



Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men

MARK 1-8

GOOD NEWS: IDENTITY

(8 BIBLE STUDIES)

EXAMINATION APPLICATION
BIBLE STUDIES

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THE SMALL PRINT

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Co

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Your Commitment

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

Your Contribution

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

Your Preparation

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading group discussions, but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials provide you with the passage so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Also, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought, and help you reflect on what the passage meant, both at the time it was written, and also what it means for us now.

I would encourage you to make good use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are, however, only “tools” – they are there to help you, and not to restrict you, or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages, and if the questions or notes don't help you, simply don't use them!

I have also included within these materials an introduction to the book. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

Your Leadership

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

*Steve McClure
Spring 2019*

INTRODUCING THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Mark's gospel is written at pace. The action moves quickly - 'immediately' is a common joining word. Sentences are short. The first half contains Jesus' actions and teachings that reveal, to those with ears to hear, who Jesus is (Yahweh himself come to rescue his people as their anointed King) - while the 2nd half begins to focus much more on what he has come to do (die on a cross and rise again), and therefore what it means to follow him (take up our crosses and die for him that we might share in his life). Tradition has it that Mark wrote his gospel as Peter's memory and teaching about Jesus. That seems to make sense, we get quite a lot of Peter and - in a very humble way - a lot of Peter, and the other disciples not getting what Jesus is talking about. Tradition also has it that the gospel was written in Rome, for mostly Gentile readers at the heart of the empire. If that tradition is right it gives the first chapter a distinct edge. Mark skips over the birth of Jesus and dives right in "*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*". The word gospel throws us slightly - but it simply means "good news". The Roman world at this time proclaimed the "gospel of Caesar". The Roman world brought order and calm to the world, in exchange for total loyalty from its subjects. The problem with early Christians was that they had a higher loyalty, a higher Lord. The gospel is of Jesus the anointed King (Christ), the Son of God. Then comes the key to Mark's gospel. Mark quotes two OT prophets and merges them together (Malachi and Isaiah), with the focus on Isaiah. "*The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord (Yahweh) and make his paths straight*" Mark 1:3 (quoting Isaiah 40:3). Mark is quoting Isaiah, and in Mark's context the voice is that of John the Baptist. But it is most likely (and I think is usually true when you have an OT quote in the NT) that Mark has the Isaiah context in his head - and any of Mark's readers who knew the OT, which could have been quite a few - Jewish Christians, and those who had associated with the synagogue as Gentiles - would have thought of the whole passage at the start of Isaiah 40.

These are the words with which Isaiah tells of Yahweh coming to redeem his people and bring an end to exile. We know from Ezra-Nehemiah and Haggai-Malachi that the end of exile in the Persian era was a massive let down. It is possible that many Jews of Jesus' day were still themselves as in exile. It seems certainly true that Jesus and the first Christians saw Jesus as the one who brings an end to exile. Jesus is Yahweh walking on the earth as a man. He drives out demons. He heals the sick. He cleanses the leper. He forgives sins. He calls a people to himself and sends them out to bless those around. He teaches the crowds, he calms the seas, he drives his enemies under the water. He feeds many in a desolate place. He walks on water and calms the seas again. The blind see, the deaf hear and the lame walk. This is our God. Jesus joins the prophecies about a Messiah, with the prophecies about Yahweh coming and makes clear that Yahweh has come himself to do the job of King over his people. When he is recognised by Peter (at last) we then see the shock that no-one saw coming. Not only is Jesus Yahweh come to his people as their King, he is Yahweh come to earth as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 who comes to suffer and die for his people's sins. The greatest problem Israel face is not that they are paralysed and under Roman control. It is that they are rebels who have failed to follow God's ways. It is a problem they share with the rest of the world. And it is this problem that Jesus has come to deal with. And that is why Mark is always heading for the cross. To a hill outside the city. Where a man broken, bruised, flogged to within an inch of his life stumbles as he carries a splintered wooden cross. He refuses anything that would dull the pain or his senses. And Mark simply 'and they crucified him'. Four words in English that we can skip over. But in the Roman world of Mark's day people knew what that meant. They knew the physical agony devised by masters of torture. And

yet, that is not the focus of Mark's account. Mark shows us the mocking - the taunts - the ironies that it was precisely by not saving himself that Jesus, that God himself, becomes able to save us. He shows us the darkness as God's judgment falls over the land, and in particular on his Son. Remember the OT prophets and the way that the day of Yahweh so often has darkness. Here is that darkness. God himself hangs on a cross, taking on himself the punishment for our sin. There is mystery here. How can the Son be separate from the Father? And yet that mystery holds the reality that the Son willingly takes on that punishment. We can be quite rubbish about illustrations that make it sound like Jesus is an innocent victim picked out to suffer by angry God who needs to die before he can love us.

Always remember God has always loved us. Jesus' death does change his love. The love of the Father and the Son is what drives the cross - it is because God is love that on the cross the Son himself takes the punishment I deserve so that I can go free. Jesus cries out, actually quoting the start of Psalm 22 as he does "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me". Read all of Psalm 22 and see how David's sufferings as an innocent man prefigure Christ's sufferings for us. The words express Jesus' feelings at the time, the sense of utter aloneness. The one who had never sinned and had always endured perfect fellowship with the Father now knowing what guilt and alienation and deserved punishment feels like. The anguish of that forces this cry from his lips.

And yet in this cry are the seeds of hope - the Psalm doesn't end in alienation. It ends in new life. Jesus' cry points Mark's hearers to the resurrection hope contained in the crucified God on the cross.

Then Jesus dies. The temple curtain is torn in two. Maybe so we can go in - or just maybe, because God has come out. Out from the Holy Place and into the world on a mission to transform the whole cosmos into his Holy Place. The way to God is no longer through multiple rituals, but by trusting in his death for us. In receiving his Spirit and new life - a life lived for God's glory in the world to transform the world. The Roman centurion gets it. He sees who Jesus is, even as the religious leaders fail. And the women stay watching, waiting and listening. It is these women who come to the tomb early in the morning after Joseph, a council member, takes courage to bury Jesus' body. The women go the tomb - but there is no one there. Just a young man (Matthew said angel - remember angel= messenger, and they often look human like) dressed in white. He tells them that Jesus is risen and will see them in Galilee, just as he said. The women are charged to go and tell the disciples - and Peter. Peter, the man who denied Jesus because of his fears has a special mention. At that the women flee and say nothing to anyone because they are afraid. The gospel ends there. Other endings are later additions, probably because the gospel seems to demand an ending. But maybe that's just the point. The question as we stand with the women, hearing the angel's voice, what will we do? Who we will tell? What difference will the crucified yet risen Jesus make in our lives?

Mark Arnold (Quoted from <https://rozandmark.wordpress.com/2019/04/19/mark-god-crucified/>)

STUDY 1 – MARK 1:1-39 – INTRODUCING JESUS

INTRODUCTION: Mark begins his Gospel with John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus and the start of Jesus' ministry. This study looks at how Jesus started his ministry and the calling of the first disciples, amongst miracles and preaching.

SETTING THE SCENE: It has been 400 years since the last prophet and Israel was waiting for the promised Messiah: what promises are made about the Messiah in the Old Testament? Many expected the Messiah to free them from Roman rule: what is the impact when our expectations miss the mark?

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GOOD NEWS (v1): What is significant about the way that Mark introduces Jesus in his account (compare with the other gospels and think about what Mark does and doesn't include)? Why does Mark describe his account about Jesus as *good news*? What is meant by the title *Son of God*?

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PREPARING THE WAY (v2-8): What is important about the quoted scriptures from Isaiah 40:3? Why was John preaching a baptism of repentance? What did this baptism achieve (e.g. could this baptism bring forgiveness of sins)? Why do you think that John was so popular (v5)?

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JESUS BEGINS HIS MINISTRY (v9-14): Why do you think Jesus was baptised? What do we learn about the relationship between Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit (v10-11)? Why does the Spirit then send Jesus into the desert and why does Mark say so little about that experience?

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JESUS CALLS HIS FIRST DISCIPLES (v15-20): What do you make of Jesus' first recorded words in this Gospel? Why did the fishermen leave their boats and nets *at once*? If you were called in a similar way to follow Jesus, would you leave at once?

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JESUS TEACHES WITH AUTHORITY (v21-28): What does teaching as one who has *authority* look like? Why does Jesus tell the evil spirit to be quiet? The news about Jesus spread quickly (v28): what kind of reputation do you think Jesus was gaining?

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JESUS HEALS MANY (v29-34): After Jesus heals Simon's mother in law, she starts to wait on them: why do you think she does this instead of going out and telling people what had just happened?

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What do you imagine it would have been like to be with Jesus as he was healing (v32-34)? Why wouldn't Jesus let the demons tell everyone who he was?

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JESUS PRAYS IN A QUIET PLACE (v35-39): Jesus makes space to go and pray on His own: why was this so important for Him in all that He was doing? In what ways might this also be an example for us to follow in our own lives?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: In this passage Mark introduces us to Jesus: what has most impacted you about what He is like and who He is? How has this study encouraged you in your own journey of faith? How could you share something from this study with a friend during this coming week?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Mark portrays Jesus as being someone who knows what His purpose is and He is going for it. Ask God to reveal His purpose for you in your life. Encourage each other to step forward in your faith and go for it! Pray also that you would be impacted as you study Mark together.

MEMORY VERSE: MARK 1:17

STUDY 2 – MARK 1:40-2:17 – FRIEND OF SINNERS

INTRODUCTION: The people Jesus meets in this passage were all treated by society as outcasts. Jesus goes against the grain and shows love, grace and compassion to each of these people. However society looks on us, Jesus loves and cares for us; the gospel really is good news for ALL.

SETTING THE SCENE: Who are the people that our own communities tends to ostracise and why? Give examples of the kinds of people that make us feel nervous or uncomfortable? What steps can we take to stand up against such prejudice?

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THE UNCLEAN LEPER (1:40-45): Lepers were social outcasts and lived in isolation so that they would not cause others to be unclean (Leviticus 13 & 14): what do the leper's actions and words reveal about his faith in Jesus (v40)? What does this teach us about coming to Jesus?

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Why do you think Jesus did not want the leper to tell others about what he did (v43-44)? Why do you think the Leper does the opposite and what was the result of this for Jesus (v45)?

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THE PARALYTIC (2:1-12): What would life have look like for the Paralytic (think both physically & emotionally)? What would have been like to have been in the house with Jesus and experience the events of this section? How hard is it to lower a man through a roof on his mat?

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HIS FRIENDS (v3-5): What do the lengths that the man's friends went to teach us about loving our own friends? What is the significance of Mark's comment that when Jesus saw *their faith*, He said to the paralytic, *Son, your sins are forgiven*? How would they have reacted to Jesus' response?

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OUR GREATEST NEED (v6-8): What does Jesus say was the paralysed man's greatest need? Why is this? Why do the teachers of the law respond so strongly to Jesus here?

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WHICH IS EASIER (v9-11): How would you answer Jesus' question about which is easier to say: to forgive sins or to heal? What does the healing of the paralysed man tell the teachers of the law and the crowd about Jesus' authority? Why are the crowds so amazed by this incident?

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THE TAX COLLECTOR (2:13-17): What would Levi have left behind to follow Jesus (v14)? Why were tax collectors so hated by the Jews?

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AT LEVI'S HOUSE (v15-17): Why was eating at Levi's house such a big deal? Specifically why was eating with *tax collectors and sinners* such a problem for the Pharisees? How do you think they would have reacted to Jesus' statement regarding the healthy and the sick (v16-18)? Why is it easy to see the sin in others and not the sin of self-righteousness in ourselves?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What would be the equivalent of such prejudices today? How does Jesus expect us to treat those who are outcasts? How do these encounters shape your understanding of Jesus and His love and concern for His people?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God that he has mercy on sinners like us. Ask God to give us an increased awareness of your own sin and not just the sin of others. Ask God to help us to have Jesus' heart and compassion for those that society looks down upon.

MEMORY VERSE: MARK 2:17

STUDY 3 – MARK 2:18-3:35 – FACING OPPOSITION

INTRODUCTION: Jesus faces increasing opposition from the Pharisees because of the things that he was saying and doing. As He responds to their accusations we learn more about who He is: i.e. the bridegroom (2:18-22), the Lord of the Sabbath (2:23-3:6), and like the strong man (3:20-35).

SETTING THE SCENE: Think of a time when you have faced opposition: what were the circumstances and outcome of this? What did it feel like? What did it take to make your stand?

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FEASTING & FASTING (2:18-22): People came to Jesus puzzled that the disciples were not fasting (v18): what answers do Jesus' stories (wedding feast, garments & wineskins) provide for this question? What is your experience of fasting (or spiritual disciplines such as prayer, study, meditation, solitude, silence, simplicity for that matter)? What do these verses say about what our motivation should be?

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LORD OF THE SABBATH (2:23-3:6): How did Jesus respond to the Pharisees' accusation? According to Jesus, why were the followers of both David and Jesus justified in breaking the Sabbath (v25-27)? Have you ever experienced a time when the requirements of your Christian faith seemed to conflict with a human need? What did you do, and why?

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FOLLOWING JESUS (3:7-12): Why were the crowds so interested in following Jesus (v7-12)? What do the details of this story tell us about Jesus' priorities? What area of your life (physical, emotional, or spiritual) needs to be healed by Jesus? How would greater confidence in Christ's power and authority impact your life? Why do you think Jesus forbid the demons from revealing his identity (v11-12)?

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CHOOSING THE TWELVE (3:13-19): How and why did Jesus choose the twelve apostles (literally *sent ones*)? How would you have been inclined to make such choices (v14-15)? What was unusual about some of the men Jesus chose (v16-19)? What do you make of Jesus choosing imperfect people to share in His ministry? Would you have chosen Judas to be an apostle?

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HOSTILITY AND REJECTION (3:20-30): Crowds were flocking to Jesus (v20) but this was also attracting opposition: how do you respond to Jesus' family's conclusion that they needed to take charge of Him (v21)? What do you think caused the teachers of the law to accuse Jesus of being possessed Beelzebub (v22) and having an impure spirit (v30)? How do you understand Jesus somewhat cryptic response to this (v23-29)? What is this blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (v28-29)?

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JESUS' FAMILY (3:31-35): How do you think Jesus felt about the response of His family and the Pharisees to His ministry and popularity? How do you think His family might have felt about Jesus' definition of God's family? How do you reconcile loyalty to your own family and to God's family?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: In your experience, when has faithfulness to a cause or person led to conflict with others? What can we learn from Jesus here about the importance of sticking to your guns even when facing opposition? What new insights do we learn about who Jesus is?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: For Jesus, obedience to His Father meant facing misunderstanding and hostile opposition from His own family and the spiritual leaders of the time. Share and pray together about how you can support and encourage each other to faithfully obey Jesus whatever the consequences.

MEMORY VERSE: MARK 2:27

STUDY 4 – MARK 4:1-34 – PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

INTRODUCTION: Jesus often taught in parables, comparing something difficult with something familiar to help people understand. Parables focus on one central truth so not every detail will have a spiritual meaning. Parables communicate truth indirectly and often require a response from the listener. For those who have 'ears to hear', Jesus' focus here is "God's Kingdom" and its subjects.

SETTING THE SCENE: Why do you think that Jesus used parables to teach people and how does this parable help to answer that question? Why do you think Jesus told these specific parables?

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PARABLE OF THE SOWER OR SOILS (v1-20): Why is the kind of soil so critical to the growth of the seed? How can our hearts be like these different types of soil both when we first heard and accepted the Word and as we continue hearing the Word?

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- What was the path like and why didn't the seed grow there? In what sense can our hearts be like the path? What kind of attitudes can give us a hard heart and prevent us from being receptive to God? How can we prevent our hearts from becoming hardened?

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- What was the rock like and why did the seed wither there? How can our hearts be like the rock? What are the 'roots' (commitments) which we need in order to build strong foundations? How will these roots help us withstand times of testing? What stops us from building these foundations?

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- Why did the seed choke among the thorns? In what sense can our hearts be like the thorns? What are the thorns that distract us in our Christian lives? What spiritual gardening do we need to undertake in our lives?

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What does it mean to have a 'noble and good heart' and how can we develop one? What different ways does God speak to us today? What is it going to take for us to be like the good soil that 'yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown'?

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THE SECRET OF THE KINGDOM (v10-12 & v21-25): How would you define the 'secret of the kingdom? Would you say that Jesus speaks in parables to deliberately conceal truth (as these verses seem to imply)? Why or why not (see also v33-34)?

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How do v21-25 (note that the listeners are those to whom Jesus explained the parable) help us to see that Jesus did not intend for the 'secret of the Kingdom' to remain hidden?

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GROWING & MUSTARD SEEDS (v26-32): How do these parables help us understand what the Kingdom of God is like? How do they help us see the power (Growing Seed) and potential (Mustard Seed) of the message? What has been your experience of seeing the Kingdom of God advancing?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: Think back over the past 6 months; has God been speaking to you during this time? What kind of soil do you think that your heart has been like throughout this time? How can we ensure that our hearts are increasingly like the good soil?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God for His Word and ask Him to give us 'ears to hear' and hearts willing to listen and obey. Pray for your friends who do not yet come to know Jesus; pray that their hearts would be like the good soil as you seek to share the good news about Jesus Christ with them.

MEMORY VERSE: MARK 4:20

STUDY 5 – MARK 4:35-6:5 – FEAR FREEZES OUT FAITH

INTRODUCTION: We've already seen that Jesus has authority over people, evil, sickness and sin. In this session there are a number of people facing hard situations: their experiences with Jesus can help us to trust Him and prevent fear from freezing out faith when the going gets tough.

SETTING THE SCENE: What kind of things makes you afraid and why? Can you think of a time when fear froze out your faith? Specifically what was it about the fear that was so overwhelming and why was it so hard to respond in faith?

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JESUS CALMS THE STORM (4:35-41): How do the disciples respond to the storm? How do you think they should have responded to the storm (think about their profession)? Why do you think the disciples woke Jesus up? Why are the disciples still terrified even after Jesus calms the storm? Why do you think Jesus is so harsh on them (see how Jesus scolds rather than comforts them in v40)?

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When has it felt like God is ignoring an overwhelming crisis in your life? What are some of the obstacles in the minds of your friends that make it hard to persuade them that Christ is Sovereign? Can you think of a time when God shattered your concept of Him by his display of his power?

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JESUS RESTORES A DEMON POSSESSED MAN (5:1-20): How do you respond to Jesus' decision to allow the demons to destroy the pigs? What does this imply about what the demons were trying to do to the man and the value Jesus places on the man?

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What does the reaction of the people in v17 teach us to expect? What is their real problem with Jesus? Look at Jesus' response to this rejection in 5:18-20; is there any hope for these people? Why does

Jesus send the demon-possessed man home to tell his family what God had done for him (contrary to the strategy He employed in 1:21-26, 1:40-45 & 3:7-12)?

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JESUS RAISES A DEAD GIRL AND HEALS A SICK WOMAN (5:21-43): What are the similarities and differences between the accounts of Jairus' daughter and the sick woman? How does Mark contrast fear and faith in each story?

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Do Jesus' miracles mean we can now expect a life free of troubles and sickness? Why or why not? What was Jesus' priority while on earth? What part did His miracles play? What was their purpose?

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A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOUR (6:1-5): How do the people of Nazareth respond to Jesus and why do you think this is? Why do you think Jesus could not do miracles in Nazareth? What affect did their unbelief have on Jesus? When might unbelief have hindered God's work in your life?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: In what areas of your life are you tempted to respond with fear rather than faith? What steps can you take to begin to trust Jesus more? How do we see the identity and authority of Jesus revealed to us in these verses?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share with each other areas in your life where you struggle with fear rather than being faithful. Pray for one another that you might trust Jesus in these struggles and give over your fears to Him. Continue to ask Jesus to reveal Himself to you.

MEMORY VERSES: PSALM 56:3-4

STUDY 6 – MARK 6:6-52 – MINDSET FOR MISSION

INTRODUCTION: Mark has described over the last five chapters how Jesus has been calling the disciples, and introducing them to Himself and the kingdom of heaven. Now He sends them out into the world and tries to help them develop a mindset for mission: a healthy rhythm of rest and activity.

SETTING THE SCENE: We live in a busy and demanding world: what do you do to get the rest and refreshment required to deal with all that life brings? To what extent does it surprise you that Jesus makes such a priority of rest both for Himself (time to pray) and for His disciples (space from activity)?

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JESUS SENDS OUT THE TWELVE (v6-13): Why do you think Jesus sends the Disciples out in pairs? What does Jesus tell them to take with them and why so little? What was Jesus teaching them about the priorities for their mission?

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What would this sense of dependence look like for us as we work amongst God's harvest today? Why were they to shake the dust off their feet? The disciples were sent out: what does the mission field look like today – in and out of the safety of the church?

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JOHN THE BAPTIST BEHEADED (v14-29): What can we learn from the characters in this story?

- *Herod* – his emotions/thoughts through this event. Are there any similar dilemmas between your conscience and your lifestyle?

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- *John the Baptist* – if he'd only been a little less opinionated... Are there any issues that we need to be bolder in speaking up about in society today?

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What can John the Baptist and his example teach us about being a disciple of Jesus?

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JESUS FEEDS THE 5,000 (v30-44): Mark doesn't tell us very much about the outcome of their mission trip: why do you think this is? How do you sense the disciples are doing (v30-36)?

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At this point Jesus makes little of the fact that they're not going to get their deserved rest: why do you think this might be? What do you make of the way Jesus responds to the crowds in compassion (like sheep without a shepherd), but apparently overlooks the needs of the disciples at this point?

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JESUS WALKS ON WATER (v45-52): What do we learn about Jesus from v45-46? As it seems pretty clear that Jesus intended to help the disciples: why do you think He was going to pass them by?

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Why do you think Jesus uses the words "It is I" (literally translated as "I am")? Think back to the beginning of the passage today: what do you think of the risk Jesus was taking? Why would He send out men who had such a limited understanding of who He is?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What impresses you about the things that we learn about Jesus in this section and in particular the priority He places on time with His Father and His compassion for the people around Him? How do you think God is sending you out into His mission field?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share ways in which we can labour amongst God's mission field amongst our friends. How might that involve us standing firm for what is right? Pray about how you can demonstrate love to others, even when you are low on energy.

MEMORY VERSES: MARK 6:50-51

STUDY 7 – MARK 6:53-7:37 – OBEDIENCE OVER TRADITION

INTRODUCTION: There is a temptation to measure spirituality against traditions and rules (written and unwritten). Jesus says it is the condition of our hearts which determines our acceptance by God, and shows (through His miracles) that He can change the bleakest spiritual condition.

SETTING THE SCENE: How would you describe your tendency towards doing things because we have always done so (sticking with tradition) or doing new things (going against the grain)? What is the merit of respecting tradition and what are the potential pitfalls involved in doing so?

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HEALINGS (6:53-54 & 7:24-37): How do you reconcile Jesus' approach to the crowds of sick people brought to Him in Gennesaret (6:53-54) with that of the Syrophenician woman (7:v24-30) and the deaf and mute man (7:31-37)? What do you find surprising or difficult in these accounts?

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What do we learn about the faith of the Syrophenician woman? What is Jesus trying to say to her and do you think she understands Him? The deaf man is healed in the region of the Decapolis (see 5:1-20): what impresses you about the way the man is healed? What is the response of people to Jesus?

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CLEAN AND UNCLEAR HANDS (7:1-13): How do you think that the Pharisees & teachers of the law would have felt about: (a) Jesus' disciples eating food which was unclean (v1-4) and (b) Jesus' response quoting from Isaiah and questioning their obedience to their tradition (v5-13)?

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TRADITIONS OF MEN VS COMMANDS OF GOD: How do we differentiate between human traditions and the commands of God? Specifically how do we know that something is from God? Can you think of some examples of contemporary 'traditions' that we've put in the place of God's commands? Why might these sometimes more appealing than actually applying and obeying God's commands?

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CLEAN AND UNCLEAN HEARTS (7:14-23): Jesus challenges their interpretation of what is clean and unclean in these verses: how do you think that this would this have been received? Is Jesus nullifying the Old Testament laws on cleanliness?

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How do Jesus' disciples compare with the religious leaders? See v18, 4:40 and 6:52? How can we guard against pointless religion or vain worship and ensure that our faith is heartfelt and genuine?

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AUTHORITY & AUTHENTICITY: To what extent do you find the imagery of clean/unclean hearts helpful? How does this relate to our tendency to set aside God's commands for traditions? If we saw the kind of miracles that Jesus performs here; do you think we would more readily obey him and submit to Him working in our hearts?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What is the thing that has most stood out to you tonight with regards to our ongoing question about the Identity of Jesus or His radical approach to the traditions of the day? How do you need to shake up your own life to make sure that you honour God not merely traditions?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Think through aspects of your own lives where traditions have got in the way of honouring God. Encourage one another with examples of how you have struggled with this and pray for inner transformation and genuine obedience in each other's lives.

MEMORY VERSE: MARK 7:8

STUDY 8 – MARK 8:1-9:1 – WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

INTRODUCTION: This is the climax of Mark's gospel as we move from the question "Who is Jesus?" to "What is His mission". The question "who do you say that I am?" is a question we must all answer and one that ultimately is lived out in the way that we live our lives.

SETTING THE SCENE: How would your friends and/or people generally respond to the question: who is Jesus? What things have we learned so far in Mark 1-7 about this question?

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FEEDING THE 4,000 (v1-13): After Jesus fed the 4,000, why do you think the disciples struggle so much to believe He can feed the 5,000? What can you tell about Jesus' heart as He looks at them? Why do you think He first calls His disciples and discusses the situation with them first?

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How does the disciples' reaction to Jesus' words in v4 remind you of your own? What tends to be your first reaction when faced with a "roadblock" in life? Why do you think Jesus reacts so strongly to the Pharisees request in v11-13? Is God opposed to giving signs to people (See also Mark 3:20-30)?

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THE YEAST OF THE PHARISEES AND THE BLIND MAN (v14-26): What do you think Jesus means by His mini-parable on yeast? How did the disciples interpret it? Jesus has some harsh words for His disciples. What do you think His main point is? How were they so blind? How does this contrast with the account of Jesus healing the blind man?

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What is Mark trying to show us about people and their reaction to Jesus, even when they have spent so long with Him? How do you see this played out in your own life?

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YOU ARE THE MESSIAH (v27-30): According to v27-33, how did people see Jesus? In what way is the disciples' view different? Does this happen today? (nb: *Christos* = the Anointed). What do you think Peter meant when he said Jesus was the Messiah (the Christ)? (See Psalm 2:2-7, Daniel 9:25)

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GET BEHIND ME SATAN (v31-33): Why do you think Peter was so shocked by Jesus' prediction of rejection and suffering? What did Peter understand and what did he fail to understand? Why does Jesus respond to Peter so harshly? According to Jesus, what's Peter's major mistake?

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How does this account relate to the blind man's healing account, in verses 22-26? What is the danger of not fully understanding who Jesus is?

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TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME (v34-38): How do these verses relate to what Jesus has just been saying about His future? What does it look to follow Jesus every day? What do we have to let go of? What does it mean to "lose your life"?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: In what way has Mark 1-8 helped us to think about the question of who is Jesus? If Jesus is who He says He is: how has your confidence grown in order to let go and *lose your life* for Him? If you are not sure that Jesus is who He says He is what is it that holds you back?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Pray that God will help you see Him fully. Pray that His constant provision, compassion and care will be present in your mind every day. Pray for one another as you count the cost of what it will mean for you to be a lifelong follower of Jesus.

MEMORY VERSES: MARK 8:35-36

MEMORY VERSES

STUDY 01: MARK 1:1-39 – INTRODUCING JESUS

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” **Mark 1:17**

STUDY 02: MARK 1:40-2:17 – FRIEND OF SINNERS

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” **Mark 2:17**

STUDY 03: MARK 2:18-3:35 – FACING OPPOSITION

Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” **Mark 2:27**

STUDY 04: MARK 4:1-34 – PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.” **Mark 4:20**

STUDY 05: MARK 4:35-6:5 – FEAR FREEZES OUT FAITH

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise—in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? **Psalms 56:3-4**

STUDY 06: MARK 6:6-52 – MINDSET FOR MISSION

They cried out, ⁵⁰ because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” ⁵¹ Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed. **Mark 6:50-51**

STUDY 07: MARK 6:53-7:37 – VIOLATING TRADITION

“You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.” **Mark 7:8**

STUDY 08: MARK 8:1-9:1 – WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? **Mark 8:35-36**