



**30 DAYS WITH**

the Gospel of

**MARK**

**A toolkit for you and your church**

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# Introduction to Bible Month

This booklet, *30 days with Mark*, is part of a series to help you and your church focus on one book of the Bible in any one month. It's genius for developing biblical literacy! Everyone in your community can have a copy and dig deep into one book of the Bible, at the same time.

Bible passages form the basis of four weekly Bible notes to guide your sermons; four sets of small group resources so every home group can join in; and four sets of youth and children's activities. A reflection and further resources add different ways into the text.

Ministers, worship leaders and preachers of all denominations find these resources invaluable in deepening understanding of scripture, building church cohesion, and in outreach for sharing the word of God. Whether at home with small children or living with infirmity or disability, everyone can have a copy of the Bible Month booklet and relate to what is happening in your main church service, either joining online or in a different meeting or by individual study.

The booklet is the primary resource for equipping people to join Bible Month and

can be a catalyst for personal thinking and prayer. Online resources include: author videos exploring more about the Bible book and its context, training events and videos on how to run Bible Month. You can order the booklets and follow video links at [www.preachweb.org.uk/biblemonth](http://www.preachweb.org.uk/biblemonth)

*Bible Month resources are produced as a partnership between the Methodist Church ([www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk)) and Preach/LWPT (Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust [www.lwpt.org.uk](http://www.lwpt.org.uk)).*

# Introduction to Mark

Kent Brower

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## Is there more to Mark's gospel than we might think?

Stories about Jesus - that's probably why many of us read the gospels. And that's a good reason. The gospels focus relentlessly on Jesus and his disciples. Children, of course, love the stories, especially those told by Jesus. They are wonderful for teaching moral truths. But, we can often instinctively turn to the epistles for our 'theology'. I wonder if this is a loss?

The gospels are rich. They provide four portraits of Jesus, far from identical, but clearly recognisably about Jesus. The Jesus story is not just an interesting tale; the gospel writers have a conviction about who Jesus is and what that means for their readers. One person put it this way: the gospels are written to tell us 'what was going on in what happened' (John Marsh, *The Gospel of St. John*, Penguin 1968, 20). Thus, each evangelist is an author, telling the story of Jesus and conveying their profound convictions about Jesus' identity and mission, and the place of Jesus' followers in that mission.

To understand Mark, we need to be aware of two things about context. First, Jesus' ministry is conducted in an occupied land, subdued and pacified by the Romans. Mark's readers too, live under the shadow of the Empire. Most of its people do not have the privilege of citizenship. A significant minority are slaves and many exist in poverty. The imperial cult dominates the religious scene: religion and politics are inseparable.

Second, for Jews the collective memory of exile and of a restoration that didn't turn out quite as expected, is rarely far from the surface. There are occasional signs of hope, but memories of the revolt of the Maccabees, which had provided a momentary glimpse of hope, are fading. Many people are just getting on with life. Others long for the day when, once again, God would dwell in the midst of his people.

Mark's gospel seems deceptively simple. It starts at the beginning of Jesus' ministry - no birth stories as in Matthew and Luke, no 'in-the-beginning' line like John. It runs, at pace, through the ministry of Jesus, which, we would guess from this gospel, lasts about a year, before Jesus is caught up in the collaboration between the religious elite and the imperial power and ends up with Jesus hanging on a Roman cross.

Of course, Mark doesn't end there - the empty tomb confirms Mark's conviction that Jesus has been raised from the dead.

## Who was the author?

So, who is Mark? The name Mark (or John Mark) occurs in Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 1:24; 2 Timothy 4:11; and 1 Peter 5:13. But nothing indicates that this Mark is the evangelist who wrote the gospel. Limited help comes from early church tradition. Eusebius (4th century) cites Papias, a 2nd century bishop, as saying that 'Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered...' (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.15). And Clement of Alexandria (late 2nd century) is quoted as writing, 'As Peter had preached the Word publicly at Rome... many... requested that Mark... should write them out' (*Hist. Eccl.* 6.14.5-7). This is the basis of the popular view that the John Mark of Acts wrote in Rome for the Christians there.

This evidence is often contested. Still, the Papias tradition makes the connection between Mark and Peter likely if not provable. If so, it helps explain why Mark's gospel survived. Scholars are less confident about Rome as either the place of writing or the destination of the text. A wider readership in the Graeco-Roman world is more likely. At best details are sketchy. But does this matter? Probably less than we think, at least for reading and understanding this astonishing document.

## A biased account

So how shall we read Mark?

First, a word about the text itself. The date of writing is difficult to determine. Most scholars place it between AD 60 and 70. The arguments are complex, the evidence is slender and there are many opinions, but a date just before the destruction of the temple (AD 70) is plausible. Two textual issues arise. In Mark 1:1, some ancient manuscripts do not have the phrase 'Son of God'. Also, Mark 16:9-20 is probably not the original ending of Mark. You will find more information in Bible commentaries (see Further Resources, page 22).

Second, despite Clement's comment, we really don't know where the text is composed. Mark seems to assume that at least some of his readers do not have detailed knowledge of Judaism. That locates Mark and his audience within the Empire in which Christians were a tiny but growing minority who were often at risk from various levels of persecution. Mark is probably in regular contact with many others who were part of the growing movement of people spreading the 'good news' across the Empire. Perhaps he himself has experienced persecution.

Third, this is the work of a highly-skilled writer. Whatever its source, Mark is responsible for its content and shape. He collected, selected and omitted material. He carefully crafted the narrative, using available literary techniques such as sequence, bracketing, and insertions. His writing is fast-paced, with a favourite word 'immediately' (often ignored in our English translations) taking us almost breathtakingly from one scene to another.

Fourth, this is a completely biased account. Mark is a committed believer who thinks that the accounts of Jesus' life actually happened in Galilee and Judea - this is no pious fiction. But his interest is much more on the significance of the events.

Finally, this text is soaked with echoes, allusions, themes, and quotations from the Old Testament. Indeed, the story of Jesus makes sense out of Mark's scriptures. Mark knows the big stories of exodus and exile and is able to cite scripture and weave it into the way he tells the Jesus story. He believes that this is the story of God and that Jesus is the fulfilment of God's rescue plan for his entire created order.

Mark's gospel then, is crafted in such a way as to lead readers inexorably to the conclusion that Jesus is the Son of God, and never more so than at the crucifixion. Through the skill of this master storyteller, readers then and now see Jesus. And in doing so, this story becomes the word of God illuminating and revealing the Word of God. It is inspired and inspiring.

*Bible references are from NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) and Kent Brower's translation. For further detail on this introduction and the following preaching notes, please see K E Brower, Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition (New Beacon Bible Commentary; Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2012). Sections of these Bible notes are revised and abridged from the commentary.*

## WEEK 1

# Mark 1:1 – 3:35 Identity and Mission



Kent Brower

When Mark writes 'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Messiah, Son of God', it resonates with the hopes and fears of his readers, and especially as the contours of Jesus' identity and mission of God emerge. In these chapters, Mark establishes Jesus' identity and mission, and that of his followers.

### Who is this person?

Mark's opening in 1:1 is brilliant. Each aspect of the identity of the main character is important. 'Jesus' is a common name, but Mark intends readers to hear from the start that this Jesus is the Messiah. Except, Jesus' messiahship is different from the kind of messiah that people expected. But there is more. Despite textual and grammatical issues, the phrase 'S/son of God' should be included and translated as 'Son of God'. 'Son of God' is a Markan theme (1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 13:32; 14:61; 15:39). Mark's message is clear: this is the good news about Jesus Messiah, Son of God.

Mark's opening identification is then immediately and dramatically confirmed in 1:9-11. Jesus sees heaven being torn

open and the descent of the Spirit. The word echoes Isaiah 64:1: 'Oh, that you would rend the heaven'. The same word in 15:38 describes the tearing of the temple veil. The climax is the voice. This is the voice of God and Jesus alone hears it. This is important. While readers know who Jesus is and are privileged to hear the voice, Jesus' full identity is only gradually disclosed to others. The words, 'you are the beloved son' (1:11) also echo scripture. They confirm, on divine authority, that Jesus is the Messiah who is the Son of God. Jesus is also the servant from Isaiah's prophecy, suffering on behalf of his people. This combination of Messiah and Servant is rich. It embodies the role of suffering figures in the Old Testament in their God-given mission. This prefigures the direction for Jesus' mission.

Ironically, those who ought to know Jesus' identity don't! In 1:24, his identity is disclosed by an unlikely witness: a demon. Mark considers this to be reliable, even if antagonistic. Demons know. When the unclean spirit sees Jesus, he identifies him: 'I know who you are - the Holy One of God!' Significantly, the

disciples hear this. They now know who Jesus is even if they struggle to know what it means. Other exorcisms occur but with few details (except for 9:14-29). Exorcisms signal that the opposition to God is cosmic in scope. Still, the demons always confess that Jesus is the Son of God and the victor. This identity is precisely what Mark wishes his readers to remember.

In 2:1-12 Jesus forgives the paralytic's sins, then heals him. The religious elite are outraged: 'who can forgive sins except God alone?' Jesus' response is telling. The healing confirms that he has that authority. Once again, ironically, Jesus' opponents offer a true confession. Yes - forgiveness of sins is God's prerogative. Jesus forgives this man's sins. The conclusion is evident.

A key disclosure comes in 3:13-14 when Jesus calls and names twelve apostles. Images of Exodus 24:9-11, when God calls Moses and the leaders to come to him, emerge. Jesus calls his leaders and sends them as apostles. Some might have seen Jesus as God's human agent, as if Son of God were simply a royal or

representative figure. But here, the Holy One is on the mountain in the midst of the people, pushing readers ever closer to recognising Jesus' participation in the divine identity.

### PREACHING POINT

Who is Jesus to the people you live and work with?  
What is your testimony about who Jesus is?

## What is his Mission?

Right from the start 1:1 identity and mission go together. Mark uses the same words that open Genesis 1:1 to imply a new beginning for humanity and the created order. It also echoes Isaiah 43:19, where God announces the new thing - the return from exile. Links to Isaiah continue. In Isaiah 52:7, the proclaimers of the 'good news' announce peace, salvation, and God's reign. God's redemptive activity in Jesus Messiah is underway. Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord.

This is God's mission - the voice from heaven is well pleased (1:11). Jesus Messiah, Son of God, the bearer of the Spirit hears the voice confirming his mission. There is almost a sense of listening in on an inner conversation of the Holy Trinity.

John has already called the people to turn from their current direction and be renewed. Now, in 1:14-15, Jesus appears in Galilee announcing God's reign in

strength. The time of waiting has now been fulfilled. God's decisive action is no longer just a distant hope; nor has it fully arrived. Rather, God is now accomplishing his good purposes in and through Jesus Messiah.

Two other stories illustrate the good news in action. In 1:40-45, the leper is cleansed and restored to community. We see Jesus' compassion and anger at the disfigurement of human community caused by exclusion on grounds of impurity. In 2:16-17, Jesus calls a despised tax-collector to follow him and then dines with him and his friends. The Pharisees object: they define holiness as separation from impurity. But Jesus eats with sinners. The significance of that can hardly be exaggerated. The broken and lost who repent and believe are transformed into God's holy people by the very presence of the Holy One.

### PREACHING POINT

Mark's good news: in your experience, what two stories might best illustrate the good news in action today?

## Who are his followers?

The identity of Jesus' followers confirms the scope of God's mission. First, in 1:5, Mark notes the nation-wide impact of John's baptism. This was the preparation of a people for the coming one - whom the voice in the wilderness has already identified as Jesus fulfilling the role of Yahweh. Once Jesus announces the good news (1:13-15), he calls the first disciples.

The mission of God is fulfilled through Jesus and the people of God.

The calling of such a disparate collection of people - fishers (1:16-20) and tax-collectors (2:13-14) - is followed by the naming of the apostles (3:13-19). 'Twelve' evokes the memory of pre-exilic Israel, so Jesus is creating the (re)new(ed) people of God. They are equipped for mission, but, significantly, they are to 'be with him'.

The diversity of the group around Jesus is given a further emphasis in 3:31-35. Ever since the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, blood-line purity was central to Jewish identity. But Jesus, looking at those who sat around him, defies this boundary with the simple statement - 'whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother'.

Mark's readers - women, men, Jews, Gentiles - would have known that the definition of God's people rested solely on participation in the proclamation and effecting of God's rule. People are invited to join the project and become what God intended, 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exodus 19:6). 'Repent and believe': change direction from self-centredness or self-absorption towards God's big purposes. The call is answered both corporately and personally.

### PREACHING POINT

What does it mean for us 'to be with him' (Mark 3:14) so that we can be equipped for mission?

# Small Group Resource

## Mark 2:1-12 Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralysed Man

Michael Parsons

### An Ignatian approach

An Ignatian approach to engagement with scripture encourages us to use our sanctified imaginations and invites us to place ourselves into the scriptural stories of Jesus - primarily, stories of his activity, rather than his teaching.

This method of entering into the text of scripture encourages us to be open to what we find there, to be attentive to details (taste, sight, smell, sound and feeling, and what is going on in the event), to encounter Jesus and ultimately to know Jesus more intimately, present with us.

The story of Jesus healing the paralysed man is perfect for this engagement. It has clearly drawn characters (Jesus himself; the paralysed man and his friends, the crowd, the teachers of the law), lots of detail (the crowdedness, the roof being dug through, the cynicism, the amazement) and so there are many implications for the use of our senses.

### Approaching the text

- Pray that the Lord would quieten everyone in the group and give peace to begin this exercise. As much as you can, be determined to encounter the Lord.
- Read the passage (Mark 2:1-12) two or three times slowly out loud, taking in the whole of the story together with the details. It might be useful to have one or two different people read the passage out loud.
- As you read the passage: allow the story to become familiar to you. Is there something that stands out for you?
- Close your eyes, if that helps, and try to picture the scene. Through your imagination, place yourself there with Jesus on that day.
  - Where does the scene take place?
  - Who is there in the scene?
  - What is Jesus doing?
  - What is he saying?
  - What are the sights, sounds, smells?
  - What can you touch and feel?
  - Which character are you - part of the crowd, a disciple, the paralysed man, one of his friends, a teacher of the law, someone else waiting to be healed?
- Participate as fully as possible in the scene; interact with the other characters and with Jesus himself.
- Afterwards, speak to the group, telling them frankly how this exercise made you feel, and listen to others' experiences.
- Reread the passage slowly out loud in the group. Discuss whether this form of engagement with the biblical passage added to your spiritual understanding of it.
- Close in prayer.

### Further Reading

Michael Parsons, *How to Read the Bible so that it makes a difference* (BRF, 2020), pp. 68-72. The Ignatian approach is one of several approaches readers are invited to try.



# Children, Young People and All Generations

## Mark Chapters 1 – 4

Methodist Children, Youth and Family Layworker Writing Team



When might it be good to stand out from the crowd?

### TRADITIONS

Mark 2:23-28

Points to ponder:

- What traditions have you grown up with? Are any unusual or quirky?
- Gather people of different ages from your family or congregation and talk about traditions that have changed.
- What traditions have we lost and miss?

Activity:

- **Lolly sticks at dinner**

Enjoy a family meal together, perhaps you could all cook a different dish to share. Bring a pot of lolly sticks and pens. At the start of the meal, ask each person to write a question on one stick, put all the sticks back in the pot. Throughout the meal each person takes a stick, reads out the question and answers it. You could take it in turns to answer and have a discussion about your findings.

### IDENTITY

Mark 3:13-20, 3:17, 3:28-30, 4:35-41

Points to ponder:

- How did Jesus act in ways that were unexpected or counter-cultural?
- In Mark 1-8, we see Jesus healing people, showing compassion but repeatedly telling them to keep quiet. In the book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Dumbledore says, 'What happened ... is a complete secret, so naturally the whole school knows.' How does this reflect what happens in the healings of Jesus?
- How are the crowds (mentioned many times) similar to experiences of social media (going viral)?
- Where is God calling us to stand out from the crowd?

Activity:

- **Me and Jesus**

Listen to 'This is me', a song from the film *The Greatest Showman* (on Spotify or YouTube). Does a particular lyric resonate with you? If you were to re-write these verses about Jesus, what would you include?

Offer a range of art materials and invite everyone to express how they see Jesus. Create a gallery of unique pieces of art.

### AUTHENTIC LIVING

Mark 1:1-8, 1:35-39, 4:21-25, 1:40-45

Points to ponder:

- Why did Jesus go to pray by himself?
- Why couldn't the man who was healed keep this to himself?
- Think about the posts and images you share on social media, what 'message' might other people think you're sending?
- How much do you think those you follow set a good example?
- How easy is it to talk about faith or share what you believe on social media?

Activity:

- **To share or not to share?**

Imagine a continuum between 'public/tell everyone' at one end and 'private/keep to myself' at the other. Write a few statements (keep in mind the age of your group) such as 'what I ate for breakfast', 'winning a competition', 'a pet has died', 'a disagreement at home' and ask the group to stand on the line to show how comfortable they are to share that information. How do we decide what should be public or private? What do we share with God? Why is God safe to share with?

### PRAYER

Collect a 'crowd' of different pictures or toys or pegs. What might each different person say, to each other, and to God? We are all part of the human race and though we experience things differently, we are still called to love one another.

*Lord, thank you that we are all wonderfully and uniquely made, help us to recognise and celebrate not only our differences, but the things we have in common. Help us to know when to stand out from the crowd, when to speak out, and give us the grace to listen when we need to, too. Amen*



Facebook/WhatsApp/Zoom

Closed groups on Facebook (age 13+) or WhatsApp (age 16+) or Zoom could provide places to share questions, ideas and comments. (NB Check guardian consent.)

## WEEK 2

# Mark 4:1 – 8:21 Mission and Boundaries



Kent Brower

Last week we left off with Jesus identifying his true family. Jesus encounters opposition from the beginning. Ironically, that includes Pharisees and interpreters of the law. They accuse Jesus of being the enemy of God (2:6; 3:22). Even his family are 'standing outside' (3:31). Meanwhile, outsiders like Levi are now around Jesus (2:14). This week picks up three threads: hardness of heart, identity miracles, and purity.

### Hardness of heart

Mark's first parable (4:1-9) comes after that scene. The Sunday school description of parables as 'earthly stories with heavenly meanings' hardly fits. Jesus' parables often have surprise endings. This one certainly does: a crop yielding one-hundred times its input? Hmmm!

In this story, when some seeds neither germinate nor thrive, the problem is the soil. The types of soil represent Jesus' hearers. Some welcome the kingdom and follow. Others start but move away. But then comes the tricky bit. In 4:11-12, Jesus tells his followers that the parables are intended to obscure rather than reveal. On its own, 4:12 is particularly bleak. Is there no hope for outsiders (see 3:29)? Or, to put it another way, is the intention of Jesus' teaching to drive people away or its consequence?

Mark cites Isaiah 6:9-10. From Isaiah 1-5, God repeatedly invites Israel to return to him. They refuse. The consequence is that they can no longer hear. The situation is the same. Jesus invites but some refuse. Failure to follow is the result of Jesus' mission, not its purpose. And hardness of heart is the tragic consequence. Crucially, later Mark applies 'hardness-of-heart' language to

the disciples (5:52; 8:17) which gives us a hint that hardness is not irreversible.

### PREACHING POINT

In what ways might we refuse God's invitation?

### The miracles of identity

In Mark, Jesus makes several journeys across the Sea of Galilee. Each gives further insight into Jesus' mission and identity. In 4:35-41, the disciples are terrified by a massive storm. We can imagine them feverishly bailing water and desperately in need of help. Jesus, meanwhile, is asleep! When he is woken, he speaks to the wind and waves: 'Quiet! Be still!' and the storm ceases. In the first exorcism, Jesus rebukes the demon (1:25); here he rebukes the storm (4:39) and silences both. Then Jesus asks, 'why are you afraid?' The answer is obvious: 'because we were drowning'. But Mark's point is different. In scripture, God's mastery of the sea is celebrated (see Exodus 14:21-31, Psalms 44:23; 65:7; 107:28-29). Here Jesus exercises the same authority and power as Yahweh. Like the crowd in 1:27, they are in awe.

A second sea crossing concludes 6:30-52. After their successful mission (6:7-13), the disciples need rest (6:31-32). However, the crowd, described as sheep without a shepherd (see Ezekiel 34) finds them with Jesus. So he teaches them, and as the time stretches, the disciples wish to disperse the crowd to feed themselves.

Jesus tells the disciples to feed them. Seriously? They are incredulous. Their meagre supplies (6:38) are laughable.

Then Jesus takes charge. The disciples must organise the five thousand men into groups. Jesus blesses the food and the disciples distribute it. Jesus exercises God's compassion for the hungry and the leaderless. Tellingly, the disciples deliver the direct care that Jesus ultimately provides. All eat and are satisfied with twelve basketfuls left over (6:42-43). These men represent scattered Israel. There is enough for all.

Militaristic overtones lurk but this is not Mark's point. Jesus deliberately dismisses the disciples before the crowds (6:45). According to John 6:15, Jesus leaves because they want to make him king. So Jesus gets the disciples out of the situation and then goes to pray (6:46). Perhaps both the crowd and the disciples misunderstand.

The sequence ends with Jesus walking on the water. The disciples are not in danger. This is another story about identity and incomprehension. To be fair, people don't walk on water. But the disciples have just participated in the miraculous feeding and nothing should surprise them. They just have not yet grasped the significance of the events in which they have participated. Their hearts are hardened (6:52).

### PREACHING POINT

How often do we miss the full significance of Jesus? Should we find ourselves amazed sometimes?

### Impurity and contagious holiness

Three episodes addressing purity/impurity round out this chapter.

The exorcism of Legion from an unnamed Gentile (5:1-20) occurs in a remorselessly impure setting: death, blood, unclean spirits, swine, Gentiles. His condition is grim. This is no place for a holy Jewish man like Jesus. In another failed attempt to control Jesus, Legion identifies Jesus as Son of the Most High God (5:7). Like 1:24, this is a true confession. Jesus, who came specifically to liberate this one marginalised man, exorcises the demons. They enter the pigs, destroying their hosts by plunging into the sea (5:13). Those who witness these events are in fear so they ask Jesus to leave their town. The liberated man wants to join Jesus, but he is to proclaim the good news at home.

Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, deliberately crosses over into Gentile territory in the worst imaginable conditions and shows that the liberating gospel is also for Gentiles. This excluded person is restored to community, clothed and in his right mind (5:15). The massed opposition to God's reign symbolised by Legion (could this name be heard

without also hearing a reference to Roman imperial power?) is no match for Jesus. The holiness of the holy One of God is not compromised by his engagement with evil at its very heart. Significantly, when Jesus returns, the sea is calm (5:21).

Jesus moves from the liberation of a demonised Gentile to responding to the pleas of a pious synagogue leader, Jairus, whose daughter is desperately ill (5:21-24; 35-43). Mark weaves this story together with the healing of a woman (5:25-34). Both females are ritually impure. The woman with a twelve-year-long gynaecological disorder (5:25) is healed from her dire condition; her impurity is gone; her isolation, over. Jesus ignores conventional boundaries by speaking to her in public and calling her daughter (5:34); she is transformed by Jesus' power and welcomed into God's family. Meanwhile, the twelve-year-old girl has died. Jesus takes her by the hand and raises her up, ignoring the fact that touching a corpse conveys impurity. The Pharisees question the

lax purity observance of Jesus and his disciples (7:1-5). Jesus roundly criticises them, showing that they miss the heart of the Mosaic Law. In fact, the source of impurity is within people and that precipitates community-destructive practices. The specific example is food (7:18-19). Food does not contaminate. This may seem somewhat trivial for us, but the statement in 7:19 reflects controversy in the early church (see Romans 14).

Mark's emphasis here is on Jesus' contagious holiness. Three distinct sources of impurity do not make Jesus impure. His purity is not compromised by his mission. Nor is ours. The lesson is clear. Holiness is not a thing to be protected but a relationship with the holy One to be shared on his mission.

#### PREACHING POINT

What might contagious holiness in impure contexts mean for us today?

# Small Group Resource

## Mark 6:45-56 Jesus Walks on the Water

Michael Parsons

### Martin Luther's approach

The reformer, Martin Luther, invited those who desire a deeper engagement with scripture to look at biblical passages with four basic things in mind: instruction, thanksgiving, confession and supplication. These four aspects, taken together, help form strong faith and prayer.

What Luther offers is a form of *lectio divina* or 'godly reading' - a deliberate, thoughtful and prayerful reading of a Bible passage with openness to and expectancy of God speaking through it.

It's important that we see the short list above as applying directly to ourselves as we read the passage. We can ensure this by turning the strands into pointed questions:

- Instruction, or teaching: what is the Lord seeking to teach me from this passage?
- Thanksgiving, or grateful praise: what should I be grateful for on reading this portion of scripture?
- Confession, or repentance: how does this passage impinge on my conscience, and what in it encourages me to confess particular sins?
- Supplication, or prayer: what do I now need to pray for, to cry out to God for?

### Approaching the text

- Begin with prayer for God's assistance. It's important that we rely on the Holy Spirit and be open to what he wants from this.
- Read the passage (Mark 6:45-56) thoughtfully out loud two or three times. It might be useful to have one or two different people read the passage out loud.
- Think out loud together. Brainstorm the passage: what are the main themes, who are the main characters, how do they interact, what is their situation, what is it telling us to believe and do?
- Keep God or Jesus as central, not self. It's tempting to rush to comment on the disciples here; but look first at Jesus. What does it tell us of him? Then, look at the disciples' reaction and, later, the crowd's reaction.
- Consider, individually and as a group, the four strands. Discuss these together with openness to the Lord.
  - Instruction: what does God want us to know?
  - Thanksgiving: what in this story makes us grateful to the Lord?
  - Confession: what encourages me to repent?
  - Supplication: how does this passage encourage me to pray?
- Conclude with prayer. Try to relate prayers to what you've been speaking about together.
- Wait on the Lord. Anticipate that he'll speak to you as individuals or as a group through that meditation on the Bible text.

### Further Reading

Michael Parsons, *Praying the Bible with Luther: A simple approach to everyday prayer* (BRF, 2017). This book introduces Luther's approach and invites readers to practice it as individuals or in groups.



# Children, Young People and All Generations

## Mark Chapters 5 – 8

Methodist Children, Youth and Family Layworker Writing Team



### What does it mean to be called and chosen?

#### TRADITIONS

Mark 7:1-23

##### Points to ponder:

- What can make us messy on the outside?
- In what ways can we be messy on the inside? Perhaps in our hearts and minds?
- Jesus says, 'What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them' (Mark 7:15). What does he mean?

##### Activity:

###### Messy hands

Gather the children and young people into a group. Have different bowls of messy foods e.g. jelly, chocolate spread, yoghurt, jam (note any food allergies, avoid nuts, and note coronavirus guidelines). Each person can put one hand into a bowl of food. When everyone has a messy hand, they can go around the rest of the group and shake hands. Once the whole group has shaken hands, they can wash them!

How did it feel to shake hands with sticky food and mix it up? A bit silly and fun. Was it a good way to share an experience? Whichever food we choose, it is provided by God. God's relationship with us can be expressed and understood in different ways too. We are invited to share our different experiences and tell our friends about God, spreading the good news.

#### IDENTITY

Mark 5:1-20, 5:25-34, 6:1-6, 6:7-13

##### Points to ponder:

- How were the disciples like apprentices?
- How did Jesus make the disciples aware of the mission they were part of?
- What and where do you think your mission might be? What might you take with you?
- How does our identity change as we draw closer to Jesus?

##### Activity:

###### Friendship with Jesus

Listen to the song 'You've got a friend in me' from the film Toy Story (try Spotify or YouTube). Which part of the song do you especially like? What qualities make a good friend? What is it about Jesus that makes him a good friend?

#### AUTHENTIC LIVING

Mark 5:21-43, 6:30-44

##### Points to ponder:

- When have you found yourself part of a large crowd? How did it feel?
- What was it like for the woman in the crowd trying to find Jesus?
- How might the disciples have felt when they only had five loaves and two fish to feed 5,000 people?

##### Activity:

###### Junk Builds

Collect items for junk modelling such as cereal packets, egg boxes, yogurt pots, milk cartons and kitchen rolls. Ensure they're clean and without sharp edges. Provide sellotape, glue, scissors and string. Divide the group into smaller teams and explain that they're going to build the tallest possible tower, but with a catch! Give the teams five minutes to get started and then move them on to work on the next model. Explain that we need to work with one another not against each other in order to build the tallest one. Prepare a small reward for the whole group, showing that it was cooperation not competition that made the task succeed. Enjoy measuring the different towers and noticing the ingenious ways everyone worked.

#### PRAYER

Sometimes we forget what God says about us, and that we are called and chosen by him. Like the disciples, sometimes we get it wrong. At these times it is important to draw closer to God. A symbolic act could be washing your hands to say sorry for forgetting our true identity. As the water flows over your hands, pray that God will re-fill you with his love.

*Lord, sorry for the times we get it wrong, please draw near to us and fill us with your love and joy again, that we may know our true calling and mission, and find our rest in you. Amen.*



## WEEK 3

# Mark 8:22 – 10:52 On the Way



Kent Brower

Last week we saw how Jesus' mission breaks boundaries to help marginalised individuals and vast crowds. Jesus has compassion. We didn't have space to consider the last feeding (8:10) and Jesus' warning about the yeast of the Pharisees (8:11-13), who are seeking a sign from heaven but miss the point of Jesus' feedings entirely. But so, apparently, have the disciples, as we see on the boat ride with them (8:14-21). Suffice it to say that Jesus asks them the pointed questions of an exasperated teacher (8:21).

### 'Open our eyes Lord'

The next story is of a two-stage restoration of sight (8:22-26). Its narrative location and its unique features compel us to ask, 'Why has Mark included it here?' The contrast of the blindness of the disciples (8:18) with the restoration of sight to this nameless person is clear. Then Mark puts Jesus and his disciples in Caesarea Philippi (8:27), the northernmost extent of Jesus' mission. From there, Jesus begins his journey to Jerusalem via Jericho, where he restores sight to Bartimaeus. So two healing stories bracket the geographical journey during which Jesus is teaching his disciples. But why two stages? Explanations abound, but the most convincing relate to the journey itself. This healing foreshadows the theological journey that the disciples are taking during which their eyes should gradually be opened. Crucially, the first stage of this restoration of sight comes with the watershed confession of Peter. Jesus presses his followers to tell them who he is - and Peter responds, 'You are the Messiah' (8:29). The penny has finally dropped, and they now know who he is! So, all is well, then?

Well, not quite. They now know who Jesus is, but they don't really know what it means for him or, for that matter, for themselves. Jesus forbids them to whisper this identity, almost certainly because it would be misunderstood (8:30). Then he elaborates: he is a Son-of-Man-must-suffer kind of Messiah (8:31). This is unacceptable to Peter and the rest. Peter rebukes Jesus who in turn says their thoughts are human solutions, not divine (8:33). In fact, Jesus repeats this identity and destiny twice more on the journey (9:31; 10:33-34). He makes it clear, both to the disciples and the crowds (8:34), that any who wish to be his followers must take up a cross, even lose their lives for his sake and the gospel. So, yes, they know who Jesus is, but their eyes still do not see clearly.

### PREACHING POINT

What does Mark want us to learn from his portrayal of the disciples?

### Lessons to be learned

The second occurrence of the voice from heaven follows. This time, the voice is not for Jesus but for Peter, James and John (9:2). Jesus has just finished talking about cross-bearing discipleship and the disciples have resisted Jesus' suffering messiahship. So these words are almost a warning: 'This is my beloved son. Listen to him' (9:7). Jesus' destiny and the path of discipleship is the divine purpose.

The reality of a botched exorcism faces Jesus when they descend from the mountain. The previously successful disciples (6:13) are unable to exorcise the demon. Jesus does, and the disciples

wonder why they couldn't. Jesus' response is telling - exorcism can only be achieved through prayer (9:29), that is, in connection with God. It is a sharp reminder that they are not independently empowered exorcists. Like their holiness, their authority is utterly dependent upon connection to the divine source.

The journey to Jerusalem continues with lessons along the way. Jesus repeats his destiny and the disciples continue to follow but fail to understand and are afraid to ask (9:30-32), perhaps because they are arguing about which one of them is greatest in the kingdom (9:33). They are not getting it yet. In the kingdom worldly hierarchies are upside down - first is last and last is first (9:35), illustrated by the welcoming of a child. Repeated teaching on true greatness is required.

As they come closer to Jericho, Mark brings three stories together. The first draws Jesus into the culturally-live discussion about divorce. One strand of interpretation of the Mosaic Law favoured easy divorce, the other did not. Jesus cuts through the debate by acknowledging the brokenness of people (10:5), and then reminding them of the intention of God from the beginning (10:6). Marriage is to be the prime example of trusting and generous relationality between humans. Jesus takes the more conservative interpretation of the Law but in his private teaching strips away male privilege by placing women on the same footing as men (10:11-12).

The second story is the poignant blessing of children. Once again, his welcome of children, who had no status or power, and his statement that the kingdom can only be received as a child, is a challenge to the disciples (10:15), as we shall see.

**PREACHING POINT**

There are more challenges for disciples beyond responding to Jesus' initial call. What challenges does Jesus put to us?

**Turning things upside down**

The story of a rich man described in glowing terms, even to the point where Jesus loved him (10:21), addresses the vexed problem of possessions. This person sounds like the ideal disciple - observant and wealthy (blessed by God for his obedience). No wonder the disciples wonder if Jesus makes a serious mistake: if he can't enter the kingdom, then who? Jesus' response about wealth is pointed. It seems he says that the wealthy can be saved but only by

caring for the marginalised. That choice is impossible: only God can transform the heart of the rich from acquisition to compassion (10:27). The disciples, who have left all (1:20; 10:28), are a bit self-satisfied. Jesus acknowledges their commitment, promising the incomparable riches of the kingdom - along with persecution, of course (10:29-30)!

The placement of the next story heightens its shock. Just after Jesus' most intensive teaching on discipleship and his destiny (10:31-34), the Zebedee brothers come with a request. They want first and second status in the kingdom. Where have they been? Remember, they heard the voice speak to them (9:2). Jesus' response is not quite what they want (10:39-40). The other disciples are angry (10:41) although hardly for any reason other than jealousy. So

Jesus takes all of them aside and tells them that the relationship amongst his followers is the opposite of secular social climbing. They are to be servants - and he is the servant of all.

At that point, they reach Jericho where Bartimaeus cries out for help. Jesus asks him the same question as he asked James and John (10:36, 51). They want power and prestige; Bartimaeus wants to see. Jesus restores his sight and Bartimaeus follows Jesus on the way.

What a journey! Jesus' destiny is clearer as is the disciples' calling. But lessons still have to be learned, as we shall see.

**PREACHING POINT**

Where might Jesus aim to turn our expectations down?

# Small Group Resource

## Week 3 Mark 9:2-13 The Transfiguration

Michael Parsons

### The big idea

By the beginning of Mark 9, we've come far enough through the gospel to know something of how Mark presents Jesus to us - Jesus from below, from the disciples' lived experience (unlike, John's gospel, which presents Jesus from above, from the perspective of 'the Word made flesh'). The transfiguration is something of a climax in Mark's gospel. By looking for the big idea we can try to discern how this passage adds to Mark's revelation of Jesus.

In working out the big idea of a biblical passage we might imagine that we're trying to convey to someone the overall message - not a detailed rundown of everything in it, just the big idea. That doesn't mean we ignore the details - far from it! But in this exercise, we don't want to lose sight of the wood for the trees. This is an excellent group approach for getting into the message of a biblical passage like this one.

### Approaching the text

- Pray together that the Lord would open your eyes to the passage and to what he wants to teach you from it.
- Read the passage slowly and thoughtfully together out loud two or three times. It might be useful to have one or two different people read the passage out loud.
- Think out loud together. Brainstorm the passage: who are the main characters, where does the event take place, why does Peter talk about 'shelters', what does God say about Jesus, why does Jesus go on to speak about suffering?
- Discuss the details of the passage, for example:
  - Why do Jesus and the disciples go up a high mountain? What does a mountain remind you of; where have you seen this before in scripture?
  - What do Jesus' dazzling white clothes remind you of?
  - Why Elijah and Moses?
  - God speaks: 'This is my Son'. Are there any other Bible texts that speak like this about a) Israel, b) the king of Israel?
  - What suffering is Jesus referring to at the end?
- Talk together about what these details add up to in the big picture. Where do they take our thinking?
- Each member of the group could now write down in one sentence what they think the big idea of the passage is: 'This passage tells us that (or about)...'
- Discuss together the different ideas presented, not to work out 'the best' but to consider all the options in light of the biblical passage - a conversation about different perspectives.
- Read the passage again slowly with the participants' sentences in mind.
- Conclude with prayer. Try to relate prayers to what you've just been speaking about together.

### Further Reading

Michael Parsons, *How to Read the Bible so that it makes a difference* (BRF, 2020), pp. 102-109.



# Children, Young People and All Generations

## Mark Chapters 9 – 12

Methodist Children, Youth and Family Layworker Writing Team



### How can I love my neighbour?

#### TRADITIONS

##### Mark 10:11

##### Points to ponder:

- Has divorce impacted on your family or your wider circle of friends?
- What does the word 'family' mean to you?
- What do you think Jesus would say about divorce today?
- How are the problems that families face today, different to those in Jesus' time?

##### Activity:

- **Sweet family**  
Take a packet of jelly babies and give each person a plate. In turns, take a jelly baby to represent each person in your family and lay them out on the plate. The 'family' can include people you are not biologically related to but who you are close to. Talk to the person next to you about their family and your family. Why is each person there? What does family mean? Think of some important families in the Bible.

#### IDENTITY

##### Mark 10:13-16

##### Points to ponder:

- Can you think of a time when you felt really welcomed?
- Who does Jesus welcome? What does that welcome look like?
- Talk about how the children in the passage felt when they were welcomed.
- What might the crowd have thought when they saw Jesus welcome the children?
- How can we show and share God's love today?

##### Activity:

- **Everyone fits in here!**  
Give each member of the group a piece from a blank jigsaw. Encourage them to decorate it by colouring and sticking on features such as googly eyes. When everyone has finished, ask the group to work together to complete the jigsaw. All the pieces will be different, but will fit together. In a similar way, we (as a church family) are different but fit together.

#### AUTHENTIC LIVING

##### Mark 9:30-37, 10:35-45, 11:1-10

##### Points to ponder:

- Why were the disciples concerned about who was the greatest among them?
- Do you compare yourself to others?
- How much do those around you influence your opinion?

##### Activity:

- **Changing opinions**  
Create some nonsense statements with the group, such as 'if you brush your hair 16 times it will grow 1m a day', 'tomato ketchup is the most delicious food ever', 'all people should wear cowboy hats'. Place them in envelopes. Give each pair one statement, ask them to persuade the other person to agree with their way of thinking. Take it in turns and follow up with the group about how they found the task. What was it like persuading someone else? Did they feel uncomfortable? Ensure that everyone participates kindly and no one is put under undue pressure.
- **Follow the leader**  
Play Simon Says (only do an action if preceded by the words 'Simon Says') using lots of silly, fun actions e.g. act like a chicken, ski downhill, pretend you itch all over. Ask the group how much they enjoyed following and why? Did they find it easy or difficult? What sort of people should or shouldn't we follow?

#### PRAYER

There are lots of ways we can show love and welcome to people, in physical, emotional and spiritual ways. Make a list of these, praying that God will show you people who you can help.

*God, you are the source of all love. Help us to know that we are loved, and help us to show love to our neighbours. Help us to identify those who are most in need of your love, and give us the courage to reach out to them, in your name. Amen.*



## WEEK 4

# Mark 11:1 – 16:8 Passion Week



Kent Brower

And so the Messiah's journey ends in Jerusalem. We know Passion Week well. Often, we combine all four gospels into series like 'The Seven Words from the Cross'. Our look at these momentous days must be highly selective. Mark wants to tell a very particular version of the story.

### Confronting the establishment

The entry into Jerusalem (11:1-11) is highly charged. Passover, a celebration of liberty, has risky connotations for empire. Jesus comes riding a donkey, not a white stallion, so despite the inflammatory words in 11:10, Jesus is different (see Zechariah 9:9). He enters the temple, looks around and leaves (11:11). Strange, until you hear the echo of Jeremiah 7:11, setting the scene for what follows.

Mark's narrative skill shows in the next episode. The prophetic action in the temple (11:15-19) is bracketed by the curious story of the barren fig tree (11:12-14, 20-24). Jesus looks for figs, finds none, and curses the tree. When he enters the temple, his words echo the prophets, pointing to its dysfunctionality. It should welcome the nations - it doesn't; it should be a house of prayer - it's a seedbed of violence. The crowds love Jesus' teaching (11:18). Next morning, the fig tree is withered (11:21). Those hearing Mark's narrative realise that Jesus predicts the end of the current system.

Not surprisingly, the temple establishment - chief priest, scribes and elders - challenges Jesus' authority (11:27-12:44); if the system collapses, so will their world. In a series of confrontations, Jesus' opponents line up to stop him. First, Jesus tells a parable

(12:1-11) and this time they get his meaning (12:12) - Jesus is the new locale of God's presence. They don't take action because they know full well that Jesus has the heart and mind of the crowd - at least at this point.

Then come the Pharisees and their odd partners, the Herodians (12:13; see 6:3). They ask Jesus a trick question which, they hope, would induce the authorities to act. He responds with an even trickier answer: give the emperor what belongs to him, and to God the things that are God's (12:17). What does that mean? Jesus leaves it hanging.

The Sadducees are next. They seem to be part of the ruling elite, holding power by accommodation to the occupiers. They reject the idea of resurrection (12:18), so pose Jesus with a conundrum about marriage and the afterlife. Jesus dismisses their spurious example with a scathing statement: 'you know neither the scripture nor the power of God... you are quite wrong' (12:24, 27).

A scribe has been listening - and is favourably impressed (12:28). So, he asks the fundamental question: which commandment is greatest? He likes Jesus' response and elaborates on it. Significantly, he says obedience to these commandments is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices - right in the precincts of the temple (12:32-33)! The direction, goal and purpose of God's holy people is epitomised in the commands to love God wholeheartedly and neighbour as oneself. This one, Jesus says, is not far from the kingdom. Mark concludes these debates with this statement: 'After that no one dared ask him any questions' (12:34).

Jesus, however, is not finished. Proud scribes are denounced, especially for their rapacious behaviour of defrauding the marginalised (12:28-40). The generosity of the widow who gives everything has mixed meaning (12:44). In the shadow of the magnificent temple and in the presence of wealthy scribes, should any widow have nothing to live on? Her commitment is commendable, but is she also a victim in Jesus' eyes?

### PREACHING POINT

What might Jesus confront in religion in our time?

### Be watchful

Jesus' teaching in the temple is finished, but he isn't finished with the temple (13:2). The interpretation of Mark 13 is controversial. Mark's readers live in troubled times and Jesus' warnings are serious - his followers will suffer, cataclysmic events will shatter earth and heaven. The only hope is that the Son of Man will come (13:26; 14:62). The immediate context is the ironic triumph of the Son of Man on the cross, where, as John's gospel has it, Jesus reigns. This teaching is temple-focused and will occur before this generation passes (13:30). This, however, is only the beginning of the end. The unpredictable timing calls for watchfulness (13:32). Disciples are to keep awake (13:37) but just a few verses later, the first disciples are asleep - three times - at the crisis moment (14:37-41).

As Jesus and his disciples celebrate Passover (14:17-25), he predicts his betrayal (14:17-21). Then, in a prophetic representative action and in language

rooted in Israel's story, Jesus breaks bread and distributes wine, both precipitating his own death and initiating the new covenant community (14:22-25). From the Mount of Olives, Jesus predicts the failure of all (14:27), despite their unified avowal of faithfulness (14:31). Jesus also promises to gather them after he is raised (14:28).

The rest of the story is dripping with irony. Jesus' Gethsemane temptation is real (14:36), but he simultaneously confirms the divine plan accepting it as God's will. The disciples, by contrast, are asleep and completely unprepared. After Judas betrays Jesus (14:43-44), the disciples flee (14:50): their undying loyalty is short-lived. Jesus is hauled before the assembled temple elite (14:53), his condemnation a foregone conclusion. His enigmatic answer to the high priest is interpreted as blasphemous (14:62). Jesus is mocked as a false prophet (14:65) just as his predictions

about Peter's denial are coming true to the letter. Jesus silently faces the assembled elite (14:61); Peter verbosely denies Jesus before a slave-girl (14:54, 66-72); when Peter hears the cock crow, he experiences the self-loathing of failure (14:72).

#### PREACHING POINT

Jesus calls on the disciples to be watchful. Why is it that his disciples fail him, then and now?

#### Hope in the midst of darkness

The irony deepens. While Jesus is on trial, at a deeper level, the whole political system is on trial. The taunts of 15:29-32 are intended as mockery, but each one is full of truth. Then darkness comes at noon (15:33) and the temple curtain is torn from top to bottom (15:38), both divine acts. Jesus experiences God's apparent absence (15:34), even while

God is at work. And the whole scene is crowned with the centurion's confession (15:39). Did he know what he was saying? Probably not. But Mark and his readers know. Jesus' identity as the Son of God is never clearer than in his redemptive death. To use Paul's phrase, God was in the Messiah (2 Corinthians 5:19).

The empty tomb (16:1-8) turns the whole story from a meaningless tragedy into the hope for humanity. But one point is especially fascinating. The women, who remain faithful throughout, tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus will be in Galilee, just as he said (16:7; 14:28). Jesus' life, death and resurrection is the hope for all of humanity; it is also the hope for failed disciples. They can be restored and return to living as part of God's holy people on God's mission.

#### PREACHING POINT

What is our hope – really?

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*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."*

*Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.*

*"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. "Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*

**Mark 14:22-25**

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# Small Group Resource

## Mark 14:12-26 The Last Supper

Michael Parsons

### Retelling the story

When we read biblical narratives, we sometimes find one of two things: either that they are too complicated or that they are too familiar. Mark's account of the Last Supper is on the surface too familiar - given that we encounter it again in other gospels, in 1 Corinthians and regularly in church services, too. We can, too easily, skim over it like a stone over water. A narrative retelling can help us to engage more deeply.

A slow, thoughtful, prayerful retelling of narrative might help us to concentrate our thinking on the text itself within its broader context.

### Approaching the text

- Pray together asking the Lord to make his word clear to you, to open your eyes and lives to the Holy Spirit through the exercise of retelling the narrative.
- Briefly, in the group, consider the Gospel of Mark up to this point. Where are we in the story? What has been Mark's repeated emphases? What have we learned personally from the book so far? That will set the short narrative in context.
- Read the passage (Mark 14:12-26) slowly and thoughtfully together out loud two or three times. It might be useful to have one or two different people read the passage out loud, from different translations, if possible.
- Divide the group into pairs, if possible. Each member should now retell the narrative in their own words to the other. This isn't a test of memory or of story-telling!
- Attempt in pairs together to pick out the salient details and try to emphasize what the Bible emphasizes - plot, characters, narrative shape, and teaching.
- Each pair might discuss between them what has been emphasized, what omitted and what is most significant.
- Each pair should discuss how their retelling differed from one another. The differences might then be quizzed, for example:
  - Do the differences indicate theological understanding?
  - Do the differences indicate personal history / testimony?
- Now together as the larger group, ask what the retelling has made you realise about the passage: has anything stood out for you, personally - characters, words, ideas? Does the passage remind you of other Bible texts?
- Reread the passage again out loud - not to make sure you have everything in your retelling but to allow the Holy Spirit to build on what you've discovered.
- Pray, mindful of what the Lord wants to teach you.

### Further Reading

Michael Parsons, *How to Read the Bible so that it makes a difference* (BRF, 2020), pp. 86-91.



# Children, Young People and All Generations

## Mark Chapters 13 – 16

Methodist Children, Youth and Family Layworker Writing Team



When might it be good to stand out from the crowd?

### TRADITIONS

Mark 14:1-10

Points to ponder:

- Why did the woman pour expensive oil on Jesus' head? What did others feel about it?
- How could you make people feel even more welcome to your church/youth group/home?
- What do you think it means to use water to baptize people? Why do we baptize people?

Activity:

- **Make a pot!**

The perfume oil used to anoint Jesus' head could have been stored in a beautiful bottle. Gather resources together to make a pot fit for such an oil. You could use a recycled bottle, ribbons, paper, or you could decorate a special pot. Think about something precious that you would store in the pot.

### IDENTITY

Mark 15:33-39

Points to ponder:

- How did Jesus face up to his own death?
- How have you experienced loss or death?
- How can reading about Jesus' death and resurrection help us?
- Is it OK to feel sad or angry sometimes?

Activity:

- **You and God**

Listen to the song 'You say' by Lauren Daigle (find it on Spotify or YouTube). Who might the 'you' be? What does the song mean to you?

- **My past and future hold hands**

Draw round your hands and cut them out. On one hand, draw or stick things that represent memories from your past. On the other hand, draw or stick things that represent hopes for your future.

- **Feelings jam**

Cut small strips of paper and write a different feeling on each strip. Roll each strip of paper up and place into a jam jar. Mix the feelings up. Take it in turns to pick out a strip of paper from the jar and read out the feeling. Ask the group: Who has ever felt like this? What caused you to feel like this?

### AUTHENTIC LIVING

Mark 14:32-42, 14:66-72

Points to ponder:

- Have you ever tried to stay awake when you're very tired?
- Has there been a time in your life when you've let someone down? Does this help you to relate to Peter?
- Think about what it was like for Peter standing in the courtyard after Jesus had been arrested.

Activity:

- **This is me**

Give small groups or individuals an outline of a person (or draw a large one on a roll of lining paper or a flip chart sheet) and ask them to jot down in words or pictures some things we get wrong. Then add things we'd like to ask for God's help with, to become more like Jesus. Spend some time in prayer reflecting on what's been shared.



### PRAYER

Mark tells us that Jesus showed a vast range of emotions: rage, sadness, happiness, joy, exhaustion and peace. It is OK to feel these emotions, and it is OK to be angry and sad at (and with) God as well as happy - he created us and knows what is in our hearts. He experiences these emotions with us and cares deeply for us. In our times of loss and grief, he comes alongside us, and walks the path with us.

*Lord, thank you that you are always there for us, no matter how we are feeling. We pray for all those who are feeling loss or grief, that you would be their comfort. We pray for all those who are happy or joyful, that you would be their strength. We pray for all those who are exhausted, that you would be their peace and rest. Amen.*

# How can we be faithful disciples today?

Mark's gospel points us towards the answer

Paula Gooder

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It is tempting, at times like this, to declare, possibly with a touch of melodrama, that it has never been harder to be a disciple of Jesus: the world as we know it has been turned upside down; our familiar patterns of meeting and worshipping together have changed beyond recognition; we are beset behind and ahead by fears and uncertainty. At times like this, how are we meant to be faithful disciples?

In the midst of such questions, Mark's gospel answers our question loud and clear. We are faithful disciples in the way that people have always been, we try and fail and try again. It has never been easy to be a disciple, and as we journey onwards we follow in the footsteps of countless others who have gone before us, trying and failing and trying again.

Indeed, one of the most striking features of Mark's gospel is the story which bubbles alongside the main narrative of the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God. This side narrative tells us of the disciples who heard the call of Jesus, left their old lives behind and followed him. They act as a model for us of faithful response; they heard Jesus' call and followed, right away.

This powerful, inspiring response stands in stark contrast to what happened next. The problems started almost straight away. Jesus was not who they expected him to be. His teaching bemused them. His refusal to take up arms against the Romans concerned them. His relationships with the poor and the

outcast troubled them. His antagonism of the Jewish leaders bothered them. Time and time again in the gospel, the disciples misunderstood who Jesus was; they misinterpreted his message and, when it really mattered in the garden of Gethsemane at his arrest, they ran away.

*Yes it is true that the disciples struggled to understand who Jesus was; they, often, had no idea what Jesus was talking about and at key moments they ran away.*

Mark's portrayal of the disciples is far from flattering. Even the women, who stayed close by during Jesus' crucifixion long after all the others had fled, ran away at the end. Right at the end of Mark, when Jesus had risen from the dead, and the angels told the women to 'Go tell' the disciples the good news of the resurrection, they too ran away gripped by fear.

But the glorious irony of the way in which Mark tells us this story of fear and fleeing is that we know the story didn't end that way. We know it because we are now reading about it in Mark's gospel. If the disciples had run away and stayed away, there would be no more story to tell. If the women had really not told anyone that Jesus was risen, we would have heard no more about it. Yes it is true that the disciples struggled to understand who Jesus was; they, often, had no idea what Jesus was talking about and at key moments they ran away.

So how are we meant to be faithful disciples at times like this? In exactly the way that people have always done – we try and fail and try again. And as we try and try again we learn more about ourselves and, crucially, more about the one we follow. One of the most important features of Mark's gospel is that Jesus, himself, doesn't appear to criticize the disciples. No matter how much they get it wrong, they are still disciples. The key thing is not, apparently, being perfect disciples or even good disciples – the key thing is carrying on so that generations to come can hear more of the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God.

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*“Don't be alarmed,” he [the angel] said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”*

**Mark 16:6-7**

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# Further Resources

If you have found the notes in this booklet helpful and would like to explore Mark's fascinating gospel further, here are suggestions of some resources that will help you.

## BOOKS

### Mark Devotional Books:

- Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (SPCK, 2001) \*
- Pope Francis, *The Gospel of Mark: A Spiritual and Pastoral Reading* (Orbis, 2020) \*
- Terry Hinks, *Praying the Way: with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John* (BRF, 2018) \*

### Mark Study Books:

- Kent Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nazarene, 2018) \*\*
- Leroy Andrew Huizenga, *Loosing the Lion: Proclaiming the Gospel of Mark* (Emmaus Road Publishing, 2018) \*
- Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Orbis 2003; anniversary edition 2008) \*\*
- Janice Capel Anderson, Stephen D. Moore, *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2008) \*\*
- Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Black's New Testament Commentaries, Baker Academic, reprint 2009) \*\*
- Helen K. Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus: Genre and Meaning in Mark's Gospel* (Eerdmans, 2020) \*\*\*
- Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Biblical Studies Library, Baker, revised updated 1997) \*\*\*

### Wider Understanding:

- Tom Wright, *Simply Jesus* (SPCK, 2011) \*
- Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards* (SPCK, 2015) \*
- Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* (SPCK, 2008) \*\*

## USEFUL WEBSITES

Simply type 'Mark' into the website search engine for a wealth of useful info and resources.

- [bibleproject.com](http://bibleproject.com) \* (includes videos, blogs, notes to help you explore Mark)
- [www.biblesociety.org.uk](http://www.biblesociety.org.uk) \* (includes a rich and accessible introduction to Mark)
- [www.thegospelcoalition.org](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org) \* (includes a short course taking you through Mark)

## MULTI-GENERATIONAL & SMALL GROUPS

- James Woodward, Paula Gooder, Mark Pryce, *Journeying with Mark: Bringing the Gospel Alive for Groups and Individuals in Year B* (SPCK, 2011) \*
- Paula Gooder, Bob Hartman, *The Tell it Together Gospel: Mark* (SPCK, 2019) \*
- Matthew Sleeman, *Meet Jesus in Mark: His Gospel in 24 Readings* (CF4Kids, revised 2017) \*
- Simon Amadeus Pillario, *The Gospel of Mark (Word for Word Bible Comic, 2018)* \* [www.wordforwordbiblecomic.com](http://www.wordforwordbiblecomic.com)

### Key:

\* Introductory      \*\* Accessible      \*\*\* Advanced

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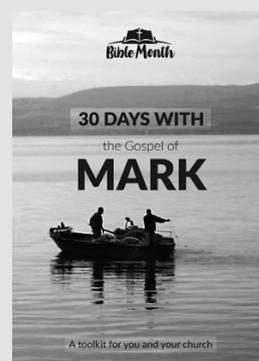
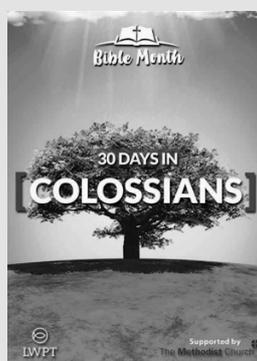
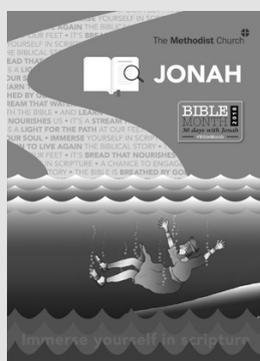
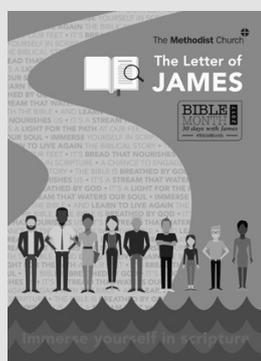
# Bible Month

## Resources for you and your church

Bible Month is an opportunity for individuals, small groups or whole churches to spend 30 days (in four week sections) focusing on a single biblical book.

Four week guides are also available for the Book of Jonah, the Book of James, the Book of Colossians and the Book of Ruth.

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

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- Bible Month Introduction and FAQs
- Bible Month Training Days
- Videos of Bible Month Training Days
- Why Take Part in Bible Month?
- Bible Month 2017: James
- Bible Month 2018: Jonah
- Bible Month 2019: Colossians
- Bible Month 2020: Ruth

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[www.preachweb.org/biblemonth](http://www.preachweb.org/biblemonth)

Bible Month provides a toolkit for you and your church to engage with the Gospel of Mark over four weeks. It includes Bible notes with preaching ideas, small group study guides, children and youth resources, a reflection on reading Mark today, and ideas for further resources.

Written by Dr Kent Brower (Bible notes) with Rev Michael Parsons (study guides) and Dr Paula Gooder (reflection).

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