of making disciples and telling the world that Jesus is Lord. None of us would know about Jesus if it weren’t for the earliest generations, and many after them, taking serious the call to make disciples of all nations.

Let us humbly depend on the Holy Spirit as we join Jesus in his work!

Questions to Consider:

1. Why do you think Jesus’ followers did not believe he was alive?
2. What does it mean to you, “to preach the gospel to all creation”?
3. What will you do with the Gospel of Mark?

Pray:

Write a prayer and ask God to show you who he has called you to disciple, and to equip you by his Spirit for the work.

[illegible]

Epilogue

In the introduction to this study, we posed several questions that have captivated people for generations: Who is Jesus? What did he do? Why does any of that matter? We may still have many questions, but it should be clear what Mark most wants us to know and believe: Jesus is the Son of God.

Mark told us up front that who he knows Jesus to be (1:1), but as he tells the story of Jesus he does so mostly without connecting every dot for us. The stories and events in his Gospel are compelling by themselves. At the climactic moment of the death of Jesus, the Roman soldier confesses what we are eager now to say: “Truly this man was the Son of God” (15:39). It is as the very Son of God on the cross that he achieves forgiveness of sins and the defeat of Satan.

If you have come to this realization, Jesus calls you to trust in him for your salvation and to take up your cross and follow him: to serve others sacrificially, to give generously, pray earnestly, and live with integrity. Things can’t just go back to normal. The world and our own hearts will tell us to seek safety, comfort, even affluence, but Jesus promises that if we lay down our lives for his sake and for the sake of the gospel, he will give us real life.

Let us take hold of the life only the Son of God can give, and give up ourselves for his glory.

