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# LETTER FROM THE PASTORS

Dear LBC,

As we open a new year, we want to turn our attention to the true King, Jesus Christ. We believe that Christ's kingship extends over every area of life and calls us to submit each and every part of our existence to him. Yet the circumstances, trials, and sufferings of this world can often pull our attention away from our victorious King. This was especially true for 2020. Therefore, we believed that it was important to work patiently through a book of the Bible and see Jesus as our true King. No book better highlights Jesus' kingship than the Gospel of Mark.

Mark opens with a proclamation of good news; it is the "beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (1:1). The good news Mark proclaims is the arrival of another king, a true King, who calls us to repent and believe in him (1:14-15). We hope that this Gospel will encourage you and provide you the strength to continue following Christ as a disciple.

## How to Use this Study Guide

The study guide contains an Introduction which will walk you through various background issues in the Gospel. It will make you aware of certain themes to be looking for as you read. It will give you tips and strategies for how to read a book like Mark well. Mark belongs to a particular genre of Scripture: Gospel. Therefore, we must pay attention to how to read a genre like Gospel faithfully.

The main section of the study guide contains the Weekly Discussion Questions and a Weekly Devotional Reading. The Weekly Discussion Questions are primarily to be used *in community*. While you can glean much from the questions when used as personal devotions, they are written in such a way as to foster discussion within the various Groups at LBC. We do not grow alone and so we encourage you to get in a group and discuss these questions together. They follow along with the sermon texts we will be preaching each week.

We believe that there is a "cycle" to discipleship and to our growth in Christ. We gather for corporate worship on Sundays and we go live in community during the week. When we gather to hear the word preached, we build our understanding of the Scriptures and deepen our conviction of biblical truth. Later in the week, or even on Sundays, we go out into smaller groups of community to apply the truth. Groups are the opportunity to live out the "one another" commands of Scripture.

The other main section is the Weekly Devotional Readings. These readings will take you through the whole book of Mark as well as supplementary readings in the Old Testament and other Gospels. Every week there are five readings for you to do for your own devotions. Besides the readings, we have included two basic questions to ask yourself when you read the passages: "What is this teaching me about the *person* of Christ?" and "What is this teaching me about the *work* of Christ?" The Gospel of Mark first and foremost is about Jesus and so we want our reflections on the text to be about Jesus. We also include a section for some written prayers to stimulate your own prayer. Some of these prayers are

adaptations from Scriptures while others come from the rich history of the church. The final piece of every week is to “live” the truth. We do not want this Study Guide to be merely an academic exercise for you but one which facilitates real transformation.

Submitting to Christ our King with you,

Your pastors, Dennis, Dan, and Chris.

# INTRODUCTION

The book of Mark was written by John Mark, a disciple of Jesus. The book of Mark belongs to the opening four books of the New Testament known as “Gospels”: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Gospels were written by early disciples of Jesus to explain who Jesus was, what he came to do, and the significance of his life, death, and resurrection. The Gospels also explain how to live as a follower of Jesus and one author has called them “discipleship manuals.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the Gospel of Mark is written for *all* Christians to learn how to follow Christ.

## Summary

Mark opens with the announcement that it is, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). The whole book focuses on proclaiming the “good news” (the gospel) of who Jesus is and what he has come to do. The identity of Jesus is revealed in the very first sermon He ever preaches when He proclaims, “The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (1:15). Jesus is the King who has brought God’s kingdom near. But Jesus’ kingship unfolds in unexpected ways throughout the story. While the Jews of Jesus’ day desired an earthly king who would destroy the Romans and relieve them from political oppression, Jesus often acted in ways that defied their expectations. Most shocking was Jesus’ insistence that He came to die. In fact, Jesus predicts His death *three times* in the book (8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34). Therefore, Jesus’ kingship is not established by the exercise of raw power but through suffering and death.

## Themes

**King/Kingdom:** Jesus presents himself as the true King of the world. He comes preaching the kingdom of God (1:15). He displays the authority of the King to forgive sins, something previously reserved for the institution of the temple (2:1-12). He speaks of plundering Satan’s kingdom (3:26-27). He teaches through parables that the kingdom of God grows imperceptibly yet will fill the earth (4:26-32). He demonstrates the power of God’s kingdom by healing many and casting out unclean spirits, even a “legion” of demons (5:1-13). Jesus provides the disciples a sneak preview of His kingly glory when He is transfigured before them (9:1-13).

**“Immediately”:** The word “immediately” occurs 39 times in the Gospel of Mark almost double than any other book in the New Testament (1:10, 12, 18, 20, 21, 28, 29, 30, 42, 43; 2:8, 12; 3:6; 4:5, 15, 16, 17, 29; 5:2, 29, 30, 42; 6:25, 27, 45, 50, 54; 7:25; 8:10; 9:15, 20, 24; 10:52; 11:2, 3; 14:43, 45, 47; 15:1). The bulk of its uses are found in the first half of the Gospel. The impression created by using the word “immediately” so often is one of urgency and speed. The story is making a beeline to the cross! In fact, the recounting of Jesus’ death and resurrection do *not* contain the word (15:2-16:8). It’s as if the author has been taking us by

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

the hand and running through a museum only to stop and linger at the very last exhibit. The cross is central to the Gospel of Mark.

**The People of God:** The true people of God are not defined by DNA or ethnic heritage but by faith in Jesus. Those who “repent and believe in the gospel” are Jesus’ disciples (1:15). Jesus even claims that those who *do God’s will* are truly part of his family (3:31-35). The importance of faith as the mark of Jesus’ true people is exemplified by the inclusion of the Gentiles and the exclusion of Jews who reject Him. Jews and Jewish leaders who oppose Jesus are cast out (2:15-17; 2:23-3:6; 6:1-4; 7:1-13; 8:11-13; 10:2-9; 11:27-33; 12:1-12; 38-44; 14:1-2). The inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God is highlighted by Jesus’ interaction with Jarius the Roman centurion and the Syro-Phoenician woman (5:21-43; 7:24-37). Moreover, Jesus makes it a point to do ministry in Gentile areas such as Gennesaret (6:45-7:23), Tyre, Sidon, and Decapolis (7:24-8:9), and Caesarea Philippi (8:10-9:32).

## **The Gospel of Mark and the Bible’s Big Story**

God created the world and tasked humanity to rule over it as His royal “son” (Gen 1:26-28). Despite God’s goodness and provision for Adam and Eve, they rebelled against Him bringing sin and death into the world (Gen 3:1-7). Cast out of God’s presence, humanity would be left to their own devices (3:24). Yet in the midst of the brokenness and destruction left behind by human sin, God makes a promise of good news: a Savior would be born by a woman (Gen 3:15). Things go from bad to worse for humanity as God decides to wipe everyone off the face of the earth because things have gotten so bad (Gen 6-8). But God saves Noah and his family to continue the human line. He brings them through the water and makes a covenant with Noah to never judge the world again by a flood (Gen 9:1-17). Despite a fresh start, Noah fails spectacularly, sinning in a vineyard much like Adam sinned in a Garden. The story of Noah highlights an important truth: a fully obedient “son” is hard to find.

God continues His plan to save and bring a Savior from the woman to the world by choosing one man, Abraham. Through Abraham’s family, the whole world will be saved (Gen 12:1-3). Abraham’s line eventually becomes a great nation, Israel. God chooses Israel to be His vehicle to continue His plan and spread His glory across the face of the earth. Unfortunately, Israel is too much like Adam and does what is good in her own eyes (Judges). Maybe one special individual *within* Israel can help the people become everything God intended them to be. So God installs a king over the people, David. God intended a line of godly kings to emerge from David so that they might spread His glory to the nations (2 Sam 7:6-14). But the Davidic kings failed miserably. The great tree of Israel must be chopped down due to their idolatry and injustice.

God exiles the people. But all hope is not lost as the prophets speak of a new David who will come, a new King who establishes a new covenant with a new Israel where they worship in a new temple within the new Jerusalem. It is in this atmosphere that Jesus steps onto the scene proclaiming that the kingdom of God has drawn near. The Gospel of Mark shows that Jesus is the King the people were looking for all along. But God’s kingdom does not come through destroying all of His people’s enemies (yet). It comes through destroying the most sinister enemy of the people of God: Satan in league with their own sinfulness.

The victory of God, however, is achieved through a surprising twist: the death of the King. When Jesus dies on the cross, He pays for the sins of the people so that they might be forgiven and brought home from their real exile, alienation from God.

## Outline

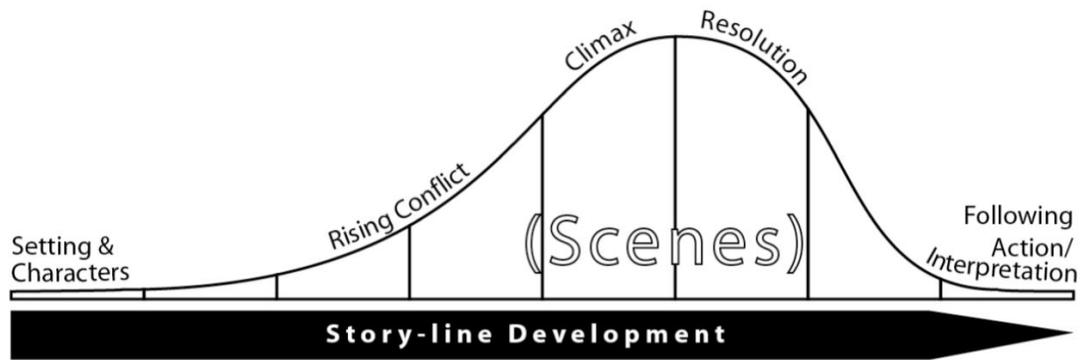
The literary structure of Mark bookends with a focus on the gospel (1:1-15; 15:21-16:8). The opening section details the intent of the book: it is to present the “gospel of Jesus Christ” (1:1-15). The end of the book focuses on the heart of the gospel: Jesus’ death on the cross (15:21-16:8). The middle sections comprises two major sections: Jesus’ ministry to Jews and Gentiles (1:16-9:50) and Jesus’ journey to the cross (10:1-15:2-).

- I. Introduction: The Gospel of Jesus Christ (1:1-15)
- II. Jesus’ Ministry and Journey to the Cross (1:16-15:1)
  - A. Jesus’ ministry to Jews and Gentiles (1:16-9:50)
    - 1. Ministry in Galilee (1:16-6:44)
    - 2. Ministry in Gentile areas (6:45-9:32)
    - 3. Ministry in Galilee (9:32-50)
  - B. Jesus’ journey to the cross
    - 1. Journey to Jerusalem (10:1-45)
    - 2. Triumphal entry into Jerusalem (11:1-11)
    - 3. Teaching and controversies at the temple of Jerusalem (11:12-12:44)
    - 4. Prophecies about Jerusalem (13:1-37)
    - 5. Anointing at Bethany (14:1-11)
    - 6. Lord’s Supper (14:12-31)
    - 7. Arrest and Trial (14:32-15:20)
- III. Jesus’ Death and Resurrection (15:21-16:8)

## How to Read the Gospels

The Gospels are not the apostle Paul’s letters. They are not systematic theology textbooks. They do not lend themselves to neat and tidy outlines. Instead, the Gospels are stories. Actually, each Gospel (like Mark) is a story *made up of smaller stories!* In a way, the Gospels are like a good TV series where each episode tells a smaller story but is also weaving a larger story through the whole season. Therefore, to read the Gospels well, you need to become good at reading stories. So how do stories work?

All stories follow a basic flow: there are characters who have some sort of “conflict” which increases a high point, or “climax” where the conflict is then resolved. After the climax, there is a “falling action,” a winding down of the story with possibly some interpretive comments which help us make sense of the story. The basic flow of a story is illustrated here:



We should apply the same working model of stories to the Gospel of Mark. There will be settings and characters in the story. Usually some sort of conflict arises, usually with the Pharisees or other Jewish leaders. It builds up to some kind of climax where Jesus will say or do something meaningful and sometimes there will be important interpretative comments strewn about in the story. The importance of understanding stories is that the “heartbeat” of the story is found in the resolution of the climax.

What’s also important about stories is that they don’t have *only* one meaning. Stories contain multiple themes within them. For example, Jesus’ parable about the judgment of the evil vineyard workers has multiple levels of meaning (Mark 12:1-12). On one level, Jesus is clearly indicting the religious leaders for their rejection of Him. Even they perceived this meaning (12:12). But on another level, Jesus is giving hope to the Gentiles telling them they can be included in the people of God: “[The vineyard owner] will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others” (Mark 12:9). Yet on *another* level, Jesus is predicting what will happen to Him: He is the “son” of the vineyard owner who will be put to death by the tenant farmers (12:7-8).

If a passage can have multiple meanings does this indicate that it can mean *anything*? No, it does it. Reading a story is like shooting arrows at a target. Some readings of a story will be right on the bullseyes, picking up the “heart” of the story. Other readings will land on the target but may pick up themes and ideas that are more “peripheral” to the story yet still legitimate. Finally, some readings may fly off into the woods! Those readings are illegitimate. So how can we tell whether a reading is legitimate or not? Two principles can help guide us: authorial intent and Scripture interprets Scripture.

The first principle is authorial intent: What did the human author and God intend to communicate in this passage of Scripture? We all want people to try to understand our words as we intended them. We don’t like it when people twist our words! Therefore, we should pay the same courtesy to the biblical authors. We should try as hard as we can to understand what they intended to communicate. The second principle is that Scripture interprets Scripture. No passage of Scripture will ultimately contradict another passage; it is all God’s word and it is all true. Sometimes, however, we need a little extra help understanding what’s going on. So it can be helpful to turn to a “parallel” passage (found in

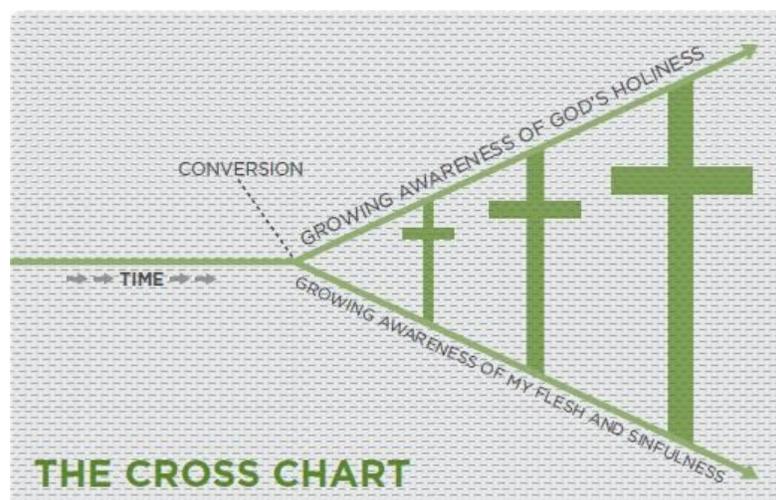
the cross references in your Bible) and see if a more clear passage can shed light on one that is less clear.

We also need to read each smaller story in light of the Bible's big story. *Every* passage is ultimately about Christ in some way. Finding connections to Christ doesn't mean that we find Him hiding behind every rock or tree in the Bible, as if any reference to a "tree" means the cross. Instead, we could ask one simple question to ourselves, "How does this passage show me a need for a Savior?" In that way, we can make connections to Christ which are not allegorical or forced.

## Developing a Cross-Centered Mindset

The point of reading the Gospel is not just to glean interesting information about the first disciples or even Jesus Himself. The point of reading the Gospels is to become a more devoted follower of Christ. They are discipleship manuals for the church, even for those who follow Christ today! Each Gospel has a different emphasis and unique challenge for disciples. In the Gospel of Mark, the cross is central. Mark challenges each and every disciple to develop a "cross-centered" mindset.

For example, Mark hurries its readers to the cross by using the word "immediately" 39 times in the narrative. Up until 15:1, the narrative pace zips along until the use of the word "immediately" stops entirely for an extended look at the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ is of utmost important in Mark's mind. So what does this mean for us practically? It means developing a cross-centered mindset. One of the key insights from the curriculum *The Gospel-Centered Life* is that when we grow in our awareness of God's holiness, we simultaneously grow in our awareness of our own sin. The awareness of our sin would lead us to despair *unless the cross grows bigger in our understanding*. The curriculum is helpful and pictures what this would look like in our lives:



As we grow in our awareness of God's holiness and of our own sinfulness, we find that our awareness of our need for and dependence on Jesus grows in our lives (i.e. the cross gets bigger). A cross-centered mindset changes the way that we confess and repent of

sin. Because we know that we are completely forgiven at the cross of Jesus, we can freely confess our sins to one another and to God (James 5:16). We do not need to fear rejection from the Lord due to our failures because He has already purchased us for Himself through Christ's death on the cross. Knowing the significance of the cross keeps us from wallowing in our despair, believing we must "make up" for sin through our own efforts. We can freely acknowledge our sin, confess it, and turn away from it. When we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us (1 John 1:9). We can then move on with our lives.

A cross-centered mindset also shapes the way we respond when someone sins against us. If we are sinned against by a fellow-believer, we can extend forgiveness to them because God has forgiven us so much (Ephesians 4:32). If God has forgiven us of even our most horrendous sins, how can we withhold forgiveness from our brothers and sisters in Christ? A cross-centered mindset creates a spirit of graciousness and gentleness within us. We do not keep a record of wrongs, but instead, we come to realize that "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

A spirit of forgiveness helps to build strong bonds among us as a church family. But what about situations where the other person does not ask for forgiveness? What if the person is *not* a Christian and doesn't even feel bad about what he or she has done? Even some Christians may be resistant to asking for forgiveness! What do we do then? We look to Christ. On the cross, we find Jesus crying out to the Father to forgive those who are crucifying him, even though they don't deserve it and haven't asked for it (Luke 23:34). Extending forgiveness to those who refuse to acknowledge their wrongdoing isn't really about *them*. It's about us and God.

When we are wronged, we can often allow the anger we feel over being hurt turn into bitterness. We may hold grudges or even seek to retaliate against the person who wronged us. Instead of allowing anger and bitterness to have their way with us, forgiveness breaks their power and sets us free. When we forgive someone, we are not minimizing that a wrong has been done. It certainly has. But when we forgive, we are not allowing that anger to take root in our heart. In essence, we are giving the outcome of the situation over to the Lord. We are saying to God, "I do not want this situation to occupy any more time or space in my life, I am giving it over to You."

As you read the Gospel of Mark, be sure to read it with the Cross in mind. Prayerfully ask God throughout your reading to make you more aware of the depth of your sinfulness and the immensity of God's holiness. Ask Him to help you grow in your love, trust, and dependence on Jesus and His work on the cross.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a deeper look at being "gospel-centered," check out Bob Thune and Will Walker, *The Gospel-Centered Life* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2009).

## Week of January 3

# Discussion Questions

### Context

Hundreds of years ago, God exiled the Israelites because of their idolatry and injustice. Yet, in the midst of their separation from everything they've ever known, God promised that a new King would arise to rule over his people when they returned from exile. While the people expected a mighty military ruler, the prophet Isaiah enigmatically predicted that He would suffer and die for the sins of the people (Isaiah 53). It was through the death of the King that salvation would come to all. It is in this time of expectation for a King that Mark records Jesus' entrance into the public and begins His ministry.

### Study Questions

*Read Mark 1:1-15*

1. What does Mark's first word tell us about his Gospel?
2. **Read Isaiah 40:1-3.** How was Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled?
3. What did the voice from heaven say about Jesus?
4. What happened to Jesus in the desert? How does this event connect to Israel's history?
5. What was the content of Jesus' first message?
6. What response was Jesus looking for?

### Application Questions

1. What makes the gospel such good news?
2. In what ways can you prepare others for Christ?
3. Why do we resist submitting to Christ as our King?
4. What areas of life do you find difficult to submit to Christ, even if you've been a Christian for a long time?
5. How is God's kingdom different from the kingdoms of this world?
6. How can we be ambassadors for Christ's kingdom this week as a Group?

# Devotional Readings

## Read

There are five readings for each week. As you read each passage, think about these two questions: 1. What does this passage teach me about the *person* of Jesus? 2. What does this passage teach me about the *work* of Jesus?

- ❑ Isaiah 40:1-11
- ❑ Malachi 3:1-4; 4:5-6
- ❑ Daniel 7:1-14
- ❑ Ezekiel 34:23-31
- ❑ Jeremiah 33:14-26

## PRAY

Lord Jesus, we praise You for being the bearer of good news who forgives our sin. We thank You for being the sun of righteousness who dispels our darkness. We exalt you as the Son of Man, the truly human One who restores our image. We praise You for being the new David who rules us with justice and righteousness. In Your name we pray. Amen.

## LIVE

As an ambassador of Christ's kingdom, seek opportunities to make a positive difference in the world. Consider stepping into these opportunities:

## Week of January 10

# Discussion Questions

### Context

The Gospel of Mark proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1:1). To prepare the people for the arrival of Christ, God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way by calling the people to repentance exemplified through baptism (1:2-8). Surprisingly, Jesus submits Himself to John's baptism, not because He needs to repent of sins but to fully identify with humanity (1:9-11). After receiving God's affirmation at His baptism, Jesus is sent into the wilderness to confront the devil (1:12). Jesus overcomes the devil's temptation and enters into public ministry by proclaiming the arrival of God's kingdom (1:14-15). In this week's passage, we will discuss the multi-faceted nature of Jesus' ministry and see the implications for how we do ministry today.

### Study Questions

*Read Mark 1:16-39*

1. How did Jesus get people to follow Him?
2. What was the response of the disciples to Jesus' call?
3. Why were the people amazed by Jesus' teaching?
4. How does Jesus provide further confirmation of His teaching?
5. What was Jesus' response to the distressed crowds?
6. How does Jesus explain His mission?

### Application Questions

1. When you hear the word "disciple," what is the first thought that pops into your head? Is that thought in line with what Scripture claims a disciple to be?
2. What does this passage tell us our attitude should be toward helping people?
3. What excuses do we commonly use to neglect serving others?
4. While Jesus healed many, He also spent a lot of time teaching the Scriptures. Why do you think Jesus' emphasized teaching and preaching so much when so many other people could have used healing?
5. When you think about your own life, do you find it easier to study and teach Scripture or meet practical needs?
6. How can you bring more "balance" to your life between study and service? How can your Group become more balanced?

# Devotional Readings

## Read

There are five readings for each week. As you read each passage, think about these two questions: 1. What does this passage teach me about the *person* of Jesus? 2. What does this passage teach me about the *work* of Jesus?

- ❑ Mark 1:40-45
- ❑ Matthew 4:23-25
- ❑ Luke 4:14-21
- ❑ Isaiah 61:1-11
- ❑ Luke 5:1-11

## PRAY

“O God, you are Love ever burning, never extinguished. O Love, my God, set me on fire! You command holiness: give me what You command and then command whatever You will.”

—St. Augustine, *Confessions*.

## LIVE

Meet a practical need this week that you see around in your family, in your neighborhood or in your workplace.

## Week of January 17

# Discussion Questions

### Context

The first message Jesus ever preached was that God's kingdom had arrived in Him (1:15). Jesus then demonstrated His kingly power by teaching with authority (1:22), casting out the forces of darkness (1:24-28), and healing many (1:29-45). Jesus' kingship looked different than what the people expected. In Mark 2:1-12, Jesus demonstrates a different kind of authority than the people expected as well. Let's discuss together the importance of forgiveness and how it relates to God's kingdom.

### Study Questions

*Reading Mark 2:1-12*

1. What dilemma did the paralytic man and his friends face?
2. What motivated Jesus to respond to the paralytic man's plight?
3. Why did the Pharisees accuse Jesus of blasphemy?
4. How did Jesus respond to the thoughts of the Pharisees?

### Application Questions

1. Why did Jesus choose to forgive the man's sins before healing him?
2. How is God's viewpoint concerning the forgiveness of sins different than ours?
3. What does this encounter teach us about the difference between genuine spirituality and counterfeit spirituality?
4. Where might you be falling into counterfeit spirituality in your life?
5. How can your group love others by meeting their physical needs and telling them about the forgiveness of sins in Christ?
6. Following the example of the paralytic's friends, how could you go out of your way this week to help another believer who is experiencing pain and suffering?

# Devotional Readings

## Read

There are five readings for each week. As you read each passage, think about these two questions: 1. What does this passage teach me about the *person* of Jesus? 2. What does this passage teach me about the *work* of Jesus?

- ❑ 1 John 1:5-2:14
- ❑ Luke 5:17-26
- ❑ Matthew 9:1-8
- ❑ Luke 7:40-50
- ❑ Ephesians 4:17-32

## PRAY

Lord, remember, your compassion and mercy which You showed long ago. Do not recall the sins and failings of my youth. In your mercy remember me, Lord, because of Your goodness.

—Psalm 25:5-6.

## LIVE

Answer question 6 in the “Application Questions” section above. After you answer the question, go out and do it!

## Week of January 24

# Discussion Questions

### Context

The Jewish people often prided themselves on their ethnic heritage and the advantages of God: they had circumcision (the sign they belonged as God's people), and the Law (the explanation of how to live in God's world). Yet inclusion in God's people was never based on DNA but always by *faith*. Jesus calls Matthew the tax collector to Himself (2:14-21). Jesus also challenges the Pharisees misuse of the Law by healing on the sabbath (3:1-12). Jesus then calls twelve disciples who reconstituted the renewed Israel, mirroring the original twelve tribes (3:13-19). Today, we will see what requirements are needed to be included in God's true people.

### Study Questions

*Read Matthew 3:20-35*

1. What did Jesus' own family think of him?
2. What were religious elites saying about Christ?
3. What was Jesus' response to their accusations?
4. In context, what is the "eternal sin"?
5. Who is really part of God's family?

### Application Questions

1. How does doing God's will make a person Christ's brother or sister?
2. Is Jesus teaching that we receive salvation by works in this passage? Explain your answer.
3. Why is it important to believe that we are only saved by *faith*, not by our own works or our DNA?
4. Why is it important for us to place even our families under the rule and place of Christ?
5. What could you do or say to help your biological family understand your faith in Christ?
6. How can your group love one another like family over the coming weeks?

# Devotional Readings

## Read

There are five readings for each week. As you read each passage, think about these two questions: 1. What does this passage teach me about the *person* of Jesus? 2. What does this passage teach me about the *work* of Jesus?\

- ❑ Mark 2:14-22
- ❑ Mark 2:23-27
- ❑ Mark 3:1-12
- ❑ Mark 3:13-19
- ❑ Matthew 12:46-50

## PRAY

O Sovereign and Almighty Lord, bless all Your people and all Your flock. Give peace, Your help, Your love to us, Your servants the sheep of Your fold, that we may be united in the bond of peace and love, one body and one spirit, in one hope of our calling, in Your Divine and boundless love; for the sake of Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep. Amen.

—adapted from the Liturgy of St. Mark.

## LIVE

One of the ways we show love and appreciation to our family is through a surprise. Surprises bring joy and delight by providing unexpected blessings. Select someone from your group or someone else from the church and surprise them with a small gift or act of service.

## Week of January 31

# Discussion Questions

### Context

As Jesus began His ministry some would believe in Him and be saved, but others (like the Pharisees) refused to believe. To conceal the truth from those who won't believe, Jesus speaks in parables (4:11-12). But to those of faith—those who have “eyes to see”—Jesus' parables become a window through which to gaze upon the reality of God's kingdom. While this world may *seem* most real to us, through the use of parables, Jesus teaches us there is a much greater reality in existence around us.

### Study Questions

*Read Mark 4:26-34*

1. What do the man and the seed in the parable represent?
2. What happens when the harvest is ripe?
3. How is the kingdom of God like a mustard seed?
4. **Read Ezekiel 17:22-24.** How does Jesus' kingdom fulfill the promise of a great tree?

### Application Questions

1. Is it unfair that Jesus purposefully spoke in parables to conceal the truth from those who won't believe? Explain your answer.
2. Do you think it's appropriate for believers today to speak in parables?
3. How do these parables give us hope as we live as citizens of God's kingdom?
4. What “worldly” measures can we use to evaluate a church's success? How do these parables challenge us when considering a church's “success”?
5. How can we be active “sowers” of the seed this week as a group?

# Devotional Readings

## Read

There are five readings for each week. As you read each passage, think about these two questions: 1. What does this passage teach me about the *person* of Jesus? 2. What does this passage teach me about the *work* of Jesus?

- Mark 4:1-9
- Mark 4:10-12
- Mark 4:13-25
- Matthew 13:1-30
- Matthew 13:31-52

## PRAY

Lord of heaven, open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in Your word. My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your word. I have told You about my ways, and You have answered me; teach me Your statutes. Make me understand the way of Your precepts, so I can meditate on Your wonders.

—Psalm 119:18, 25-27

## LIVE

Spend 10 minutes interceding for unbelieving family and friends to have their eyes opened by the Lord.

## Week of February 7

# Discussion Questions

### Context

After Jesus teaches in parables, He displays Himself to be the true Adam by taking dominion over creation, calming the winds and the waves (4:25-41). Once on the other side of the sea, Jesus will have another kingly confrontation. It will not be with the chaotic and untamed forces of nature but with a much more sinister force in the world.

### Study Questions

*Read Mark 5:1-20*

1. Think about the geography and setting of the story. Why would most Jews avoid such a situation?
2. What does Jesus' willingness to go to such a place teach us about Him?
3. Why was the man chained up?
4. What did Jesus do when confronted by the demon-possessed man?
5. What was the response of the people to Jesus' exorcism?
6. What was the man's response to what Christ had done for him?

### Application Questions

1. What "unclean" areas or people has the church typically avoided? What has been the result of such avoidance?
2. How can the church reach tough-to-reach people?
3. When have you seen God's power on display in your own life or the lives of those around you?
4. Describe a time that you met with resistance for sharing the message of Christ. What was the outcome?
5. What can you do as a group to bring the message of Christ to those around you in the coming month?

# Devotional Readings

## Read

There are five readings for each week. As you read each passage, think about these two questions: 1. What does this passage teach me about the *person* of Jesus? 2. What does this passage teach me about the *work* of Jesus?

- ❑ Mark 4:35-41
- ❑ Matthew 8:28-34
- ❑ Luke 8:26-39
- ❑ Ephesians 6:10-20
- ❑ Colossians 2:8-15

## PRAY

Lord, strengthen our weakness, that we may fight valiantly in this spiritual war; help us against our own negligence and cowardice, and defend us from the treachery of our unfaithful hearts. We are exceedingly frail, and reluctant to engage in every virtuous and important undertaking. Grant, O Lord, that we may bring our vessel safe to shore, unto our desired haven. Amen.

—St. Augustine

## LIVE

Jesus sent the man back to his hometown to speak of all that God had done for him. His "testimony" about Jesus had an opportunity for significant impact among the community of people who knew him before he met Jesus. Take a step of evangelism to share your story of God's transformation in your life with someone who doesn't know Jesus. (If you don't know how...talk to Pastor Dan who can help you learn how to share your testimony effectively).

## Week of February 14

# Discussion Questions

### Context

While Jesus is the promised King who will save His people, He does not rule in the way that most people expect. Instead of exercising raw power to subjugate those in opposition to Himself, Jesus oozes with compassion. There are no better examples of his compassion than when He interacts with the suffering. In today's passage, we will see Jesus' great love, mercy, and care on display.

### Study Questions

*Read Mark 5:21-43*

1. Who was Jairus and why did he want to see Jesus?
2. Who interrupted Jesus' ministry to Jairus?
3. What was Jesus' interaction with the bleeding woman?
4. How did the people react when Jesus proclaimed that the girl would be alright?

### Application Questions

1. When have you felt afraid of God, like the woman trembling before Jesus?
2. What is healthy "fear" of God and unhealthy fear?
3. How does this passage show us the heart of God toward people?
4. What is your typical reaction to interruptions?
5. How can we see an opportunity for ministry in the interruptions of life?
6. How can your group display love for those who are hurting?

# Devotional Readings

## Read

There are five readings for each week. As you read each passage, think about these two questions: 1. What does this passage teach me about the *person* of Jesus? 2. What does this passage teach me about the *work* of Jesus?

- ❑ Matthew 9:18-31
- ❑ Luke 8:40-56
- ❑ Psalm 34:15-22
- ❑ Isaiah 54:1-8
- ❑ 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

## PRAY

For this reason I bend my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to all the fullness of God.

—Ephesians 3:14-19

## LIVE

Consider who in your life is suffering, either with long-term illness, physical or emotional need, difficulties with aging. Carve out specific time to pray for them. Make a meal, bring a gift card, or serve them in a particular way.

## Week of February 21

# Discussion Questions

### Context

Jesus was the fulfillment of God's kingdom promises. He ushered in God's kingdom to the earth. But Jesus' mission was not something that He kept to Himself. Of course, certain aspects of the mission were unique to Jesus, like dying for the sins of the world. But He also graciously invites His people into His mission, giving us significance and purpose as we live in the world.

### Study Questions

*Read Mark 6:1-13*

1. What did Jesus do when He returned to His hometown?
2. Why did the people of Nazareth react negatively to Jesus' visit?
3. What prevented Jesus from doing a lot of miracles there?
4. What tasks did Jesus give His disciples?
5. How did Jesus equip them for His mission?

### Application Questions

1. What prevents us from listening to people we know well?
2. Why is mission to those we know best often the hardest?
3. What obstacles keep us from being ambassadors for Christ?
4. How does Christ equip us to overcome those obstacles to His mission?
5. What does being on mission look like as a group? How can you help each other in this area?

# Devotional Readings

## Read

There are five readings for each week. As you read each passage, think about these two questions: 1. What does this passage teach me about the *person* of Jesus? 2. What does this passage teach me about the *work* of Jesus?

- ❑ Matthew 10:1-15
- ❑ Matthew 10:16-23
- ❑ Matthew 13:53-58
- ❑ Luke 4:20-30
- ❑ Luke 9:1-11

## PRAY

Grant us, Lord God, the vision of Your kingdom. Grant us forgiveness and new life. Grant us the stirring of Your Spirit so that we may proclaim Your love and change this world. May Your Spirit make us wise. May Your Spirit guide us. May Your Spirit strengthen us so that we may be strong in the faith, courageous in witness, and persistent in good deeds. God the Sender, send us. God the Sent, come with us. God the Strengthener of those who go, empower us so that we may go with You and find those who will call You Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

—Adapted from the *Worship Sourcebook*

## LIVE

Jesus sent the disciples “simply”: they were sent to do ordinary things (like share about the kingdom and call people to repentance and faith) and trust God's extraordinary power. Remembering that you are sent, do a "simple" act of faithfulness this week: Prayer walk your neighborhood, invite a neighbor over for dinner, or participate in a community non-church event.

## Week of February 28

# Discussion Questions

### Context

Jesus is the unexpected King. He comes preaching the message of God's kingdom which advances not through force but through faith. But even those who oppose God's kingdom, like Herod, cannot stop it. The people keep flocking to Jesus to hear Him preach (6:14-33). In His compassion, Jesus feeds the multitudes (6:34-44). He walks on the water and strengthens His disciples, demonstrating His kingship over all the earth once again (6:45-52). He heals many of their diseases and infirmities, tangibly showing off the power of God's kingdom. Despite the acts of love, compassion, and healing, some still cling to their man-made traditions rather than submitting to Jesus' rule of love.

### Study Questions

*Read Mark 7:1-13*

1. What did the Pharisees and teachers of the law notice? What were they concerned about?
2. According to Jesus, what were the Pharisees doing wrong?
3. What is the danger of man-made traditions?
4. How does Jesus place tradition in proper perspective?

### Application Questions

1. How can we be sure that we are "clean" in God's sight?
2. What's wrong with "holding to the traditions of men"?
3. Two major dangers exist when thinking about past tradition. The first is to make it equal to Scripture. The other is to discard the past entirely. But we must know our history to have strong roots. So how can we learn from the wisdom of the past without improperly elevating it or denigrating it?
4. What role does the church community play in reading and understanding Scripture?
5. How can we work together to stay committed to reading Scripture together this year?

# Devotional Readings

## Read

There are five readings for each week. As you read each passage, think about these two questions: 1. What does this passage teach me about the *person* of Jesus? 2. What does this passage teach me about the *work* of Jesus?

- Mark 6:14-32
- Mark 6:33-44
- Mark 6:45-52
- Mark 6:53-56
- Matthew 15:1-14

## PRAY

Almighty God, we thank You for the gift of Your holy Word. May it be a lantern to our feet, a light to our paths, and strength to our lives. Take us and use us to love and serve all people in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—An Australian Prayer Book

## LIVE

Read through the entire Gospel of Mark in one sitting. Share something you observed with a group member.

## Week of March 7

# Discussion Questions

### Context

Jesus declares that God's Word is greater than human tradition (7:1-13). And as the divine King, Jesus knows what is in the heart of man (7:14-23). Yet his kingly compassion is on display as He heals a woman, and many others, who are from Gentile regions (7:24-37). Jesus' rule continues to display His great love for the people as His compassion moves Him to meet the needs of the people.

### Study Questions

*Read Mark 8:1-21*

1. Why did Jesus call the disciples to Himself?
2. How did Jesus involve the disciples in this problem?
3. How much food went uneaten?
4. What did Jesus do after He fed the crowd?
5. How did Jesus use the feeding as an opportunity to teach the disciples?

### Application Questions

1. What can we learn from Jesus' attitudes and actions toward the crowds that followed Him?
2. Why do we hesitate to show compassion to others?
3. How would your group, church, and world change if we showed more compassion?
4. When have you seen God abundantly supply your needs?
5. Who in your group, church, or community can we reach out to meet their needs?

# Devotional Readings

## Read

There are five readings for each week. As you read each passage, think about these two questions: 1. What does this passage teach me about the *person* of Jesus? 2. What does this passage teach me about the *work* of Jesus?

- ❑ Mark 7:14-23
- ❑ Mark 7:24-30
- ❑ Mark 7:31-37
- ❑ Matthew 15:21-31
- ❑ Matthew 15:32-39

## PRAY

God, You see all things. You are the Ruler of all spirits and the Lord of all flesh—who chose our Lord Jesus Christ and us through Him to be a sanctified people. Lord, please give to every soul that calls upon Your glorious and holy Name: faith, peace, patience, long-suffering, self-control, purity, and sobriety, to the well-pleasing of Your Name, through our High Priest and Protector, Jesus Christ, by whom be to Him glory, and majesty, and power, and honour, both now and forevermore. Amen.

—Adapted from Clement of Rome

## LIVE

In compassion and love Jesus provided a meal for people who were hungry and had nothing to eat. Make a meal (or Doordash) a meal for someone to bless them this week. Meals are enacted grace. Bless a church member, a neighbor, or a college student with the gift of good food!

## Week of March 14

# Discussion Questions

### Context

After Jesus feeds the crowds, He heals a blind man in stages, showing that understanding His real identity as the true King often takes time (8:22-26). It even takes time for the disciples as Peter triumphantly declares Jesus to be the Messiah in one instant (8:27-30) only to be rebuked by Jesus for his worldly attitude the next (8:31-33). To be a follower of the King means being willing to give up everything for Him and endure suffering (8:34-38). But while Jesus demands endurance through hardship, He also gives the disciples hope by providing them a sneak preview of his ultimate destiny.

### Study Questions

*Read Mark 9:1-13*

1. What happened to Jesus on the mountain?
2. Who else appeared with Jesus? What is the significance for their appearance?
3. What did God say to the disciples?
4. What did God want the disciples to do?
5. Who is the "Elijah" that Jesus said already came? (Hint: read Mark 1:2-8).

### Application Questions

1. How would this account encourage the early church which was suffering and undergoing persecution?
2. What is implied in God's command that we listen to Jesus?
3. How does reading and reflecting on God's Word give us hope?
4. What keeps you from adequately engaging with God's Word?
5. What rhythms or habits do you need to cultivate in order to spend time in God's Word?
6. How can we hold one another accountable for engaging God's Word?

# Devotional Readings

## Read

There are five readings for each week. As you read each passage, think about these two questions: 1. What does this passage teach me about the *person* of Jesus? 2. What does this passage teach me about the *work* of Jesus?

- Mark 8:22-26
- Mark 8:27-30
- Mark 8:31-33
- Mark 8:34-38
- Luke 9:28-43

## PRAY

Jesus, how good it is to be here with You. Let me never lose sight of Your glory, no matter how much darkness may press on me. Let me live in Your presence forever. Amen.

—Excerpted from *A Year of Celebration: Experiencing God through the Feast Days of the Church*

## LIVE

The context of this story is "worship." Take some time this week to "worship." Go for a walk and listen to the lbcdoxology playlist, or go for a drive by yourself and sing to the Lord spending time with him through singing and prayer.

## Week of March 21

# Discussion Questions

### Context

Jesus provides the disciples a preview of his glorious kingdom (9:1-13). Yet the kingdom of darkness still exists in this broken world as unclean spirits possess human beings. Only the power of the kingdom of God, accessed through prayer, can drive back the forces of darkness (9:14-29). The nature of Christ's kingdom is not one of glory yet for first He must suffer, predicting His death and resurrection a second time (9:30-32; cf. 8:31). Christ's kingdom is unlike any other kingdom as it is based on service and total devotion to God (9:33-50).

### Study Questions

*Read Mark 10:13-31*

1. How did Jesus surprise His disciples in this situation?
2. What did Jesus want the disciples to do?
3. How did Jesus treat the children He met?
4. How did Jesus treat the rich young ruler?
5. Why could the man not obey Christ's instructions?

### Application Questions

1. Why would Jesus want us to copy children?
2. How can we exemplify Jesus' love to children?
3. In what ways can money stop us from doing what God wants?
4. How do you think God wants you to use the material wealth He has given you?
5. What steps can we take to make sure we're valuing eternal things and not merely material things?
6. How can your group grow in generosity and kingdom-mindedness?

# Devotional Readings

## Read

There are five readings for each week. As you read each passage, think about these two questions: 1. What does this passage teach me about the *person* of Jesus? 2. What does this passage teach me about the *work* of Jesus?

- Mark 9:14-29
- Mark 9:30-37
- Mark 9:38-50
- Mark 10:1-12
- Mark 10:13-52

## PRAY

I pray that the eyes of my heart may be enlightened, so that I will know what is the hope of Your calling, O Lord, what are the riches of the glory of Your inheritance in the saints, and what is the boundless greatness of Your power toward us who believe.

—Prayer from Ephesians 1:18-19

## LIVE

Give. Evaluate your budget and stretch yourself to give generously to a missionary or missions agency, Anthem Church, a campus staff worker, or other ministry the Lord has given you a passion for. Email [lbcmissionscommittee@gmail.com](mailto:lbcmissionscommittee@gmail.com) for more info about our missionaries and their needs.

## Week of March 28

# Discussion Questions

### Context

After Jesus counsels the rich young ruler about the nature of following Himself as the true king, Jesus predicts His suffering a third time (9:32-34). Despite Jesus' emphasis on suffering, the disciples jockey for position in the kingdom, misunderstanding the reign of Christ (10:35-45). Like Bartimaeus, the disciples are blind to the realities of Christ's kingdom, but through Jesus' compassion they might receive sight (10:46-52). At this point in the story, the scene shifts as Jesus enters Jerusalem. The narrative is continuing to sprint to the cross as Jesus will have increasing conflict with the religious elite of His day.

### Study Questions

*Read Mark 11:1-11*

1. What did Jesus ask the disciples to do?
2. How did the disciples' experience match what Jesus said?
3. Why did the people spread their cloaks and branches on the road for Jesus?
4. **Read Zechariah 9:9-10.** How does Jesus' triumphal entry fulfill this prophecy?

### Application Questions

1. Why is totally surrendering to God's will for our lives so difficult?
2. Jesus riding into Jerusalem was part of a much larger plan that God had based on Zechariah 9:9-10. But many times, we do not understand what God is doing in our lives in the moment. Why do you think that God does not always reveal his intentions or long-range plans for us when we find ourselves in difficult situations?
3. What should we do when we don't understand what God is trying to do in and through us?

# Devotional Readings

## Read

There are five readings for each week. As you read each passage, think about these two questions: 1. What does this passage teach me about the *person* of Jesus? 2. What does this passage teach me about the *work* of Jesus?

- ❑ Mark 11:15-33
- ❑ Mark 12:1-27
- ❑ Mark 12:28-44
- ❑ Mark 13:13-37

## PRAY

Dear God, thank you for sending your Son and paving the way for our lives to be set free through Jesus' death on the cross. Thank you for what this day stands for - the beginning of Holy Week, the start of the journey towards the power of the cross, the victory of the Resurrection, and the rich truth that Jesus truly is our King of Kings.

—Prayer by Debbie McDanile, [ibelieve.com](http://ibelieve.com)

## LIVE

Go to a local farm and pay a farmer to get a donkey ride...Or: Take a day to fast this week in preparation for Easter. Pay attention to your appetites and your spiritual hungers that are not God honoring. Take time to repent of sin and ways that distraction, comfort, or other have taken your eyes off Jesus and your need for him.

## April 2, 2021: Good Friday Readings

Take time today to read the Passion Narrative (from the Latin verb *patior*, *passus sum*; "to suffer, bear, endure"): Mark 14:1-15:47. Record any thoughts or reflections below:

## Week of April 4

# Discussion Questions

### Context

After Jesus enters Jerusalem, there is a clash of kingdoms. Jesus confronts the moral and religious rot that has infested the people of Israel (11:15-33). He calls out the religious leaders yet highlights the faith of a poor widow (12:1-44). He predicts the destruction of the temple in 70AD as a sign of the even greater troubles at the end of the age (13:1-37). To prepare His disciples for his departure in death, Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper and prays with them in the Garden of Gethsemane (14:1-42). Eventually, Jesus is arrested and brought before His accusers (14:43-15:2). Jesus is then led away, mocked and crucified (15:3-15:47). But when all hope seemed lost, Jesus was risen! He is risen indeed!

### Study Questions

*Read Mark 16:1-8*

1. Why did the women go to the tomb?
2. What did they see when they got there?
3. How did the women react to the "young man" dressed in white?
4. Why did the women flee the tomb and not tell anyone what they witnessed?

\*There is major debate on where the book of Mark actually ends. Many Christians believe that the book ends at verse 8. Others believe that a longer ending was included. There is some evidence for both views but either way no major doctrine stands or falls on whether Mark ends at verse 8 or has a longer ending (See *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: Four Views*, Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2008).

### Application Questions

1. Why is fear such a powerful motivator in life?
2. What is the opposite of fear in the Bible?
3. What fears do you have that keep you from being the kind of disciples you would want to be?
4. How does the resurrection overcome our fears?
5. How can you grow in your faith *together* as a group?

# Devotional Readings

## Read

There are five readings for each week. As you read each passage, think about these two questions: 1. What does this passage teach me about the *person* of Jesus?

2. What does this passage teach me about the *work* of Jesus?

- Matthew 28:1-20
- Luke 24:1-12
- Luke 24:13-35
- Luke 24:36-52
- John 20:31

## PRAY

Eternal God, You have promised us a resurrection. Therefore what life is sufficient, what length of ages will be long enough, for us to be thankful? You have delivered us from error and ignorance; You have sent Christ among men as a man, being the only begotten God; You have made the Comforter to inhabit among us; You have set angels over us; You have put the devil to shame; You have brought us into being when we were not; You take care of us when made; You measure out life to us; You give us food; You have promised repentance. Glory and worship be to You for all these things, through Jesus Christ, now and forever, and through all ages. Amen.

—Adapted from Apostolic Constitutions.

## LIVE

Invite someone to come to church with you for Easter. Spend the week leading up to church praying. Include others in your group in praying for that person(s).



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