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Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by Thomas Nelson. Thomas Nelson is a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc.

Produced with the assistance of Hudson Bible (www.HudsonBible.com). Project staff include Christopher D. Hudson and Randy Southern.

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The quote by Papias in the Introduction is from Eusebius, *History of the Church,* 3:39. The quote by Irenaeus is from *Against Heresies,* 3:1.

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ISBN 978-0-310-09151-6

First Printing April 2019 / Printed in the United States of America

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INTRODUCTION TO
The Gospel of Mark

"When [Paul and Barnabas] arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God . . . they also had John [Mark] as their assistant" (Acts 13:5). John Mark was not one of Jesus' original disciples, but he was present at the birth of the church and had a strong relationship with Peter. Luke writes that the early church gathered to pray in Jerusalem at the home of Mary, who was "the mother of John whose surname was Mark" (Acts 12:12). At the time, King Herod Agrippa, the ruler of Judea, had just put the disciple James to death. He intended to do the same with Peter, but God sent an angel to free the disciple from prison. Later, Peter was put to death during the reign of Emperor Nero. It is likely Mark decided at that time to record everything Peter had told him about Jesus and create his Gospel account of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Author and Date

The Gospel of Mark, as with the other three Gospels, does not list the name of its author. However, the earliest church fathers to mention the Gospel all concur it was written by John Mark. Papias, who lived c. AD 60–163, was the first to write, "Mark, who became Peter's interpreter, wrote accurately, though not in order, all that he remembered of the things said or done by the Lord." Irenaeus (c. AD 130–202) wrote, "after [Peter's] death, Mark . . . himself also handed down to us in writing the things preached by Peter." In addition to this evidence, it seems unlikely the church would assign authorship of the Gospel to Mark—who was not

prominent in the early church—unless there were historical reasons for doing so. It is likely that Mark was the first Gospel to be written, sometime between AD 65 to 70, from the city of Rome.

Background and Setting

Mark appears to have written his Gospel during a time of great turmoil for Christians in the Roman Empire. In AD 64, the Emperor Nero blamed the Christians for a massive fire that devasted the city of Rome . . . a fire that historians believe *he* had likely ordered to be set. During the persecutions that followed, both Peter and Paul were put to death. Mark appears to have written his Gospel to Gentile believers in Rome to encourage them to persevere in their faith in Christ. This is seen in the fact that Mark often uses Latin expressions instead of their Greek equivalents, translates Aramaic terms for his readers, feels the need to explain Jewish customs, and quotes infrequently from the Old Testament. Mark's Gospel also focuses on the *power* of Jesus as the Son of God—a topic that would have impressed a Roman audience.

Key Themes

Several key themes are prominent in Mark's Gospel. The first is that *Jesus used His power to minister to others and serve them*. In the first-century Roman world, it was the job of slaves (those at the lower rungs of society) to provide service to those in power. But Jesus, the all-powerful Son of God, flipped this paradigm on its head by coming into the world not "to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Mark also shows how Jesus instructed His followers to take after their Lord and do the same.

A second theme is that *Jesus was the long-expected Savior of the world*. In one key passage, the disciple Peter acknowledges Jesus as "the Christ," which translates to the Hebrew word for *Messiah* (8:29). Previously, God had affirmed Jesus as His own Son (see 1:11), and the demons had

recognized the same (see 3:11), but this is the first time in Mark's Gospel that we find one of Jesus' own followers confessing that He is the Messiah. This theme culminates in a scene that takes place at the foot of Jesus' cross, when a Roman centurion who has witnessed the execution of Christ declares, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" (15:39).

A third theme is that *Jesus will reward those who persevere in their faith.* As previously mentioned, Mark wrote his Gospel during a time of persecution against Christians in the Roman Empire. Mark wanted to show his readers that Jesus predicted such times of suffering and plainly stated the cost involved in following Him. In one passage, Mark quotes Jesus as saying, "It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire—where 'their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched'" (9:47–48).

A fourth theme is that *Jesus was fully God and fully man.* As apostles such as Peter and Paul began to be executed for their faith, there was a need to record their teachings and recollections of Jesus for future generations of Christians. Mark also seems to be concerned about addressing certain false teachings that had arisen in the church, such as those that emphasized Jesus' divinity at the expense of His humanity. Mark wanted to show his readers that Jesus was fully God but also fully human . . . as evidenced in His suffering at the cross.

Key Applications

Mark shows us that no matter how chaotic our world becomes, we can always cling to the *hope* and *peace* that we have in Jesus. Even in the darkest of times, we can rely on the *light of Christ* to see us through. And while the path to following Jesus is not always easy, it is always *worth it*.

LESSON *one*

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

Mark 1:1–45

Getting Started

How did you respond the first time you heard about Jesus?

Setting the Stage

It is believed that Mark's Gospel is the first written record of the life of Jesus Christ. For that reason, it's been called "the most important book in the world." It is the shortest and easiest to understand of the Gospels. The average reader can finish it in less than an hour.

Although Mark wrote the book, the story he tells is not his own. Mark served as a secretary and translator for someone who was not only an eyewitness to the events described but also one of Jesus' closest friends—the Gospel of Mark is actually the apostle *Peter's* account of his days with Jesus. In creating this account, Mark had unique credentials. From the time he was young, his house was a center of Christian activity. His cousin was Barnabas, the traveling companion of the apostle Paul. In time, Mark himself became a trusted confidant of Paul, but Mark's most significant friendship was with the apostle Peter.

In Peter's first letter, he refers to Mark as his son (see 1 Peter 5:13). Although Peter was speaking in spiritual terms, the connection between the two men ran deep. In fact, that relationship is the key to understanding the Gospel of Mark.

Peter was a man of action, and Mark's Gospel reflects his restless energy. The book moves quickly from one event to the next. The word *immediately* appears frequently in the text. Through Mark's pen, Peter places himself at Jesus' side throughout the narrative. He is not, however, trying to burnish his own reputation. In many stories, Peter is portrayed in an unflattering light. In the end, the Gospel of Mark is a collection of the extraordinary experiences of a simple fisherman who followed the Son of Man.

Exploring the Text

John the Baptist Prepares the Way (Mark 1:1–11)

[1] The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. [2] As it is written in the Prophets:

"Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You."
3 "The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the LORD;
Make His paths straight.'"

4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. 5 Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. 8 I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

9 It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. 11 Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

---

1. What was the purpose of John the Baptist's ministry (see verses 2–3)? What are the specific ways he fulfilled his calling (see verses 4–11)?

2. How would you describe John the Baptist's appearance and his attitude toward Jesus (see verses 6–7)?

Jesus Calls His First Disciples (Mark 1:14–20)

14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

16 And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 17 Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." 18 They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

19 When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. 20 And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.

3. Most of the people who heard Jesus' message had little hope. They were oppressed by the Romans who ruled over them and by the religious leaders who demanded they follow hundreds of rules and regulations. How do you think they reacted to Jesus' message?

4. How did Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John respond to Jesus' call to follow Him (see verses 18, 20)? What do you think they expected when they made this decision?

Jesus Drives Out an Impure Spirit (Mark 1:21–28)

21 Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath
He entered the synagogue and taught. 22 And they were astonished
at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not
as the scribes.

23 Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit.
And he cried out, 24 saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with
You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who
You are—the Holy One of God!"

25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of
him!" 26 And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out
with a loud voice, he came out of him. 27 Then they were all amazed,
so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this?
What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even
the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." 28 And immediately His fame
spread throughout all the region around Galilee.

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5. The people who spoke at the synagogues in first-century Israel were usually laypeople who read the Torah and shared their thoughts about it. Why did Jesus' teachings have such an impact on His listeners (see verses 21–22)?

6. How did the people in Capernaum react when Jesus healed the demon-possessed man? What impact did this have on Jesus' ministry (see verses 27–28)?

Jesus Prays in a Solitary Place and Heals a Leper (Mark 1:35–45)

35 Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight,
He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.
36 And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him. 37 When
they found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You."

38 But He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I
may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth."

39 And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all
Galilee, and casting out demons.

40 Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to
Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean."

41 Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand
and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." 42 As
soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was
cleansed. 43 And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once,
44 and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your
way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those
things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

45 However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction.

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7. Simon (Peter) and his companions wanted Jesus to return to Capernaum and embrace His burgeoning celebrity status. Why was it important for Jesus to move on to other towns (see verse 38)?

8. In Jesus' day, if someone was deemed to have leprosy, that person had to live in isolation from the community and shout "unclean" whenever others approached. How did the man in this story go against that custom? How do you think the people reacted when they saw Jesus actually reach out and *touch* the man (see verses 40–42)?

Reviewing the Story

Jesus received His heavenly Father's blessing at His baptism and then immediately got to work. He had much to do in a very short time. Like any good leader, Jesus surrounded Himself with people who were hard-working, committed, and willing to be taught. He announced the good news with His words and actions. He spent His days calling people to repentance, healing their sicknesses *and* their disabilities. He also took care of Himself by retreating to solitary places where He could commune with His heavenly Father, rest, and recharge for the work ahead.

9. How did John view his ministry and baptism as compared to Jesus' (see Mark 1:7–8)?

10. What did Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John leave in order to follow Jesus (see Mark 1:18–20)?

11. What was the reaction in Capernaum to Jesus' miracles (see Mark 1:36–37)?

12. What happened when the word spread about Jesus' healing power (see Mark 1:45)?

Applying the Message

13. What have you—like the first disciples—left behind in order to follow Jesus?

14. If you were to freely proclaim what Jesus has done for you, as the leper did, what would you say?

Reflecting on the Meaning

Jesus was an incredibly busy man, but he never seemed to be in a hurry. There was a quality about His life—a quiet center—that was observable wherever He went. As these passages in Mark reveal, this inner peace in the midst of chaos may be attributed to three things.

First, Jesus was *devoted to the practice of prayer*. According to Mark 1:35, Jesus rose well before dawn and found a solitary place to pray. This in itself was no small feat. The day before, Jesus had preached in the synagogue, driven out a demon, healed Peter's mother-in-law, and then, after the Sabbath ended, stood in front of Peter's house and healed everyone who came to see Him. The crowd kept Him busy until the early hours of the morning. He must have been exhausted, but that wasn't His concern. Sleep could wait. Prayer could not.

Second, Jesus was *committed to what God wanted Him to do*. At one point, His disciples came to escort Him back to the crowds who awaited him in Capernaum. But Jesus opted to move on to the next town, where He could preach. "For this purpose I have come forth," He explained to them (verse 38). When you know what God wants you to do, you won't be persuaded by others who have their own ideas about your purpose.

Third, Jesus was *driven by the passion He had for people in need*. While most people went out of their way to avoid lepers, Jesus literally reached out to them. He touched their infectious skin. He made them whole—physically, spiritually, emotionally, and socially.

You may or may not be able to lessen the chaos that swirls around you every day. But you can maintain a calm center by following Jesus' example and devoting yourself to prayer, committing yourself to God's will, and stoking a passion for people in need.

Journaling Your Response

What might Jesus say to you about addressing the chaos and increasing the peace in your life?

LESSON *two*

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Mark 2:1–3:35

Getting Started

Who had the most influence on your decision to become a Christian? How did that person influence you?

Setting the Stage

The events of Mark 2–3 highlight the difference between the religious laws of the Pharisees and the good news that Jesus came to bring. Religion, as far as the Pharisees were concerned, was all about ritual. They cared about

doing the right things at the right time in the right way. They focused on obeying rules and regulations. They cared about appearances. They tried to work their way to God and let Him know all they were doing so He would love them.

In contrast, Jesus cared about serving others. Rituals meant less to Him than making people whole. Following the letter of Pharisaical law was not as important to Him as reaching out to the poor and needy and showing loving concern to the outcasts of society. This is why the Pharisees opposed Jesus every chance they could. It is also why they typically came away looking like cowardly, petty, unfeeling hypocrites whenever they challenged him. When it came to faith, Jesus' attitude was, "Don't tell me what you know; show me what you do."

The Pharisees "weaponized" God's commandments, along with their own intricately detailed oral traditions, and used them to spiritually browbeat the Jewish people. The laws of the Pharisees were so numerous and so exacting that no one could obey them all. No one could hope to earn God's favor through perfect obedience. No one could work their way to Him.

Jesus' message was thus a breath of fresh spiritual air. He offered freedom from the oppression of overzealous rules and regulations. He taught that faith, and not rule-following, was the key to being righteous in God's eyes. Jesus ushered in something brand new. It was something personal . . . and something eternal.

Exploring the Text

Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man (Mark 2:1–12)

[1] And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard
that He was in the house. [2] Immediately many gathered together, so
that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the
door. And He preached the word to them. [3] Then they came to Him,
bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. [4] And when they
could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the

roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."

6 And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

8 But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, 11 "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." 12 Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

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1. The paralyzed man thought his deepest need was to be able to walk again. Jesus, however, saw a much deeper need. What did Jesus do before He healed the man (see verse 5)?

2. The crowd that gathered to see Jesus included Pharisees, scribes, and teachers of the law—the sophisticated intellectuals of Jewish society. How did they initially respond to what Jesus was doing (see verses 6–7)? Why is their reaction to the paralytic man's healing somewhat surprising (see verse 12)?

Jesus Is Questioned by the Pharisees (Mark 2:13–22)

13 Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to
Him, and He taught them. 14 As He passed by, He saw Levi the son
of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow
Me." So he arose and followed Him.

15 Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many
tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His
disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. 16 And when
the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and
sinners, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks
with tax collectors and sinners?"

17 When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well
have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come
to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

18 The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then
they came and said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John and of
the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"

[19] And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom
fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the
bridegroom with them they cannot fast. [20] But the days will come
when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they
will fast in those days. [21] No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an
old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the
tear is made worse. [22] And no one puts new wine into old wineskins;
or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the
wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."

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3. Levi (also known as Matthew) was a tax collector. Tax collectors were so despised in Israel that if they touched something in another person's home, that item was considered unclean. Why did Jesus chose a "sinner" like Levi to be His disciple (see verse 17)?

4. The legalists who criticized Jesus thought righteousness should be expressed through a somber attitude. How did Jesus respond to their criticism (see verses 19–20)?

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1–6)

[1] And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had
a withered hand. [2] So they watched Him closely, whether He would
heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. [3] And He
said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward." [4] Then
He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do
evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent. [5] And when He had
looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness
of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he
stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.
[6] Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the
Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.

5. The Pharisees had created a list of thirty-nine sub-laws of things people couldn't do on the Sabbath. They did this just to make sure no one violated the *actual* law, which God had established for His *people's* benefit, so they would have a day of rest. What point was Jesus making when He healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath (see verses 3–5)?

6. The religious leaders' plot to kill Jesus begins in verse 6, which was quite early in Jesus' public ministry. So, not only did the Pharisees follow Jesus around, hoping to catch Him doing something wrong, but they were also actively plotting to destroy Him. What effect do you think their actions had on Jesus' ministry?

Jesus Is Accused by His Family and by Teachers of the Law (Mark 3:20–35)

20 Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so
much as eat bread. 21 But when His own people heard about this, they
went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind."
22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has
Beelzebub," and, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons."
23 So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables:
"How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against
itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against
itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against
himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. 27 No one
can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first
binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house.
28 "Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men,
and whatever blasphemies they may utter; 29 but he who blasphemes
against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal
condemnation"— 30 because they said, "He has an unclean spirit."
31 Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside
they sent to Him, calling Him. 32 And a multitude was sitting around
Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers
are outside seeking You."

[33] But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My
brothers?" [34] And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about
Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! [35] For whoever
does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

---

7. Jesus' family (most likely his brothers) went to "take charge" of Him because they feared the stress had affected Him mentally—that He was "out of His mind" (verse 21). Which of Jesus' teachings do you think may have given them this impression?

8. In Jesus' analogy in verse 27, the "strong man" is Satan, the "house" is the devil's kingdom in this world, and the "possessions" being plundered are the victims he holds. Up to this point, how had Jesus demonstrated His power over Satan?

Reviewing the Story

Try as they might, the Jewish religious leaders could not get the better of Jesus. They were shocked when they witnessed Him forgive the sins of the paralyzed man—something only God had the power to do—and silently accused Him of blasphemy. Jesus read their thoughts and demonstrated His divine power by healing the man's paralysis. They criticized Christ for spending time with sinners. They complained that His disciples didn't fast. They got offended when He healed a man on the Sabbath. They accused Him of being in league with Satan. All they accomplished, however, was to make themselves look hypocritical.

9. Why were the teachers of the law outraged when they saw Jesus heal the paralyzed man in Capernaum (see Mark 2:5–7)?

10. How did Jesus respond when the Pharisees criticized Him for eating with tax collectors and sinners (see Mark 2:17)?

11. Most of the crowd celebrated and marveled at Jesus' ability to heal a man's withered hand. What did the Pharisees and Herodians do (see Mark 3:6)?

12. According to Jesus, how does the bond between brothers and sisters in Christ compare to the bond between biological family members (see Mark 3:34–35)?

Applying the Message

13. The friends of the paralyzed man overcame the inconvenience of the crowd, exerted themselves physically, risked embarrassment and rejection, and resorted to highly unusual methods for bringing their friend to Jesus. What will you do for a friend this week who needs to be brought to Jesus?

14. What steps can you take to strengthen your relationship with your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Reflecting on the Meaning

Jesus' healing of the paralyzed man is a heartwarming story about the power of friendship. But it is much more than that. Mark writes, "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven you'" (2:5), and then He healed the man. Jesus saw into the hearts of the four men who had brought their friend to Him and rewarded their faith by doing what they wanted. The paralyzed man was healed not primarily because of his own faith but because of the faith of his friends.

The others in the house saw the earnestness, compassion, and love of the four friends. Jesus, however, looked past all that and saw their faith. These four men believed that He could make the difference in their friend's life. There was no barrier too high and no problem too great for them to overcome to bring their companion to Jesus. Christ took note of that. He looked into their hearts and saw what had motivated them to take such drastic measures. He saw their faith in His ability to intervene in their friend's suffering.

Jesus still sees into our hearts today. This may not always be a comforting thought, but it is true. He sees beyond our excuses and our defenses. He sees our hearts for what they are and knows if we have true faith in Him.

What could your faith accomplish in another person's life? Do you know someone who needs Jesus to intervene in his or her life? Do you believe Jesus can bring healing, whether it's physical, emotional, or spiritual? What are you prepared to do to bring this person into Jesus' presence? Most importantly, what will Jesus see in your heart when you do?

Journaling Your Response

What are some ways you could show your gratitude to the people who played key roles in bringing you to Christ?

LESSON *three*

INTO THE STORM

Mark 4:1–41

Getting Started

When was a time that you faced an overwhelming and fearful situation? How did you respond?

Setting the Stage

Mark 4 records one of the most extraordinary events in the Gospel narrative: Jesus' quieting of a storm at sea. As Mark relates the miracle, there are some telling details of which to take note. The first is that *the disciples didn't get into the storm because they had done something wrong.* Jesus had said, "Let us cross over to the other side" (4:35), and the disciples set about making it happen. They were in the storm because they were being obedient.

When we have problems, it's not a bad idea to examine our hearts to see whether we are walking in fellowship with the Lord. However, we should not automatically assume that every storm we encounter signals that we have breached fellowship with God. Sometimes, He is up to something in our lives that we won't comprehend until much later.

The second detail to note is that these men, who had seen Jesus perform incredible miracles, *never thought for a moment that He might be the answer to their problem*. Although it wasn't apparent to the disciples, Jesus was in complete control of the situation. He simply had to speak for the wind to cease and the waves to calm.

It wasn't wrong for the disciples to be frightened in the storm, but it was wrong for them not to turn to Jesus until after panic filled their hearts. It was wrong for them to approach Him in an accusing manner by asking, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" (verse 38). Not only did Jesus care, but He alone had the power to see them through the storm.

Exploring the Text

The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1–20)

[1] And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. [2] Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching:

3 "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And it happened,
as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of
the air came and devoured it. 5 Some fell on stony ground, where it
did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it
had no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up it was scorched,
and because it had no root it withered away. 7 And some seed fell
among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded
no crop. 8 But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop
that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty,
and some a hundred."

9 And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

10 But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve
asked Him about the parable. 11 And He said to them, "To you it has
been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those
who are outside, all things come in parables, 12 so that

'Seeing they may see and not perceive,
And hearing they may hear and not understand;
Lest they should turn,
And their sins be forgiven them.'"

13 And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable?
How then will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows
the word. 15 And these are the ones by the wayside where the word
is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away
the word that was sown in their hearts. 16 These likewise are the ones
sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately
receive it with gladness; 17 and they have no root in themselves, and
so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution
arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. 18 Now these are
the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word,
19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the
desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes

unfruitful. [20] But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

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1. In this teaching by the sea, it is likely Jesus chose to talk about a man sowing seeds as the subject of His parable because there was a farmer sowing seeds nearby (see verses 3–8). Why would this kind of "immediate" teaching have an impact on His listeners?

2. Most people have "ears to hear" (verse 9). But why could only certain people *understand* Jesus' parables (see verses 11–12)?

A Lamp on a Stand and a Growing Seed (Mark 4:21–29)

21 Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket
or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? 22 For there is
nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been
kept secret but that it should come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to
hear, let him hear."

24 Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the
same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who
hear, more will be given. 25 For whoever has, to him more will be
given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken
away from him."

26 And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter
seed on the ground, 27 and should sleep by night and rise by day, and
the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how.
28 For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head,
after that the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain ripens,
immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

3. A lamp is useless unless its light shines into the darkness. How is this also true of people who follow Jesus (see verses 21–22)?

4. How is sharing God's Word with others similar to a farmer scattering seeds on the ground (see verses 26–29)?

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30–34)

30 Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or
with what parable shall we picture it? 31 It is like a mustard seed
which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds
on earth; 32 but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater
than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of
the air may nest under its shade."

33 And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as
they were able to hear it. 34 But without a parable He did not speak
to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His
disciples.

5. The mustard seed was tiny, but when planted it grew into a huge treelike shrub. How was Jesus saying this was similar to the growth of the kingdom of God (see verses 30–32)?

6. Jesus challenged His disciples, but He also "explained all things" to them so they could understand His message (verse 34). What impacts how a person is "able to hear"?

Jesus Calms the Storm (Mark 4:35–41)

35 On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let
us cross over to the other side." 36 Now when they had left the
multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other
little boats were also with Him. 37 And a great windstorm arose, and
the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. 38 But He
was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said
to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

39 Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea,
"Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.
4 But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have
no faith?" 41 And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another,
"Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

7. Four of Jesus' disciples were experienced fisherman who had lived on the Sea of Galilee since their childhood. They probably knew every mood of the wind and waves. What does their reaction tell you about the circumstances they were facing (see verse 38)?

8. How did this incident on the Sea of Galilee change the way the disciples thought of Jesus (see verse 41)?

Reviewing the Story

The Sea of Galilee plays a key role in the events of Mark 4. When the crowd on the shore grew too large, Jesus climbed into a boat and taught from there. He noticed a man sowing seeds nearby and spun a trio of parables involving sowing. He also urged His followers to let their spiritual light shine. But the peaceful setting turned ominous when Jesus and His disciples started to cross the Sea of Galilee later that night. A storm arose that tested the disciples' resolve and made them reassess their faith.

9. In Jesus' parable of the sower, the seed represents God's Word and the soil represents people's hearts (see Mark 4:13–20). What kind of heart is most receptive to God's Word?

10. In what ways are Christ's followers light to the world (see Mark 4:21–22)?

11. In Jesus' day, the mustard plant was often seen in a negative light because it grew wild, spread quickly, and was nearly impossible to kill. How would this description further fit with Jesus' description of the kingdom of God on earth (see Mark 4:30–32)?

12. What lessons do you think Jesus' disciples took away from their experience on the stormy sea (see Mark 4:35–41)?

Applying the Message

13. When was a time in your life that someone served as a light to guide you through a dark or uncertain situation? What did that person do to help you?

14. What are some events in your life that have caused you to question—or might cause you to question—whether Jesus cares for you?

Reflecting on the Meaning

A "perfect storm" in your life may involve a combination of struggles with your finances, relationships, job, physical or emotional health, or some combination of them all. When it hits, you feel overwhelmed, almost as though you're drowning. So what do you do when the perfect storm hits? Let's take some wisdom from the disciples' experience in Mark 4.

First, *never fall for the lie that believers are exempted from storms*. Following Jesus does not guarantee smooth sailing or cloudless skies. Storms are part of life for believers and unbelievers alike (see 1 Peter 4:12–13). So you need to understand there's a high probability you *will* face storms in your life.

Second, *consider the course Jesus has charted for you*. In Mark 4:35, Jesus said to His disciples, "Let us cross over to the other side." He didn't say,

"Let us go to the middle of the sea and drown in the storm." He charted a course for them to get to the other side of the sea. And if Almighty God in the person of the Lord Jesus says, "We're going to the other side," then you *are* going to the other side. Nothing is so powerful it can thwart His plans.

Third, keep in mind that *Jesus knew the storm was coming and directed His disciples into it*. If you don't have any storms in your life, you will get comfortable with a kind of happiness that falls far short of what God wants for you. He wants you to find your joy and happiness in *Him*. He wants you to experience the incredible peace that comes from knowing Jesus is with you when you are in the midst of a storm—a perfect peace that leaves you feeling as though you would rather be there with Him than any other place in the world!

Journaling Your Response

What do you want people to learn from your example as you go through storms in life?

LESSON *four*

AN INCIDENT IN GADARA

Mark 5:1–43

Getting Started

What is the most amazing thing you've ever seen Jesus do in someone's life?

Setting the Stage

In Mark 4, Jesus demonstrated His power over nature by calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Mark 5 details the rest of that journey. The light of day was gone when Jesus and His disciples finally reached their destination. The sky was probably pitch black when they landed at Gadara, a village on the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee. Steep limestone hills rose sharply from the water. Carved into the rock were tombs where the people of Gadara buried their dead.

In many respects, Gadara was an alien place for Jesus and His disciples. Its inhabitants were Gentiles, who were considered to be "unclean" by the Jewish people. Large herds of swine, which were also considered unclean, roamed the hillsides. But the most unclean thing about Gadara was the man who greeted Jesus when the boat landed.

The man emerged from the tombs on the hillside. It would be hard to imagine a more frightening sight. He was possessed not by a *single* demon but by a *legion* of them. The people of Gadara had tried to subdue him with shackles and chains, but he was too strong and broke them in pieces. Day and night, he roamed the tombs of Gadara, crying out and cutting himself with stones. He was cut off from society, uncontrollable, unrestrained, untamed, wild, violent, and supernaturally strong. He was a threat to himself and those around him.

The people of Gadara were helpless to do anything about the man. But Jesus knew that He could help him. After all, He had already demonstrated His power over the forces of nature. In Gadara, He would now demonstrate His power over the forces of evil.

Exploring the Text

Jesus Encounters a Demon-Possessed Man (Mark 5:1–10)

[1] Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the
Gadarenes. [2] And when He had come out of the boat, immediately

there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, [3] who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, [4] because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. [5] And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.

[6] When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. [7] And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me."

[8] For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!" [9] Then He asked him, "What is your name?"

And he answered, saying, "My name is Legion; for we are many." [10] Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country.

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1. "The other side of the sea" refers to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, which was inhabited by Gentiles who did not worship the God of Israel (see verse 1). What was the significance of Jesus traveling to this place to perform a miraculous healing?

2. How did the man respond when he encountered Jesus (see verses 6–10)?

The People Beg Jesus to Leave (Mark 5:11–20)

11 Now a large herd of swine was feeding there near the mountains.
12 So all the demons begged Him, saying, "Send us to the swine, that
we may enter them." 13 And at once Jesus gave them permission.
Then the unclean spirits went out and entered the swine (there were
about two thousand); and the herd ran violently down the steep
place into the sea, and drowned in the sea.

14 So those who fed the swine fled, and they told it in the city
and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that had
happened. 15 Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had
been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and
in his right mind. And they were afraid. 16 And those who saw it told
them how it happened to him who had been demon-possessed, and
about the swine. 17 Then they began to plead with Him to depart
from their region.

18 And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-
possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. 19 However, Jesus
did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell
them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has
had compassion on you." 20 And he departed and began to proclaim
in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.

3. In other places where Jesus traveled, the people usually swarmed Him after He performed a miraculous healing. Why do you think the people didn't do that here (see verses 11–17)?

4. What did Jesus instruct the formerly demon-possessed man to do? Why didn't Jesus allow the man to go with Him (see verses 18–20)?

A Woman Seeks Healing (Mark 5:21–34)

21 Now when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other
side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea.
22 And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus
by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet 23 and begged
Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter lies at the point of death.
Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she
will live." 24 So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed
Him and thronged Him.

[25] Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years,
[26] and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had
spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse.
[27] When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd
and touched His garment. [28] For she said, "If only I may touch His
clothes, I shall be made well."

[29] Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she
felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction. [30] And Jesus,
immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him,
turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?"

[31] But His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude thronging
You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?' "

[32] And He looked around to see her who had done this thing.
[33] But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole
truth. [34] And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well.
Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."

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5. The woman who had been bleeding for twelve years convinced herself that if she could just touch Jesus' clothes, she would be healed. How did this woman develop such a strong faith in Jesus (see verses 27–28)?

6. Why do you think Jesus wanted the woman to know that *He* knew what she had done (see verses 32–34)?

Jesus Raises a Girl from the Dead (Mark 5:35–43)

35 While He was still speaking, some came from the ruler of the synagogue's house who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?"

36 As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not be afraid; only believe." 37 And He permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. 38 Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly. 39 When He came in, He said to them, "Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping."

40 And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying. 41 Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." 42 Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement. 43 But He commanded them strictly that no one should know it, and said that something should be given her to eat.

7. This passage has similarities to the story of the raising of Lazarus (see John 11:1–44). Why did Jesus wait until Jairus' daughter had died before He did anything?

8. Jarius had demonstrated faith by coming to Jesus, but with the child's death it appeared his actions were in vain. How did Jesus encourage Jarius to not lose hope (see verses 36–39)?

Reviewing the Story

In the Gentile region of Gadara, Jesus encountered a demon-possessed man who terrorized the local people with his unpredictable behavior. The demons inside the man recognized Jesus' power and begged Him not to

send them to hell. Instead, they asked Him to let them enter a nearby herd of pigs. Jesus agreed, and the demons promptly drove the pigs into the sea and drowned them. The owners of the pigs were upset over their lost revenue and asked Christ to leave. Jesus then crossed to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, where He not only healed a sick woman who had suffered for years but also raised a girl from the dead.

9. How do you think the demons knew more about Jesus than some of His followers did (see Mark 5:6–7)?

10. The former demon-possessed man of the tombs may have been Jesus' first missionary to the Gentiles (see Mark 5:20). How do you think people responded to this man's testimony?

11. Evidently, the woman with the issue of blood had heard about Jesus' miracles and believed in Him (see Mark 5:27–28). So why do you think the people outside of Jairus's house responded with ridicule instead of faith when Jesus said, "The child is not dead, but sleeping" (verse 39)?

12. After Jesus raised the twelve-year-old girl from the dead, He told the parents not to tell anyone (see Mark 5:43). Why didn't He want anyone else to know about it? How do you think the girl's parents responded to Jesus' command? Explain.

Applying the Message

13. Jesus told Jairus, "Do not be afraid; only believe" (Mark 5:36). Why are those words so hard to live by?

14. If you made a commitment to live by those six words, "Do not be afraid; only believe," what might you dare to do?

Reflecting on the Meaning

The people of Gadara had written off the demon-possessed man as a lost cause. He was too far gone to be helped. His situation was hopeless. The demons inside him were too powerful. He had no future. But then Jesus arrived . . . and everything changed.

The shortsightedness of the Gadarenes was understandable. Nothing about the man suggested he *could* be changed. He struggled not just with one demon but with a host of them. He gave no indication he was strong enough to overcome them. He was at their mercy. He violated social norms. He spent his time in the worst places imaginable. People avoided him because he scared them. He was a danger to himself and others.

Sound familiar?

You may not know someone who is possessed by literal demons, but chances are good you know someone who wrestles with figurative ones. It may be a family member—a parent, child, sibling, uncle, aunt, or cousin who has been labeled a "black sheep" and written off as unredeemable. It may be a friend who has betrayed people's trust too many times. It may be someone at school or work who embraces a destructive lifestyle.

Before you turn your back on that person for good, consider the demon-possessed man's encounter with Jesus. Consider, too, that we worship the God of the impossible. If He can work in the life of the tomb-dweller of Gadara, He can do the same in anyone's life.

So don't stop praying for your family member, friend, or acquaintance just because you see no hope in that person's future. Deliverance may not

be far away. It is available to anyone who has a battle in his or her soul. It comes when Jesus lands on the shores of our lives and we choose not to send Him away.

Journaling Your Response

What is the best thing you can do right now for a "lost cause" person in your life?

LESSON *five*

REJECTED

Mark 6:1–56

Getting Started

What is the worst rejection you've ever experienced? How did you get through that time?

Setting the Stage

The events of Mark 1–5 were centered in Capernaum, Jesus' adopted home during His Galilean ministry. In Mark 6, Jesus traveled to Nazareth, His hometown. He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath and began to teach from the Scriptures. Gathered in the synagogue on that day were members of His family and those who had known Him as a little boy, running around the streets of Nazareth, and as a young man working in the carpentry business.

Jesus' popularity preceded Him. The news of His mighty works piqued people's curiosity. And as He began to teach in the synagogue, the people were astonished. They weren't prepared for the incredible wisdom and integrity that came from His mouth. They could not imagine how this man they had known had come to be what He was. They had watched Him grow up and had seen nothing that suggested He would turn out this way.

But it didn't take long for them to move from astonishment to anger. Their response quickly turned cynical and sarcastic. Their rejection of Jesus spilled out into their words. "Is this not *the carpenter*," they said to each other (Mark 6:3, emphasis added). The citizens of Nazareth viewed Him as nothing more than a common laborer.

"He is no better than we are," they might have objected. "What right does He have to be teaching us? Look at Him. He is just a handyman and nothing more." Furthermore, they added that Jesus was not only *just* a carpenter, but He was also "the Son of Mary" (verse 3). By referring only to Mary, and not to Joseph, they may have been suggesting that Jesus was her illegitimate offspring.

Exploring the Text

A Prophet Without Honor (Mark 6:1–13)

[1] Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. [2] And when the Sabbath had come, He began

to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished,
saying, "Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is
this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by
His hands! 3 Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother
of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with
us?" So they were offended at Him.

4 But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except
in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house."
5 Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands
on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And He marveled because of
their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching.

7 And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them
out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits. 8 He
commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff—no
bag, no bread, no copper in their money belts—9 but to wear sandals,
and not to put on two tunics.

10 Also He said to them, "In whatever place you enter a house,
stay there till you depart from that place. 11 And whoever will not
receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the
dust under your feet as a testimony against them. Assuredly, I say to
you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day
of judgment than for that city!"

12 So they went out and preached that people should repent.
13 And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who
were sick, and healed them.

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1. How did people in Jesus' hometown respond to Him (see verses 2–3)? Why do you think strangers were more receptive to Jesus' message than were the people of His hometown?

2. What power did Jesus give to His disciples? What instructions did Jesus give them for their journey (see verses 7–11)?

John the Baptist Beheaded (Mark 6:14–29)

14 Now King Herod heard of Him, for His name had become well
known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and
therefore these powers are at work in him."
15 Others said, "It is Elijah."
And others said, "It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets."
16 But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded;
he has been raised from the dead!" 17 For Herod himself had sent and
laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias,
his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. 18 Because John had
said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."
19 Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him,
but she could not; 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a
just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him,
he did many things, and heard him gladly.
21 Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave
a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee.
22 And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and
pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl,
"Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you." 23 He also swore
to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom."
24 So she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?"
And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!"

[25] Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

[26] And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. [27] Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, [28] brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. [29] When his disciples heard of it, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb.

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3. How did Herod respond to John the Baptist? Why might Herod and Herodias have had different attitudes toward John (see verses 17–20)?

4. How was Herodias able to force Herod into executing John the Baptist (see verses 21–23)?

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (Mark 6:30–44)

30 Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both
what they had done and what they had taught. 31 And He said to
them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a
while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not
even have time to eat. 32 So they departed to a deserted place in
the boat by themselves.

33 But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him
and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and
came together to Him. 34 And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great
multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they
were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them
many things. 35 When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to
Him and said, "This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late.
36 Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country
and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat."

37 But He answered and said to them, "You give them something
to eat."

And they said to Him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii
worth of bread and give them something to eat?"

38 But He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go
and see."

And when they found out they said, "Five, and two fish."

39 Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups
on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in
fifties. 41 And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish,
He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave
them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided
among them all. 42 So they all ate and were filled. 43 And they took up
twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish. 44 Now those who
had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men.

5. What do Jesus' instructions in verse 31 tell you about His concern for His disciples?

6. How would you describe the difference between the disciples' concern for the multitude and Jesus' concern for them (see verses 34–36)?

Jesus Walks on the Water (Mark 6:45–56)

45 Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before
Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away.
46 And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to
pray. 47 Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the
sea; and He was alone on the land. 48 Then He saw them straining at
rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch
of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have
passed them by. 49 And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they
supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; 50 for they all saw Him and
were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to
them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." 51 Then He went up

into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled. [52] For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.

[53] When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there. [54] And when they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, [55] ran through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was. [56] Wherever He entered, into villages, cities, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well.

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7. Why do you think prayer was so important to Jesus (see verse 46)?

8. How might the disciples' hardened hearts have affected their understanding of Jesus' words (see verse 52)?

Reviewing the Story

Jesus' return to His hometown of Nazareth turned ugly when the people who had known Him all of His life rejected Him and His message. Shortly thereafter, Jesus learned that John the Baptist, His forerunner and brother in ministry, had been executed. Yet Jesus would not allow His circumstances to define His ministry. When a crowd of thousands of people grew hungry after following Jesus to a remote area, He fed them all with only five loaves of bread and two fish. Hours later, He stilled a raging storm at sea with a single command.

9. What advantages might there have been to sending out the disciples in pairs (see Mark 6:7)?

10. John the Baptist's execution marked a turning point in the relationship between the government and Jesus' followers (see Mark 6:27–28). What message did Herod send when he ordered John's beheading?

11. Why do you think Jesus insisted that His disciples rest (see Mark 6:31)? How is rest an essential component of serving the Lord?

12. Being a disciple of Jesus was a constant learning experience. What do you think the disciples learned when they experienced Jesus walking on the surface of the Sea of Galilee (see Mark 6:48–51)?

Applying the Message

13. The disciples had only five loaves of bread and two fish. What do you have to offer Jesus? What could He do with it?

14. Think of your greatest fear—something that terrifies you the way the ghostly figure walking on the water terrified the disciples. If you were to pray for Jesus to make His presence known to you, as He did for the disciples, what difference might it make?

Reflecting on the Meaning

There are at least three points to take away from Jesus' experience in Nazareth. The first is that if you face rejection, your immediate action should be to *go to the Lord Jesus Christ and tell Him what you are feeling*. He can and will empathize with you. He experienced rejection, too. His whole life was one episode of rejection after another, all the way to the cross. So don't think you are alone. The One who saved you from your sin knows rejection. You can talk to Him about it.

The second takeaway is that rejection is a *momentary and spontaneous decision by one person to show cruelty to another*. It does not define you. Rejection has little to do with the person being rejected and everything to do with the one doing the rejecting. You may ask, "What can I do so people won't reject me anymore?" The answer is probably nothing. You can't get others to be what they are not. You cannot change who they are or what they do.

However, while you are not responsible for what other people do to you, you *are* responsible for how you react to them. The ideal strategy is to follow Jesus' instructions. Shake the dust off your feet and remove yourself from those people's presence. When you resist the urge to exact revenge on those who rejected you, you nullify their power to hurt or diminish you.

The third takeaway is that if you are rejected because of your relationship with Christ, *you should rejoice*. Jesus said, "Blessed are you when men

hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake" (Luke 6:22). Being rejected for the sake of Christ is a badge of honor and an experience that will be richly rewarded. So don't be intimidated by the thought of rejection. The favor of people is always fickle. Take comfort in the fact the Lord you serve will never reject you.

Journaling Your Response

What can you do today to ease your fear of rejection?

LESSON *six*

THE POWER OF FAITH

Mark 7:1–8:38

Getting Started

If you asked people in your church, "What is a Christian supposed to do?" what are some of the responses you might get?

Setting the Stage

During the first century, a group of Jewish leaders in Jerusalem kept their eyes on religious comings and goings. Their whole purpose was to find fault. When they saw something they didn't think was right, they sent an investigative committee to check it out.

In Mark 7, the Pharisees who approached Jesus and His disciples accused them of breaking the oral law. The Pharisees believed that when God gave the written law to Moses, he also gave an oral law . . . even though Scripture makes no mention of it. This oral law, in which they put their faith, was supposed to help people understand how to apply the law in everyday matters. But the oral law became such a priority that it actually shifted the focus from the intent of the law to a bunch of external things that really did not represent the law at all.

Jesus confronted His accusers on this occasion by quoting from Isaiah 29:13, in which the prophet described how the people's outward actions honored God while in reality they were far from Him. The Pharisees claimed to place a high priority on God's laws. Among other things, however, they used a loophole in their oral tradition to shield their money so that they could avoid taking care of their elderly parents. With their oral law they violated God's written commandment to "honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12).

Jesus pointed out that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile that person—only what comes from within can defile. He redefined the concepts of spiritual cleanliness and uncleanliness. He called out the Pharisees on their hypocrisy . . . and thus made lethal enemies of them.

Exploring the Text

Defilement Comes from Within (Mark 7:1–23)

[1] Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to
Him, having come from Jerusalem. [2] Now when they saw some of

His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. [3] For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. [4] When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.

[5] Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"

[6] He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

'This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.
[7] And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

[8] For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."

[9] He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. [10] For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' [11] But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"—' (that is, a gift to God), [12] then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, [13] making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."

[14] When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand: [15] There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which

come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. [16] If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!"

[17] When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. [18] So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, [19] because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" [20] And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. [21] For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, [22] thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. [23] All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

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1. How did the religious leaders negate the law of God with their tradition (see verses 9–13)?

2. Read Galatians 5:19–21. How do these works of the flesh compare with the things Jesus said defile a person (see Mark 7:21–22)? How are these different from what the religious leaders thought defiled a person?

Jesus Honors a Syro-Phoenician Woman's Faith (Mark 7:24–30)

[24] From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He

could not be hidden. [25] For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet. [26] The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. [27] But Jesus said to her, "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

[28] And she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs."

[29] Then He said to her, "For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter."

[30] And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.

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3. In Jesus' response to the Syro-Phoenician woman, "children" refers to the Jewish people while "dogs" refers to the Gentiles (see verse 27). Why did Jesus give His message ("bread") first to the Jewish people?

4. Jesus' reply to the desperate mother may seem cruel, but the fact He spoke to a Gentile woman at all set Him apart from most Jewish men. What did the woman's response indicate about her understanding of Jesus' words (see verse 28)?

Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand (Mark 8:1–21)

[1] In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing
to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, [2] "I have
compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with
Me three days and have nothing to eat. [3] And if I send them away
hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of
them have come from afar."

[4] Then His disciples answered Him, "How can one satisfy these
people with bread here in the wilderness?"

[5] He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?"

And they said, "Seven."

[6] So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.
And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave
them to His disciples to set before them; and they set them before
the multitude. [7] They also had a few small fish; and having blessed
them, He said to set them also before them. [8] So they ate and were
filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. [9]
Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent
them away, [10] immediately got into the boat with His disciples, and
came to the region of Dalmanutha.

[11] Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with
Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him. [12] But He
sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, "Why does this generation
seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this
generation."

[13] And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed
to the other side. [14] Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread,
and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. [15]
Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven
of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

[16] And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because
we have no bread."

[17] But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? [18] Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? [19] When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?"

They said to Him, "Twelve."

[20] "Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?"

And they said, "Seven."

[21] So He said to them, "How is it you do not understand?"

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5. This is the second account in Mark's Gospel of Jesus feeding a crowd of people (see 6:30–44). How do you explain the fact that the disciples seem to have forgotten Jesus' earlier feeding of a multitude?

6. Jesus departed from Dalmanutha after the confrontation with the Pharisees, which prompted Him to warn the disciples about the "leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (verse 15)? How did the disciples misinterpret His remarks (see verse 16)?

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (Mark 8:27–36)

27 Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea
Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them,
"Who do men say that I am?"
28 So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and
others, one of the prophets."
29 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"
Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."
30 Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one
about Him.
31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer
many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and
scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke
this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke
Him. 33 But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples,
He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not
mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."
34 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples
also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him
deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35 For whoever
desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My
sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what will it profit a man if he
gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"

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7. Jesus had been ministering to the crowds alongside the disciples and certainly knew what the people were saying about Him. Given this, why do you think He asked the disciples, "Who do men say that I am" (verse 27)?

8. What were the requirements Jesus made for those who wanted to follow Him (see verses 34–35)? Why did Jesus call for such sacrifice?

Reviewing the Story

Faith is a recurring theme in Mark 7–8. The Pharisees and teachers of the law placed their faith in oral traditions—man-made rules and regulations they believed were the keys to righteousness. The Syro-Phoenician woman, though she was not a member of Jewish race, put her faith in Jesus—and the Lord answered her request to heal her daughter. Later, a crowd of thousands who followed Jesus to hear Him teach placed their faith in Him to feed them. Yet when the disciples discovered on their journey that they had only one loaf of bread to split among them, it didn't occur to them to put their faith in Jesus.

9. How does the story of Jesus' interaction with the Syro-Phoenician woman reveal that His ministry was to the Gentiles as well as to the Jewish people (see Mark 7:24–30)?

10. Jesus compared the hypocrisy of Herod and the Pharisees to leaven (see Mark 8:15). Why did Jesus consider hypocrisy so destructive?

11. When Jesus asked the disciples to recall the number of baskets of bread left over from both feedings of the multitudes, the disciples were able to provide the correct numbers (see Mark 8:19–20). What was Jesus trying to make them see by asking this question?

12. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Satan had offered Him the option of using the world's means to bypass His mission (see Matthew 4:8–9). How did Jesus recognize Satan's attempts to again distract Him from His mission through Peter's words (see Mark 8:33)?

Applying the Message

13. What safeguards can you set up to make sure you don't fall into hypocrisy?

14. Peter misunderstood Jesus' purpose, so Satan tried to use him as a stumbling block. What happens when people today misunderstand Jesus' identity and His purpose?

Reflecting on the Meaning

According to Mark 6, the disciples watched Jesus feed a multitude of people with only five fish and two loaves of bread. In fact, the disciples *participated* in the miraculous feeding. They distributed the food as Jesus handed it to them. After everyone in the crowd had eaten, the disciples collected the leftovers, which filled twelve small baskets.

Sometime later, a similar situation arose. Jesus fed a crowd using seven loaves of bread and a few fish. The Bible says 5,000 people were fed the first time and 4,000 were fed the second time. But those numbers only represented the men in the crowd. When you factor in the women and children who were present, the totals could be three to five times the number of men. So the disciples watched Jesus feed many thousands of people using the most meager provisions imaginable.

Immediately after the second miraculous feeding, Jesus and His disciples boarded a boat to sail to Dalmanutha. The disciples grew concerned, however. They had brought only one loaf of bread for the voyage, and they were afraid it wouldn't be enough to feed all twelve of them.

It's tempting to shake our heads at the disciples' short memory. Yet we do the same thing every time we worry. Worry reflects a lack of faith in Jesus. When we worry, we forget the miracles we have witnessed. We forget the extraordinary things Jesus has done for us. We forget the billions of tiny miracles that work together in harmony every nanosecond of the

day in order to sustain our lives on this planet. We imagine that whatever difficulty we are facing is somehow beyond Jesus' concern or power to do anything about.

A better solution is to prayerfully consider what Jesus has to work with—even if it is something seemingly small and insignificant, the equivalent of a single loaf of bread, and then in faith ask Him to do something incredible with it.

Journaling Your Response

What will you tell yourself the next time you start to worry?

LESSON *seven*

A TASTE OF GLORY

Mark 9:1–50

Getting Started

Do you think it was easier to be a disciple in the first century than it is to be a disciple in the twenty-first century? Explain.

Setting the Stage

The Transfiguration of Jesus is recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and referenced by John and Peter. Arguably, it is the most important event to occur in Jesus' life between His birth and His death. The Transfiguration involved seven characters: two of the most important men of the Old

Testament, three of the most prominent disciples of the New Testament, God the Father in heaven, and God the Son on the earth.

When we examine the events of the Transfiguration, we see that it reveals several important things about Christ. First, the Transfiguration serves as *a presentation of His glory*. According to Mark 9:3, the translucent light that came from Jesus' inner being was so bright it caused His clothing to become white. It was a picture of the Jesus who would come out of the tomb three days after His death. It was an image of the Jesus who would come in the clouds in great glory to set up His kingdom on this earth. It was a picture of the future triumphant Christ.

Second, the Transfiguration provides *proof of Christ's deity*. God in heaven speaks to Peter, James, and John from a cloud and says, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Mark 9:7). In effect, God was saying, "I don't want you to have any doubt about what is going on here. This One who just revealed Himself to you is My beloved Son. Listen to Him."

Third, the Transfiguration is *a preview of Christ's suffering*. Mark 9:4 reveals that Elijah and Moses were talking with Jesus. In Luke's Gospel, we learn the topic of their conversation: Jesus' impending death in Jerusalem. "And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:30–31).

Finally, the Transfiguration is *a picture of Christ's exclusivity*. Moses and Elijah vanished, and only Jesus remained. This was to dispel the notion there was any kind of equality among the three men. Jesus alone remained because He alone is salvation.

Exploring the Text

The Transfiguration (Mark 9:2–13)

[2] Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them
up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured
before them. [3] His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like

snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. [4] And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. [5] Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"— [6] because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid.

[7] And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" [8] Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves.

[9] Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead. [10] So they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant.

[11] And they asked Him, saying, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

[12] Then He answered and told them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? [13] But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him."

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1. Mark likely heard the story of the Transfiguration from Peter himself. As Peter recounted the story, how do you think he felt about his words and actions that day?

2. The Jewish teachers of the law believed that Elijah would come before the arrival of the Messiah and lead the people to repentance (see Malachi 4:5–6). How did Jesus respond to this claim? What did He indicate had already taken place (see Mark 9:11–13)?

Jesus Heals a Boy Possessed by an Impure Spirit (Mark 9:14–29)

14 And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude
around them, and scribes disputing with them. 15 Immediately, when
they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running
to Him, greeted Him. 16 And He asked the scribes, "What are you
discussing with them?"

17 Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought
You my son, who has a mute spirit. 18 And wherever it seizes him, it
throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and
becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it
out, but they could not."

19 He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long
shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me."
20 Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately
the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed,
foaming at the mouth.

21 So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening
to him?"

And he said, "From childhood. 22 And often he has thrown him
both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can
do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

23 Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible
to him who believes."
24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with
tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"
25 When Jesus saw that the people came running together,
He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit,
I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!" 26 Then the
spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he
became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead." 27 But Jesus
took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.
28 And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked
Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"
29 So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but
prayer and fasting."

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3. How do you interpret the father's words, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief" (verse 24)?

4. Why do you think prayer and fasting are essential for some actions of faith? Why didn't the disciples think to pray when they were trying to drive out the demon?

Jesus Predicts His Death a Second Time (Mark 9:30–37)

30 Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and
He did not want anyone to know it. 31 For He taught His disciples
and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands
of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the
third day." 32 But they did not understand this saying, and were
afraid to ask Him.

33 Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house
He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on
the road?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed
among themselves who would be the greatest. 35 And He sat down,
called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first,
he shall be last of all and servant of all." 36 Then He took a little child
and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in
His arms, He said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one of these little
children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives
not Me but Him who sent Me."

5. Jesus didn't want anyone to know He was passing through Galilee because He wanted uninterrupted time with His disciples. What was the important message He wanted them to understand (see verses 30–31)?

6. Why do you think the disciples were afraid to ask Jesus about His prediction of His death (see verse 32)?

Whoever Is Not Against Us Is for Us (Mark 9:38–50)

38 Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we saw someone who
does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade
him because he does not follow us."
39 But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a
miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. 40 For he
who is not against us is on our side. 41 For whoever gives you a cup of
water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly,
I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.
42 "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me
to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around
his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you
to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather
than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be
quenched— 44 where

'Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.'

45 "And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for
you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into
hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— 46 where

'Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.'

47 "And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire— 48 where

'Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.'

49 "For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. 50 Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another."

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7. Not only did the disciples argue about which of them was the greatest, but they also tried to stop someone who was not part of their group from doing Christ's work (see verses 34, 38). How would you explain their attitude?

8. Based on the events of Mark 9:14–41, what might cause another believer (especially "one of these little ones") to stumble in his or her faith?

Reviewing the Story

At the Transfiguration, Jesus gave Peter, James, and John a glimpse of His glory. Coming down from this literal mountaintop experience, Jesus had to settle a dispute involving His other disciples, who had failed in their attempt to drive out a demon. Yet their failure seemed to have little effect on their egos. As they made their way to Capernaum, the disciples got into an argument about which of them was the greatest. They also tried to place themselves above another follower of Christ who was driving out demons using a method different from theirs.

9. Read 2 Peter 1:16–21. How did Peter's brief glimpse of Jesus' glory in the Transfiguration forever change his life (see Mark 9:2–6)?

10. Why did Jesus lament about the "faithless generation" that surrounded Him? How was He having to "bear" with them (see Mark 9:14–19)?

11. Why do you think Jesus had such concern for the "little ones" who believed in Him (see Mark 9:36–37)?

12. What are some actions Jesus' followers should (and shouldn't) do to "have peace with one another" (Mark 9:50)?

Applying the Message

13. In Mark 9:24, the father of the child with an unclean spirit said to Jesus, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" How can you make that father's prayer your prayer? In what areas do you need to confess your lack of faith? Take a moment to ask Jesus to increase your faith.

14. What specific things can you do to help prevent others from stumbling spiritually?

Reflecting on the Meaning

In Mark 9, we read that when Jesus, Peter, James, and John came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, they met with the other nine disciples, who had gotten into an argument with a man who had brought his demon-possessed son for healing. Initially, the man got nothing for his efforts because the disciples could not exorcise the demon. Jesus later explained they had failed because "this kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting" (verse 29).

Yet in verse 38, those very same disciples felt justified in criticizing a man who was casting out demons using a different method. Truth be told, they were probably upset because he was doing a better job of it than they were. Many of us today share the struggles of those first disciples. We find a style of evangelism we prefer and convince ourselves it is the only effective way for bringing people to Christ. However, were we to travel to different parts of the world, we would discover that God uses all kinds of people and means to bring people to Himself. We do great damage when we think we're the only ones who know how to do it right.

It is a sad fact that pride and competitiveness often lead us to work against others who are on the same team. The result is that those who are living in darkness get ignored while we argue about the "right" way to reach them. Instead, we must remind ourselves we serve the *same* God and are working toward the *same* goal. The things that separate us are insignificant.

If we are going to make an impact on this world for Jesus Christ, we can't allow pettiness and jealousy to distract us. We're all on the same team. So when one of us wins, we all win.

Journaling Your Response

What might cause you to criticize another believer's faith or way of serving God? How can you stop yourself from being overly critical of that person?

LESSON *eight*

THE RANSOM

Mark 10:1–52

Getting Started

When is a time that God revealed something to you in a dramatic and profound way? How did that event change your understanding of Him?

Setting the Stage

Jesus and His disciples were headed toward Jerusalem and the crucifixion. Jesus was out in front, leading His disciples, teaching by example. He was helping them understand what leadership was all about. The disciples were amazed and afraid.

Perhaps this was because He was speaking to them more solemnly than usual. Or maybe because His gait seemed more steady and determined than usual. Luke writes that "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" (9:51; see also Isaiah 50:7). Whatever the case, the disciples knew something was up . . . and they were filled with anxiety. They were following Jesus, knowing that something foreboding lay ahead of them.

Jesus does little to calm His disciples' anxiety. In fact, He intensifies it with His brutal honesty. This wasn't the first time Jesus predicted His death. He had talked about it on two previous occasions (see Mark 8:31–33; 9:30–32). Both times, however, His disciples had misunderstood his words. They thought He was talking about establishing an earthly kingdom. They thought He was predicting Israel's return to power and the end of bondage to Rome.

This time, however, Jesus left no room for misunderstanding. He explained to them that shortly He would be suffering at the hands of His enemies. He told them that He was going to offer Himself as a sacrifice. He was not going to do any political maneuvering. He was going to give His very life as a ransom for many.

Lest anyone mistake what Jesus was saying, he offered specific details. He told His disciples His death would occur in Jerusalem. He identified the chief priests and scribes as the ones who would condemn Him to death. He used legal terms to indicate that He would be tried and executed within the criminal justice system. And He left His disciples feeling stunned.

Exploring the Text

Marriage and Divorce (Mark 10:1–12)

1 Then He arose from there and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan. And multitudes gathered to Him again, and as He was accustomed, He taught them again.

2 The Pharisees came and asked Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" testing Him.

3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?"

4 They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss her."

5 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. 6 But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' 7 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, 8 and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

10 In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same matter. 11 So He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. 12 And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

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1. King Herod had previously put John the Baptist to death because John had denounced the king's marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife (see Mark 6:17–18). What might the Pharisees have been trying to do by asking Jesus this question on divorce (see Mark 10:2)?

2. What did Jesus reveal were the differences between the Pharisees' views of divorce and God's view on the matter (see verses 4–9)?

The Rich and the Kingdom of God (Mark 10:17–31)

17 Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt
before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I
may inherit eternal life?"

18 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is
good but One, that is, God. 19 You know the commandments: 'Do not
commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false
witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'"

20 And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things
I have kept from my youth."

21 Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One
thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the
poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the
cross, and follow Me."

22 But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he
had great possessions.

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard
it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 And
the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered
again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust
in riches to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to
go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the
kingdom of God."

26 And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves,
"Who then can be saved?"

27 But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible,
but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

28 Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and
followed You."

29 So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is
no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother
or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, 30 who shall

not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life. [31] But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

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3. How did Jesus respond to the rich young man? What were His specific instructions (see verse 21)?

4. Why do you think it was so difficult for the rich young man to move from trusting wealth to trusting Christ (see verses 22–25)?

Jesus Predicts His Death a Third Time (Mark 10:32–45)

[32] Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: [33] "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; [34] and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him,
saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask."
36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"
37 They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right
hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory."
38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are
you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the
baptism that I am baptized with?"
39 They said to Him, "We are able."
So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink,
and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; 40 but
to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is
for those for whom it is prepared."
41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased
with James and John. 42 But Jesus called them to Himself and said
to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the
Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority
over them. 43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires
to become great among you shall be your servant. 44 And whoever
of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of
Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a
ransom for many."

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5. Look back at Mark 9:33–37. Why were the other disciples upset with James and John? Why do you think Jesus kept having to address this issue?

6. Why does Jesus expect His followers to have servants' hearts (see Mark 10:42–45)? What does Paul indicate in Philippians 2:5–8 about the attitude of a servant?

Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52)

46 Now they came to Jericho. As He went out of Jericho with His
disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus,
sat by the road begging. 47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of
Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have
mercy on me!"

48 Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the
more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

49 So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called.

Then they called the blind man, saying to him, "Be of good cheer.
Rise, He is calling you."

50 And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus.

51 So Jesus answered and said to him, "What do you want Me
to do for you?"

The blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, that I may receive my
sight."

52 Then Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made
you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus
on the road.

7. There are stories throughout the Gospels of people helping the sick and disabled get to Jesus. How is the story of Bartimaeus different from those other stories (see verse 48)?

8. Read John 9:1–3. How did Jesus' attitude and actions toward Bartimaeus contradict the prevailing thought about sin and punishment?

Reviewing the Story

Once again the Pharisees had tried to catch Jesus in a theological trap, this time with a question about divorce. As before, Jesus exposed the wrong thinking behind their question. He welcomed children into His presence and upbraided a rich young man—two things that were unusual in first-century Jewish culture. He also spoke explicitly to His disciples about what was about to transpire in Jerusalem. The news shook Jesus' disciples momentarily, but an argument about which of them was the greatest soon distracted them. Jesus intervened in their dispute and then restored sight to a man named Bartimaeus.

9. The Pharisees approached the issue of divorce from a legal perspective—they wanted to determine what a person *could* and *couldn't* do. How was Jesus' approach different (see Mark 10:5–9)?

10. Why would it be considered a "wise investment" for a person to surrender his or her life to Christ (see Mark 10:29–30)?

11. Given Jesus' statements to the disciples in Mark 10:33–34, why should you be surprised by the requests James and John made to Jesus (see verses 35–37)?

12. Put yourself in Bartimaeus's place. You are suddenly able to see, and the first thing your eyes focus on is the face of Jesus. How would you describe your emotions in this moment?

Applying the Message

13. Jesus never walked around trouble. He set a course straight for the heart of controversy and confrontation. What are the implications of this mindset for those who follow Him?

14. What can you do to serve someone else this week? If Jesus asked, "What do you want Me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51), what would you say?

Reflecting on the Meaning

As Jesus was approaching the city of Jericho, he was met by a blind man named Bartimaeus, who cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:47). As we look at this story, we need to remember that Bartimaeus serves as an illustration of what it means to come to faith in

Christ. If we, like Bartimaeus, are to receive *spiritual* sight and have our blindness removed, we must take the same steps as he took.

First, we need to *acknowledge our condition*. In 2 Corinthians 4:3–4, Paul writes that Satan has "blinded [those] who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." Bartimaeus knew his greatest need was not money or housing—as important as those things might have been. What he needed most was *eyesight*, for he was blind (and had probably been so since birth). In the same way, we need to acknowledge our condition: we all suffer from spiritual blindness.

Second, we need to *accept the truth about Christ*. Bartimaeus had never met Jesus, and he had certainly never seen Him. Yet he believed what the people were saying about Christ. He believed He was the Son of David, the Messiah, and he believed the reports he had heard about the miracles Jesus had done. Once we acknowledge we are blind, we must likewise accept the truth about Christ. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Third, we need to *act on the truth we have received*. In Romans 10:13, Paul writes that "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." When Bartimaeus heard the command from Jesus to rise, he believed he could stand up . . . and he did. And when Jesus commanded Bartimaeus to go his way, he began to walk in obedience. In all this, Bartimaeus demonstrated his faith by his obedience. Our faith must likewise be demonstrated in our action. We come to Jesus by an act of our will and, in repentance, we seek His healing and forgiveness.

Finally, we need to *affirm our faith by following Christ*. Jesus had previously said to His disciples, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up His cross and follow Me" (Mark 8:34). After Bartimaeus received the healing he had requested, he did not return to his house but began following Jesus from that day forward. "And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road" (10:52). If we are born again—if we have truly been saved from our sin—there should be evidence we are following the Lord!

Journaling Your Response

What evidence can others see in your life that you are following after the Lord?

LESSON *nine*

ONE LAST JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Mark 11:1–33

Getting Started

If you knew you had less than a week to live, what would you do?

Setting the Stage

Jesus and His disciples were making their way up the 3,500-foot incline from Jericho to Jerusalem. Their pace was unhurried but purposeful. The culmination of Jesus' ministry, and God's plan of salvation, was rapidly approaching. The fate that awaited Jesus in Jerusalem was horrific but absolutely essential. How fully the disciples understood that fate is open to debate. Jesus had predicted His suffering and death to them three times already, but they still didn't fully grasp the magnitude of what was about to happen.

Still, they followed Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. As they neared the city, they were interrupted in their journey by a blind man named Bartimaeus who begged for Jesus to heal him. Jesus took pity on the man and restored his sight. During the most intense time of His life, Jesus paused one last time to minister to someone in need.

The travelers stopped in the village of Bethany, which was Jesus' "second home." The village, located at the top of the Mount of Olives, offered a respite from the crowds and bustle of Jerusalem. From their perch in Bethany, Jesus and His disciples could look out over the valley at the capital city of Israel. Bethany was the staging area for the final push into Jerusalem.

The narrative pace of the Gospel of Mark changes in the eleventh chapter. If you look back at Mark 1, you will see the author begins his book with Jesus' baptism, which took place when Jesus was well into His adult years. The first ten chapters cover roughly two years of Jesus' public ministry. The last six chapters cover *seven days*. Mark gives great focus and emphasis to Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

Exploring the Text

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem As King (Mark 11:1–11)

[1] Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany,
at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples; [2] and He said

to them, "Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it. [3] And if anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it,' and immediately he will send it here."

[4] So they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it. [5] But some of those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, loosing the colt?"

[6] And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go. [7] Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it. [8] And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road. [9] Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

"Hosanna!
'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'
[10] Blessed is the kingdom of our father David
That comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!"

[11] And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve.

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1. Read Exodus 12:37–51. Jesus and His disciples came to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Why was the Passover celebration especially relevant in light of what Jesus was preparing to do (see Mark 10:32–34)?

2. Read Zechariah 9:9, which was considered a Messianic prophecy. Why did the crowd respond toward Jesus as they did (see Mark 11:8–10)?

Jesus Curses a Fig Tree (Mark 11:12–14)

12 Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was
hungry. 13 And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to
see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it,
He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 In
response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again."
And His disciples heard it.

3. Read Luke 13:6–9. The fig tree represented Israel (see Hosea 9:10). Spiritually speaking, Israel appeared to be fruitful, but it was not. What message was Jesus sending to the people of Israel by cursing the fig tree (see Mark 11:14)?

4. Look at Mark 11:20–21. What impact did this brief incident have on Jesus' disciples?

Jesus Clears the Temple Courts (Mark 11:15–26)

15 So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and
began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and
overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those
who sold doves. 16 And He would not allow anyone to carry wares
through the temple. 17 Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not
written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'?
But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

18 And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they
might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were
astonished at His teaching. 19 When evening had come, He went out
of the city.

20 Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree
dried up from the roots. 21 And Peter, remembering, said to Him,
"Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away."

22 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. 23 For
assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed
and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes
that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.
24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray,
believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against
anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you
your trespasses. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father
in heaven forgive your trespasses."

5. Jesus had been to the temple and had encountered the money changers many times before. Why do you think He chose this time to disrupt their dealings?

6. What key teachings on prayer did Jesus emphasize in this passage (see verses 23–26)?

The Authority of Jesus Questioned (Mark 11:27–33)

27 Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the
temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him.
28 And they said to Him, "By what authority are You doing these
things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?"
29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one
question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do
these things: 30 The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from
men? Answer Me."
31 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From
heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 32 But if we
say, 'From men' "—they feared the people, for all counted John to
have been a prophet indeed. 33 So they answered and said to Jesus,
"We do not know."
And Jesus answered and said to them, "Neither will I tell you by
what authority I do these things."

7. What do you think the Jewish religious leaders would have done if Jesus had told them His authority came from God? What do you think they would have done if He had told them His authority came from Himself (see verse 33)?

8. Based on this passage, what conclusions can you draw regarding the motives of the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders?

Reviewing the Story

Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly, the way a king might enter a city. The people of Israel, who desperately wanted a Jewish king, were happy to welcome him. Jesus reminded his disciples that his power extended far beyond earthly realms by cursing a fig tree, which subsequently withered and died. He exercised his spiritual authority by driving the money changers from the temple. Yet the chief priests, scribes, and elders still demanded to know the source of Jesus' authority. Jesus refused to indulge their nonsensical request. He silenced them with a single question.

9. "Hosanna!" means "Save!" By shouting this, what do you think the crowd in Jerusalem anticipated Jesus would do (see Mark 11:9–10)?

10. How would you respond to someone who suggested Jesus lost His temper with the fig tree (see Mark 11:13–14)?

11. How might doubt hinder a person's prayers? How might unforgiveness impact a person's prayers (see Mark 11:22–26)?

12. Why do you think the Jewish religious leaders continued to challenge Jesus even though He made them look foolish and hypocritical every time?

Applying the Message

13. Who do you need to forgive so you can fully experience God's forgiveness?

14. Based on Jesus' words in Mark 11:23–24, what bold prayer requests will you take to God this week?

Reflecting on the Meaning

Jesus' encounter with the money changers in the temple is so startling, and so inspiring, that it should cause us to reevaluate not only Jesus' character but also our own Christlikeness. Jesus was not a man prone to outbursts. His gentle and loving nature attracted people to Him. Powerful religious leaders sought an audience with Him. So did the outcasts of society. He welcomed children into His presence. He brought joy and healing to countless people.

His moral courage was just as striking as His kindness. Jesus was afraid of no one. He never backed down from a confrontation, but neither did He seek one out. He was a person of integrity. He knew when anger was appropriate and when it was counterproductive. He endured constant accusations from the Pharisees but never responded with malice. He countered their accusations and silenced them with His wisdom and reliance on God's Word.

Yet Jesus didn't hesitate to act when the time came to take a bold stand against those in the temple who were perverting God's Word and making it difficult for others to worship. He made His point memorably . . . even though He knew that He would be criticized and vilified for His actions.

Jesus' moral courage calls for an aggressive agenda to your faith. With Jesus living in you, you can apply an aggressive spirit toward things that are worth conquering. You can use that spirit to learn how to express what is in your heart about the injustices of the world. You won't be afraid to stand up and be counted when it is your turn. You will love to surprise children,

the elderly, and disadvantaged people with a strength that protects and encourages. You will use your strength as a Christian to speak and act on behalf of righteousness and truth.

Journaling Your Response

What might happen if you were more courageous in your faith?

LESSON *ten*

THE PROBLEM WITH PHARISEES

Mark 12:1–44

Getting Started

What is the most meaningful gift you've ever received? What made it so significant?

Setting the Stage

The last act of Jesus' public ministry was not a sermon or a miracle but a day spent at the treasury in Herod's temple, watching people put money in a treasury box. It was Tuesday of Passion Week. In Herod's temple, there

were thirteen different treasuries in the center of the Court of the Women, where all the Jewish people could go. Each treasury was unique.

The treasury box was a tall container with a huge trumpet proceeding from it. When people came to give, they would cast their money into the trumpet. The coins would go around and down, into the treasury box below. Some people learned how to throw their money into the treasury box so it could be heard all over the temple. They would bring all the copper coins they could find and toss them forcefully into the trumpet. The clatter they made announced to the other temple-goers that someone had just made a conspicuous gift to the temple. In other words, some people gave so they could be noticed.

Jesus likely saw plenty of givers like that, but they didn't interest Him much. What did interest Him was an elderly widow who quietly made her way to the temple box. In her frail hand, she held two small coins, an amount that would have seemed insignificant to anyone but her. They were, however, significant to Jesus. In fact, the woman's offering meant more to Jesus than other gifts worth a thousand times its value.

The reason, Jesus explained, is that while others gave out of their wealth, the widow gave out of her poverty. Those two coins were all she had. So she entrusted them to God.

Exploring the Text

The Parable of the Tenants (Mark 12:1–12)

[1] Then He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. [2] Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers. [3] And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. [4] Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded him in the head, and sent him away

shamefully treated. [5] And again he sent another, and him they killed;
and many others, beating some and killing some. [6] Therefore still
having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying,
'They will respect my son.' [7] But those vinedressers said among
themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance
will be ours.' [8] So they took him and killed him and cast him out of
the vineyard.

[9] "Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will
come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others.
[10] Have you not even read this Scripture:

'The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
[11] This was the Lord's doing,
And it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

[12] And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude,
for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left
Him and went away.

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1. In this parable, the vineyard owner represents God, the vineyard represents His kingdom, the tenants represent Israel's religious leaders, the servants represent God's prophets, and the beloved son represents Jesus. Based on these insights, what point was Jesus making in His parable?

2. The plan to kill Jesus was already in motion. In His parable, Jesus predicted His death and warned the religious leaders about what would happen if they killed Him (see verses 9–11). What do you think the leaders thought and felt when they realized that Jesus knew their plans?

The Pharisees and Sadducees Test Jesus (Mark 12:13–27)

13 Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians,
to catch Him in His words. 14 When they had come, they said to
Him, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one;
for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God
in truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? 15 Shall we pay,
or shall we not pay?"

But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why do you test
Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it." 16 So they brought it.

And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?"
They said to Him, "Caesar's."

17 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar
the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

And they marveled at Him.

18 Then some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came
to Him; and they asked Him, saying: 19 "Teacher, Moses wrote to us
that if a man's brother dies, and leaves his wife behind, and leaves

no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring
for his brother. [20] Now there were seven brothers. The first took a
wife; and dying, he left no offspring. [21] And the second took her,
and he died; nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise.
[22] So the seven had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman
died also. [23] Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose
wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife."

[24] Jesus answered and said to them, "Are you not therefore
mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power
of God? [25] For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor
are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. [26] But concerning
the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in
the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the
God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? [27] He is
not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore
greatly mistaken."

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3. Taxes were the lifeblood of the Roman Empire, and the punishment for not paying them was severe. However, the Jewish people absolutely *despised* paying taxes to Rome. How was this question about paying taxes designed to put Jesus in an awkward position (see verses 13–15)?

4. In what ways did the Sadducees misunderstand the Scriptures and the power of God (see verses 24–27)?

The Greatest Commandment (Mark 12:28–34)

28 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning
together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him,
"Which is the first commandment of all?"
29 Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is:
'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall
love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all
your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.
31 And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as
yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."
32 So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken
the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. 33 And
to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the
soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself,
is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."
34 Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him,
"You are not far from the kingdom of God."
But after that no one dared question Him.

5. According to Jesus, what are the two greatest commandments (see verses 29–31)?

6. Why do you think Jesus' reply kept people from asking Him additional questions (see verse 34)?

The Widow's Offering (Mark 12:38–44)

38 Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who
desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces,
39 the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts,
40 who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers.
These will receive greater condemnation."

41 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people
put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much.
42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a
quadrans. 43 So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them,

"Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; [44] for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

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7. What actions of the scribes received condemnation from Jesus (see verses 38–39)? What other words would you use to describe them?

8. What action from the widow received commendation from Jesus (see verses 42–44)? What does this say about the way God views the attitude of your heart in giving?

Reviewing the Story

The Jewish religious leaders hated Jesus' parables because many of the stories were directed at *them*. They knew His parable of the tenants implicated them and put them in a bad light, but they were powerless to do anything about it because they feared the reaction of His followers. So they tried to bait Jesus with a question about paying taxes to Rome, but He thwarted their efforts with a reply so wise it stunned them into silence. Jesus offered similarly wise responses to their questions about marriage in heaven and the greatest commandment. He also warned His followers not to be fooled by the religious leaders' showy self-importance.

9. The chief priests, scribes, and elders were the religious leaders of Israel. Why do you think they were afraid of the crowd (see Mark 12:12)?

10. Why would Jesus' listeners have been amazed by His reply to the question about paying taxes to Rome (see Mark 12:15–17)?

11. Practically speaking, how can a person express love for God with all of his or her heart, soul, mind, and strength (see Mark 12:30)?

12. How does giving express a person's priorities? What does a person's giving reveal about his or her trust in God (see Mark 12:43–44)?

Applying the Message

13. What do you think Jesus might say if He reviewed your giving? Why?

14. Which of your neighbors, the people in your life, especially need to be shown love right now? What can you do to show a tangible expression of love to them?

Reflecting on the Meaning

Alfred Nobel was a Swedish chemist who made his fortune by inventing dynamite and other powerful explosive materials that were bought by major governments to produce weapons. When Alfred Nobel's brother died, one newspaper accidentally printed Alfred's obituary instead. Alfred was described in the obituary as a man who had become rich by enabling people to kill each other in unprecedented quantities.

When someone sent Alfred a copy of his own obituary, he read it with amazement. He was so shaken with the assessment of his life that he resolved to use the fortune he had amassed to reward accomplishments that benefitted humanity instead of destroying it. He established what we now know as the Nobel Peace Prize.

Alfred Nobel had a rare opportunity to look at the assessment of his life while he was still alive . . . and while he was still able to do something about it. What would you do if you had the same opportunity? If you could read an unbiased assessment of your life up to this point, what would it say? What would be highlighted? What *wouldn't* it say? What goals do you have that are yet to be accomplished?

The more important question is this: What can you do to *change* your obituary—to bolster it and make it more meaningful? What can you do to make a difference in the lives of others? How can you show Christ's love to others? How can you realign your priorities to reflect God's will? How can

you spend more time building a spiritual legacy that will outlive you and less time doing things that ultimately don't matter?

Alfred Nobel made the most of his second chance to leave a lasting, positive impression. What will you learn from his example?

Journaling Your Response

In two or three sentences, how would you summarize the legacy you would like to leave?

LESSON *eleven*

A TRIAL AND THREE DENIALS

Mark 13:1–14:72

Getting Started

If you could take back one moment in your life, what would it be? Why?

Setting the Stage

In Mark 13–14, the disciples experienced a rollercoaster of emotions as the Passover week unfolded. They were excited to be given a glimpse of the future as Jesus revealed events that would occur in the end times and usher in His kingdom. At the same time, they were confused. The kingdom Jesus described bore little resemblance to the kingdom they had anticipated.

At one point, they became outraged when a woman in Bethany poured an entire jar of expensive perfume on Jesus' head. They argued the perfume should have been sold and the money used to care for the poor. They were startled when Jesus came to the woman's defense and explained that she was preparing His body for burial.

The Passover meal itself was disconcerting. Alone with His disciples, Jesus announced one of them would betray Him. Eleven of the men were stunned by the news. Yet none of them scoffed at the notion. Instead, each man asked Jesus if He would be the betrayer. As the disciples wrestled with that news, Jesus spoke more about His impending death.

And then came Gethsemane, where everything seemed to fall apart. For the first time, the disciples saw Jesus in a vulnerable position. He agonized over what lay ahead. But they could do nothing to help. He asked them to keep watch while He prayed, but they fell asleep—not once, but three times. They awakened in time to see one of their own, Judas Iscariot, leading a group of Jesus' enemies. Some of them tried to put up a fight, but Jesus stopped them. They stared helplessly as Jesus allowed Himself to be arrested and led away.

Exploring the Text

Signs of the End Times (Mark 13:1–31)

[1] Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him,
"Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!"

2 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great
buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not
be thrown down."

3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple,
Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, 4 "Tell us, when
will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things
will be fulfilled?"

5 And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no
one deceives you. 6 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,'
and will deceive many. 7 But when you hear of wars and rumors of
wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end
is not yet. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against
kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there
will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows.

9 "But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to
councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be
brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them.
10 And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. 11 But
when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand,
or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in
that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.
12 Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child;
and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put
to death. 13 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he
who endures to the end shall be saved.

14 "So when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of
by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader
understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.
15 Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor
enter to take anything out of his house. 16 And let him who is in the
field not go back to get his clothes. 17 But woe to those who are
pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 18 And
pray that your flight may not be in winter. 19 For in those days there

will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. [20] And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

[21] "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it. [22] For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. [23] But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

[24] "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; [25] the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. [26] Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. [27] And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.

[28] "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. [29] So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! [30] Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. [31] Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

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1. Some of the disciples lived to see the utter destruction of Jerusalem and its temple (see verse 2). What emotions do you think they experienced when they saw that not one stone was left on another?

2. Jesus warned, "Take heed that no one deceives you" (verse 5). What insights did Jesus give that would help keep His followers from being spiritually deceived (see verses 6–31)?

Jesus Anointed at Bethany and the Last Supper (Mark 14:1–21)

1 After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened
Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might
take Him by trickery and put Him to death. 2 But they said, "Not during
the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people."

3 And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat
at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly
oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head.
4 But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and
said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? 5 For it might have been
sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor."
And they criticized her sharply.

6 But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She
has done a good work for Me. 7 For you have the poor with you
always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you
do not have always. 8 She has done what she could. She has come
beforehand to anoint My body for burial. 9 Assuredly, I say to you,
wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman
has done will also be told as a memorial to her."

10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests
to betray Him to them. 11 And when they heard it, they were glad, and
promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently
betray Him.

[12] Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?"

[13] And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. [14] Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' [15] Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us."

[16] So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover.

[17] In the evening He came with the twelve. [18] Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me."

[19] And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "Is it I?" And another said, "Is it I?"

[20] He answered and said to them, "It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish. [21] The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born."

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3. How would you compare the unnamed woman with Judas Iscariot—especially as it relates to their attitudes toward money and the Lord (see verses 3, 10–11)?

4. What thoughts do you think Judas had as he listened to Jesus' warning (see verse 21)?

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane (Mark 14:27–50)

27 Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written:

'I will strike the Shepherd,
And the sheep will be scattered.'

28 "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."
29 Peter said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be."
30 Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times."
31 But he spoke more vehemently, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"
And they all said likewise.
32 Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and

deeply distressed. [34] Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch."

[35] He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. [36] And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."

[37] Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? [38] Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

[39] Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words. [40] And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him.

[41] Then He came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. [42] Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

[43] And immediately, while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. [44] Now His betrayer had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him and lead Him away safely."

[45] As soon as he had come, immediately he went up to Him and said to Him, "Rabbi, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

[46] Then they laid their hands on Him and took Him. [47] And one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

[48] Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? [49] I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled."

[50] Then they all forsook Him and fled.

5. Jesus knew what lay ahead for Him as He prayed in Gethsemane. What insights about His humanity do you find in this passage (see verses 32–41)?

6. It was customary at the time for disciples to greet their rabbi with a kiss. But what greater implications did Judas's kiss have in this story (see verses 44–46)?

Peter Disowns Jesus (Mark 14:53–72)

53 And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were
assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes. 54 But
Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high
priest. And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire.
55 Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony
against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. 56 For many
bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree.
57 Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying,
58 "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands,

and within three days I will build another made without hands.'"
59 But not even then did their testimony agree.

60 And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" 61 But He kept silent and answered nothing.

Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

62 Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

63 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? 64 You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?"

And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.

65 Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, "Prophesy!" And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands.

66 Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came. 67 And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with Jesus of Nazareth."

68 But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are saying." And he went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed.

69 And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, "This is one of them." 70 But he denied it again.

And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, "Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it."

71 Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this Man of whom you speak!"

72 A second time the rooster crowed. Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And when he thought about it, he wept.

7. Read Deuteronomy 17:6. Why were the chief priests so intent on finding two witnesses whose testimony agreed about Jesus (see verses 55–56)?

8. What do you think changed in Peter's life between his vow never to "stumble" or to "deny" Jesus and his triple denial of Jesus in this passage (see verses 66–71)?

Reviewing the Story

From all appearances, the disciples had reason to panic. The Passover week, which began so promisingly with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, had spiraled into something out of a nightmare. Jesus' enemies appeared to have outmaneuvered Him. After Jesus' arrest, the disciples faced a worst-case scenario that none of them had fully anticipated. Jesus seemed to accept His fate. He offered no resistance when His enemies came for Him, even though His life was at stake. From all appearances, Jesus' ministry—and the disciples' hopes for roles in His kingdom—had come to an abrupt end. Appearances, however, can be deceiving.

9. What did Jesus say would happen to His followers as the time of His return drew near (see Mark 13:9–13)?

10. How did Jesus respond to the disciples when they criticized the woman for pouring expensive oil over His head (see Mark 14:6–9)?

11. What do Jesus' words and actions in Gethsemane reveal about the way in which we should deal with our own personal struggles (see Mark 14:35–36)?

12. How did all of the disciples ultimately fulfill Jesus' promise that they would stumble and betray Him (see Mark 14:50, 66–72)?

Applying the Message

13. What would be your best-case scenario as far as Jesus' return is concerned? What would you like Him to find you doing when He returns?

14. What will you do the next time you're tempted to deny or downplay having a personal relationship with Christ?

Reflecting on the Meaning

Jesus had warned His disciples about the high cost of following Him when they began arguing about which of them was the greatest. Yet here again, we see that His warnings did little to shake their confidence. You can almost hear the cockiness in Peter's voice as he now vows never to leave Jesus' side. The other disciples likely voiced their pledges with similar cockiness.

That's what makes their subsequent failures so stunning. Jesus made a single request of Peter, James, and John in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus had the weight of the world on His shoulders, and He needed to talk to His Father without being disturbed. So He asked the trio to keep watch for Him while He prayed. He gave them an opportunity to do something *for Him*.

Three times He asked them to keep watch . . . and three times they fell asleep. Then, when Judas Iscariot and his co-conspirators came to arrest Jesus, the disciples put up a token defense and ran away. Peter followed the arrest party to the high priest's residence and hid in the courtyard. Three times people recognized him, giving him a chance to stand boldly with Jesus. Three times Peter denied even *knowing* Jesus.

The disciples failed Jesus when He needed them the most. But that's not the takeaway here. The takeaway is that none of the disciples—aside from Judas Iscariot, who killed himself—were defined by their failures. After repenting and seeking forgiveness, they all came back strong. They all played vital roles in spreading the news of Christ throughout the world.

If you have failed in a public way, know that you can come back strong as well. Take the necessary steps. Ask forgiveness, first from God, and

second from anyone who was hurt by your failure. Take whatever lessons you can learn from the experience. And then move forward. God has big plans for you.

Journaling Your Response

What steps do you need to take in order to put a failure behind you?

LESSON *twelve*

IT'S NOT OVER

Mark 15:1–16:20

Getting Started

What are some of the ways that you have seen people still mocking Jesus today?

Setting the Stage

Mark devotes two chapters (one eighth of his book) to the events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. The plot against Jesus, which kicked into high gear with his arrest at Gethsemane, now unfolds at a breakneck pace. Mark reveals the unlikely alliances and strange bedfellows that were created to get rid of Jesus.

The complexity of the plot against Jesus may give the illusion that Pilate, Herod, the Jewish religious leaders, and the Roman soldiers somehow held Jesus' fate in their hands. Nothing could be further from the truth. None of them recognized it at the time, but each person involved in Jesus' trial, torture, and crucifixion was playing a role in God's plan of salvation. Jesus was not a helpless victim of Jewish and Roman scheming. He was an obedient servant of His heavenly Father—a willing sacrifice.

The Roman soldiers mocked and beat Jesus because He allowed them to do so. They drove spikes through His hands and feet because He permitted it. His enemies taunted Him while He hung in agony on the cross because He agreed to let them do so. In fact, Jesus asked God to forgive them because they didn't know what they were doing (see Luke 23:34).

Look at Jesus' words to Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53). With a single word from His lips, Jesus could have ended His suffering and exacted a holy retribution on His torturers. Yet He remained silent. He understood that His death, and His resurrection, was the only way to bridge the gap that sin had created between God and humankind.

Exploring the Text

Jesus Before Pilate (Mark 15:1–15)

[1] Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound

Jesus, led Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate. [2] Then Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

He answered and said to him, "It is as you say."

[3] And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. [4] Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, "Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!" [5] But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.

[6] Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. [7] And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. [8] Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them. [9] But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" [10] For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.

[11] But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. [12] Pilate answered and said to them again, "What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?"

[13] So they cried out again, "Crucify Him!"

[14] Then Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?"

But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him!"

[15] So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified.

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1. How would you describe the actions and attitude of the Jewish religious leaders in this passage? How would you describe the actions and attitude of Pilate?

2. Why do you think the crowd refused to answer Pilate when he asked what crime Jesus had committed (see verse 14)?

The Soldiers Mock Jesus (Mark 15:16–32)

16 Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and
they called together the whole garrison. 17 And they clothed Him
with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head,
18 and began to salute Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 Then they
struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing
the knee, they worshiped Him. 20 And when they had mocked Him,
they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led
Him out to crucify Him.

21 Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the
father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country
and passing by, to bear His cross. 22 And they brought Him to the
place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. 23 Then they
gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it.
24 And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting
lots for them to determine what every man should take.

25 Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. 26 And the
inscription of His accusation was written above:

THE KING OF THE JEWS.

27 With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right
and the other on His left. 28 So the Scripture was fulfilled which says,
"And He was numbered with the transgressors."

[29] And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, [30] save Yourself, and come down from the cross!"

[31] Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. [32] Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe."

Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.

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3. Wine mixed with myrrh was a painkiller that was offered by certain respected women of Jerusalem to people who were condemned to die. Why do you think Jesus refused something that would ease His suffering (see verse 23)?

4. How would you describe the treatment Jesus received beginning at the Praetorium and continuing even on the cross (see verses 16–20, 29–32)?

The Death of Jesus (Mark 15:33–47)

[33] Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the
whole land until the ninth hour. [34] And at the ninth hour Jesus cried
out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which
is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

[35] Some of those who stood by, when they heard that, said, "Look,
He is calling for Elijah!" [36] Then someone ran and filled a sponge full
of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying,
"Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down."

[37] And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.

[38] Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.
[39] So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried
out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the
Son of God!"

[40] There were also women looking on from afar, among whom
were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of
Joses, and Salome, [41] who also followed Him and ministered to Him
when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with
Him to Jerusalem.

[42] Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation
Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, [43] Joseph of Arimathea, a
prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom
of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for
the body of Jesus. [44] Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and
summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for
some time. [45] So when he found out from the centurion, he granted
the body to Joseph. [46] Then he bought fine linen, took Him down,
and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had
been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of
the tomb. [47] And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses
observed where He was laid.

5. Read Psalm 22:1–31. How do some of these verses relate to the events of Jesus' crucifixion?

6. In what ways was Joseph of Arimathea's request to take the body of Jesus an act of courage? How did Pilate respond to his request (see Mark 15:43–45)?

Jesus Has Risen (Mark 16:1–20)

1 Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the
mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come
and anoint Him. 2 Very early in the morning, on the first day of the
week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. 3 And they
said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door
of the tomb for us?" 4 But when they looked up, they saw that the
stone had been rolled away—for it was very large. 5 And entering
the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting
on the right side; and they were alarmed.

6 But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of
Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place
where they laid Him. 7 But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that
He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He
said to you."

8 So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they
trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for
they were afraid.

9 Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He
appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven
demons. 10 She went and told those who had been with Him, as they
mourned and wept. 11 And when they heard that He was alive and
had been seen by her, they did not believe.

12 After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as
they walked and went into the country. 13 And they went and told it
to the rest, but they did not believe them either.

14 Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and
He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did
not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. 15 And He
said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every
creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he
who does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will
follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons;
they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and
if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will
lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

19 So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received
up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they
went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them
and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.

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7. The angel instructed the women to "tell [Jesus'] disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee" (verse 7). Why did the angel specifically mention Peter?

8. Why do you think the disciples, of all people, didn't believe the witnesses who said they had seen the risen Jesus (see verses 11–13)?

Reviewing the Story

On Friday, Jesus' enemies walked away from Golgotha believing they had accomplished their mission. They had turned the people—the very ones who had cheered Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem only days earlier—utterly against Him. They had caused His disciples to scatter in fear. They had exacted their revenge for Jesus' public challenges to their authority. They had rid themselves of the nuisance from Nazareth forever and put an end to His radical teachings. On Sunday, however, Jesus' enemies discovered just how wrong they had been when reports started circulating about an empty tomb and numerous sightings of the resurrected Jesus.

9. How were the Jewish religious leaders able to stir up the crowd outside of Pilate's residence so easily (see Mark 15:11)?

10. Why do you think Jesus quoted from Psalm 22 as He hung on the cross (see Mark 15:34)?

11. The mother of James and John was present at Jesus' crucifixion (see Mark 15:40–41). Earlier, she had asked Jesus to give her sons places of honor on either side of Him. What do you think was going through her mind when she saw what it actually meant to be on either side of Jesus at Golgotha?

12. How did Jesus' resurrection impact His disciples (see Mark 16:20)?

Applying the Message

13. How would you explain to someone what Jesus did for each of us on the cross?

14. People talk about keeping the spirit of Christmas in their heart every day. How can you keep the spirit of Easter in your heart every day?

Reflecting on the Meaning

Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection have life-changing implications for you. First, it reveals that *you have immeasurable worth to God*. As the apostle Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians 6:20, "You were bought at a price." That price was the life of Jesus Christ. God saw such value in you that He sent His only Son to die in your place so you could have eternal life with Him.

Second, it reveals *you have a unique story*. If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, you have an experience that is unlike any other. At one point in your life, you were lost and now you are saved. The details behind that transition—the condition of your life beforehand, the realization that something was wrong, the circumstances that caused you to turn to Jesus, the changes in your life that resulted from your decision—make your story unique. You have no idea how powerfully your story will resonate in someone else's life . . . until you share it.

Third, the death and resurrection of Christ reveal that *you have a benevolent Lord*. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6:19, that "you are not your own," describe the implications of what it took to make heaven possible for you. If you are a Christian, you have submitted to Jesus' lordship. This means your life is no longer in your own hands. Jesus' priorities are now your priorities. His will is now your will.

Fourth, it reveals *you have an essential responsibility*. If you recognize your worth in God's eyes, embrace the uniqueness of your story, and have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, your job is to help others do the same. You do that by the way you live your life—the way you treat others, the loving concern you show, and the priorities you embrace.

Journaling Your Response

How will you celebrate today what Jesus did for you at the cross?

LEADER'S GUIDE

Thank you for choosing to lead your group through this study from Dr. David Jeremiah on *The Gospel of Mark*. Being a group leader has its own rewards, and it is our prayer that your walk with the Lord will deepen through this experience. During the twelve lessons in this study, you and your group will read selected passages from Mark, explore key themes in the Gospel based on teachings from Dr. Jeremiah, and review questions that will encourage group discussion. There are multiple components in this section that can help you structure your lessons and discussion time, so please be sure to read and consider each one.

Before You Begin

Before your first meeting, make sure you and your group are well-versed with the content of the lesson. Group members should have their own copy of *The Gospel of Mark* study guide prior to the first meeting so they can follow along and record their answers, thoughts, and insights. After the first week, you may wish to assign the study guide lesson as homework prior to the group meeting and then use the meeting time to discuss the content in the lesson.

To ensure everyone has a chance to participate in the discussion, the ideal size for a group is around eight to ten people. If there are more than ten people, break up the bigger group into smaller subgroups. Make sure the members are committed to participating each week, as this will help create stability and help you better prepare the structure of the meeting.

At the beginning of each week's study, start with the opening Getting Started question to introduce the topic you will be discussing. The members

should answer briefly, as the goal is just for them to have an idea of the subject in their minds as you go over the lesson. This will allow the members to become engaged and ready to interact with the rest of the group.

After reviewing the lesson, try to initiate a free-flowing discussion. Invite group members to bring questions and insights they may have discovered to the next meeting, especially if they were unsure of the meaning of some parts of the lesson. Be prepared to discuss how biblical truth applies to the world we live in today.

Weekly Preparation

As the group leader, here are a few things you can do to prepare for each meeting:

- *Be thoroughly familiar with the material in the lesson*. Make sure you understand the content of each lesson so you know how to structure the group time and are prepared to lead the group discussion.

- *Decide, ahead of time, which questions you want to discuss.* Depending on how much time you have each week, you may not be able to reflect on every question. Select specific questions that you feel will evoke the best discussion.

- *Take prayer requests.* At the end of your discussion, take prayer requests from your group members and then pray for one another.

Structuring the Discussion Time

There are several ways to structure the duration of the study. You can choose to cover each lesson individually, for a total of twelve weeks of group meetings, or you can combine two lessons together per week, for a total of six weeks of group meetings. You can also have the group members read just the selected passages of Scripture that are given in each lesson,

or they can cover the entire Gospel of Mark. The following charts illustrates these options:

TWELVE-WEEK FORMAT

Week	Lessons Covered	Expanded Reading
1	Behold the Lamb of God	*Mark 1:1–45*
2	Friends and Family	*Mark 2:1–3:35*
3	Into the Storm	*Mark 4:1–41*
4	An Incident in Gadara	*Mark 5:1–43*
5	Rejected	*Mark 6:1–56*
6	The Power of Faith	*Mark 7:1–8:38*
7	A Taste of Glory	*Mark 9:1–50*
8	The Ransom	*Mark 10:1–52*
9	One Last Journey to Jerusalem	*Mark 11:1–33*
10	The Problem with Pharisees	*Mark 12:1–44*
11	A Trial and Three Denials	*Mark 13:1–14:72*
12	It's Not Over	*Mark 15:1–16:20*

SIX-WEEK FORMAT

Week	Lessons Covered	Expanded Reading
1	Behold the Lamb of God / Friends and Family	*Mark 1:1–3:35*
2	Into the Storm / An Incident in Gadara	*Mark 4:1–5:43*
3	Rejected / The Power of Faith	*Mark 6:1–8:38*
4	A Taste of Glory / The Ransom	*Mark 9:1–10:52*
5	One Last Journey to Jerusalem / The Problem with Pharisees	*Mark 11:1–12:44*
6	A Trial and Three Denials / It's Not Over	*Mark 13:1–16:20*

In regard to organizing your time when planning your group Bible study, the following two schedules, for sixty minutes and ninety minutes, can give you a structure for the lesson:

Section	60 Minutes	90 Minutes
Welcome: Members arrive and get settled	5 minutes	10 minutes
Getting Started Question: Prepares the group for interacting with one another	10 minutes	10 minutes
Message: Review the lesson	15 minutes	25 minutes
Discussion: Discuss questions in the lesson	25 minutes	35 minutes
Review and Prayer: Review the key points of the lesson and have a closing time of prayer	5 minutes	10 minutes

As the group leader, it is up to you to keep track of the time and keep things moving according to your schedule. If your group is having a good discussion, don't feel the need to stop and move on to the next question. Remember, the purpose is to pull together ideas and share unique insights on the lesson. Encourage everyone to participate, but don't be concerned if certain group members are more quiet. They may just be internally reflecting on the questions and need time to process their ideas before they can share them.

Group Dynamics

Leading a group study can be a rewarding experience for you and your group members—but that doesn't mean there won't be challenges. Certain members may feel uncomfortable discussing topics that they consider very personal and might be afraid of being called on. Some members might have disagreements on specific issues. To help prevent these scenarios, consider the following ground rules:

- If someone has a question that may seem off topic, suggest that it is discussed at another time, or ask the group if they are okay with addressing that topic.
- If someone asks a question you don't know the answer to, confess that you don't know and move on. If you feel comfortable,

invite other group members to give their opinions or share their comments based on personal experience.

- If you feel like a couple of people are talking much more than others, direct questions to people who may not have shared yet. You could even ask the more dominating members to help draw out the quiet ones.
- When there is a disagreement, encourage the group members to process the matter in love. Invite members from opposing sides to evaluate their opinions and consider the ideas of the other members. Lead the group through Scripture that addresses the topic, and look for common ground.

When issues arise, encourage your group to think of Scripture: "Love one another" (John 13:34), "If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18), and, "Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19).

ABOUT

Dr. David Jeremiah and Turning Point

Dr. David Jeremiah is the founder of Turning Point, a ministry committed to providing Christians with sound Bible teaching relevant to today's changing times through radio and television broadcasts, audio series, books, and live events. Dr. Jeremiah's teaching on topics such as family, prayer, worship, angels, and biblical prophecy forms the foundation of Turning Point.

David and his wife, Donna, reside in El Cajon, California, where he serves as the senior pastor of Shadow Mountain Community Church. David and Donna have four children and twelve grandchildren.

In 1982, Dr. Jeremiah brought the same solid teaching to San Diego television that he shares weekly with his congregation. Shortly thereafter, Turning Point expanded its ministry to radio. Dr. Jeremiah's inspiring messages can now be heard worldwide on radio, television, and the internet.

Because Dr. Jeremiah desires to know his listening audience, he travels nationwide holding ministry rallies and spiritual enrichment conferences that touch the hearts and lives of many people. According to Dr. Jeremiah, "At some point in time, everyone reaches a turning point; and for every person, that moment is unique, an experience to hold onto forever. There's so much changing in today's world that sometimes it's difficult to choose the right path. Turning Point offers people an understanding of God's Word and seeks to make a difference in their lives."

Dr. Jeremiah has authored numerous books, including *Escape the Coming Night* (Revelation), *The Handwriting on the Wall* (Daniel), *Overcoming Loneliness, Prayer—The Great Adventure, God in You* (Holy Spirit), *When*

Your World Falls Apart, *Slaying the Giants in Your Life*, *My Heart's Desire*, *Hope for Today*, *Captured by Grace*, *Signs of Life*, *What in the World Is Going On?*, *The Coming Economic Armageddon*, *I Never Thought I'd See the Day!*, *God Loves You: He Always Has—He Always Will*, *Agents of the Apocalypse*, *Agents of Babylon*, *Revealing the Mysteries of Heaven*, *People Are Asking . . . Is This the End?*, *A Life Beyond Amazing*, *Overcomer*, and *The Book of Signs*.

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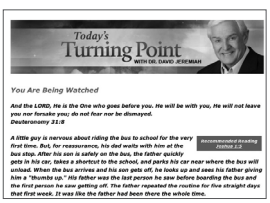
Today's Turning Point
WITH DR. DAVID JEREMIAH

You Are Being Watched

And the LORD, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.
Deuteronomy 31:8

A little guy is nervous about riding the bus to school for the very first time. But, for reassurance, his dad waits with him at the bus stop. After his son is safely on the bus, the father quickly gets in his car, takes a shortcut to the school, and parks his car near where the bus will unload. When the bus arrives and his son gets off, he looks up and sees his father giving him a "thumbs up." His father was the last person he saw before boarding the bus and the first person he saw getting off. The father repeated the routine for five straight days that first week. It was like the father had been there the whole time.

Recommended Reading
Joshua 1:2

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