40 DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK

SIX-SESSION STUDY GUIDE

ROMANS

IN THE GRIP OF GRACE

MAX LUCADO

WITH KEVIN & SHERRY HARNEY

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40 Days Through the Book: Romans Study Guide
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Requests for information should be addressed to: Zondervan, *3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546*

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The themes of this study are drawn from the video study of the same name by Max Lucado. All other resources, including the session introductions, small group discussion questions, prayer direction, and the 40 Days learning and reflection exercises and have been written by Kevin and Sherry Harney in collaboration with Max Lucado.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Welcome to the *40 Days Through the Book* study on Romans. During the course of the next six weeks, you and your fellow group members will embark on an in-depth exploration of Paul's message to the church in Rome. During this study, you will learn when Paul wrote the book, the audience for whom it was written, and the background and context in which it was written. But, more importantly, through the teaching by Max Lucado, you will explore the key themes that Paul relates in the book—and how his teachings relate to you today.

SESSION OUTLINE

The *40 Days Through the Book* video and study guide are designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or small group gathering. Each session begins with an introduction reading and question. You and your group will then watch the video message. There is an outline provided in the guide for you to take notes and gather your reflections as you watch the video. Next, you will engage in a time of directed discussion, review the memory verse for the week, and then close each session

with a time of prayer. (Note that if your group is larger, you may wish to watch the videos together and then break into smaller groups of four to six people, to ensure that everyone has time to participate in discussions.)

40-DAY JOURNEY

What is truly unique about this study, and the other studies in the *40 Days Through the Book* series, are the daily learning resources that will lead you into a deeper engagement with the text. Each week, you will be given a set of daily readings, with accompanying reflection questions, to help you explore the material that you covered during your group time.

The first day's reading will focus on the key verse to memorize for the week. In the other weekly readings, you will be invited to read a passage from the book of Romans, reflect on the text, and then respond with some guided journal questions. On the final day, you will review the key verse again and recite it from memory. As you work through the six weeks' worth of material in this section, you will read (and, in some cases, reread) the entire book of Romans.

Now, you may be wondering why you will be doing this over the course of *forty* days. Certainly, there is nothing special about that number. But there is something biblical about it. In the Bible, the number forty typically designates a time of *testing*. Noah was in the ark for forty days. Moses lived forty years in Egypt and another forty years in the desert before he led God's people. He spent forty days on Mount Sinai receiving God's laws and sent spies, for forty days, to investigate the land of Canaan. Later, God sent the prophet Jonah to warn

ancient Nineveh, for forty days, that its destruction would come because of the people's sins.

Even more critically, in the New Testament we read that Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, fasting and praying. It marked a critical transition point in his ministry—the place where he set about to fulfill the mission that God had intended. During this time Jesus was tested relentlessly by the enemy . . . and prevailed. When he returned to Galilee, he was a different person than the man who had entered into the wilderness forty days before. The same will be true for you as you commit to this forty-day journey through Romans.

GROUP FACILITATION

You and your fellow group members should have your own copy of this study guide. Not only will this help you engage when your group is meeting, but it will also allow you to fully enter into the *40 Days* learning experience. Keep in mind the video, questions, and activities are simply tools to help you engage with the session. The real power and life-transformation will come as you dig into the Scriptures and seek to live out the truths you learn along the way.

Finally, you will need to appoint a leader or facilitator for the group who is responsible for starting the video teaching and for keeping track of time during discussions and activities. Leaders may also read questions aloud and monitor discussions, prompting participants to respond and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate. For more thorough instructions on this role, see the Leader's Guide included at the back of this guide.

INTRODUCTION

ROMANS

AUTHOR, DATE, AND LOCATION

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome c. AD 57, almost three decades after the resurrection of Jesus and the birth of the Church. It is fair to say that Rome was the "center" of the world in the days of Paul. The most famous poets, politicians, philosophers, and people came from Rome, moved to Rome, or longed to visit this influential city. Paul knew that if the gospel grew healthy roots in Rome, it could spread all over the world. If the church in Rome was gripped by the grace of God, it could influence and help believers far and wide.

THE BIG PICTURE

Some of Paul's letters were written to dear friends, others to people he had mentored, and still others to churches that knew him well. The letter to the church in Rome was different. It was written to a group of believers who had not

met Paul and were actually a bit cautious about him. He was a controversial person they had heard about but did not know personally. Paul's hope was to visit the believers in Rome on his way to Spain. So, as a preamble to their meeting, Paul sent a letter that was inspired by the Holy Spirit and came from deep within his heart. Romans is one of the richest theological works ever penned, yet it is also deeply personal.

The first eleven chapters focus with laser precision on the core beliefs of the Christian faith. If a believer wants to dig into the central teaching of the Bible, almost all of the core doctrines can be found in the book of Romans. The theme of these chapters is correct belief, or what theologians would call *orthodoxy*. Paul is showing the Roman church that his beliefs were absolutely in line with the Scriptures and the teaching of Jesus.

Starting in chapter twelve, there is a shift. With one word, the focus moves from belief to action. When Paul declares "Therefore," in Romans 12:1, he turns the reader's attention to what scholars call *orthopraxy*, or right Christian living. Once we know what we believe, we can move into action and daily behavior that honors and glorifies God.

In this one letter, Paul shows the Roman church that his beliefs and practices are unquestionably in line with the truth they have been taught. He gives a Spirit-breathed clarification of what the gospel is and how Jesus' people are to think and live in the grip of God's amazing grace. Paul, with authentic clarity and deep transparency, thus goes from being a controversial stranger to the Romans to a brother and friend—before they ever meet him.

Paul's words to the Romans contained the power to save souls, shape minds, and transform lives for the glory of Jesus. The exciting thing is that reading this book of the Bible can

still do all of these things today! So brace yourself as you read this letter from Paul.

EPIC THEMES

There are several themes in Romans that are worthy of our focus. Some of these include:

- **The reality, danger, and power of sin.** Sin is the deepest problem that human beings face and has eternal consequences (see Romans 1–2).

- **God's grace is real, amazing, and available to all people.** Through Jesus, every person is invited to enter a relationship with the Father and be cleansed of their sin (see Romans 3–5).

- **God has broken our chains and set us free, but the battle with sin continues.** Our old way of life is dead and we are alive in Jesus, but the process of spiritual growth and becoming like Jesus takes a lifetime and demands continual surrender to the will and ways of God (see Romans 6–8).

- **God's beautiful story comes in four movements: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.** We are part of a spiritual family tree that spans the Old and New Testaments in the Bible. God is engrafting us into a bigger story and family than we can imagine (see Romans 9–11).

- **Christians follow in the steps of their Savior.** This means that we walk the pathway of love. In a world driven by selfish ambition and self-centered demands, we humbly serve and sacrificially love others (see Romans 12–13).

- **Followers of Jesus are like passengers on a ship.** We are all on the same journey. We are part of an amazing family of faith, and God calls us to live in fellowship with each other (see Romans 14–16).

In the first eleven chapters of the book of Romans, the apostle Paul lays out the core beliefs of the Christian faith with clarity and precision. Then, in the final five chapters, Paul reveals how to live in ways consistent with those beliefs. So, as you start this journey, ask God to help you *understand* your faith at a deeper level than you ever have before, and then pray for the courage and strength to *live out* what you learn in your daily life. In addition, ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand God's grace, walk in that grace, and share it freely with every person you meet.

SESSION 1

THE PROBLEM WE FACE

ROMANS 1–2

There is a problem that every human being faces called sin. It leads to consequences that are bigger than we realize. Try as we might, we can't solve this problem on our own. Thankfully, God has a solution, and he desires to deal with our sin.

WELCOME

When you look at the top-grossing movies of all time, there is one fascinating common trait that stands out: *heroes!* From the *Star Wars* movies to the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy to the *Avengers* franchise, about 60 percent of the top movies are stories of heroes. Even *The Ten Commandments*, which was made in 1956, shows up in the top ten-grossing movies of all time and presents Moses as a type of hero—and God as the ultimate hero.

All of this raises the question as to why we people are so drawn to heroes. But before we can answer that question, we first have to consider what a hero is. One simple definition is, "A person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities." In movies, these characters tend to do things that are far and above what "ordinary" people could or would choose to do. A war hero rushes back into battle to drag injured soldiers out of harm's way. A superhero flies in to save the day, or summons sea creatures to do their bidding, or throws a massive hammer that returns to their hand after defeating their enemies.

We are drawn to heroes because they have the courage, noble qualities, and power to change the world that we desire for our own lives. We admire these traits because they are rare in this world today. In fact, most of us would likely say we have never met a true hero.

Or have we?

If a hero is truly someone who lives with courage, achieves great things, and does that which is noble, then maybe we have met more heroes than we have recognized. When a person loves Jesus and follows his will, he or she might just qualify as a hero. Maybe your prayer-warrior grandmother was a hero. Maybe that faithful Sunday school teacher who opened the Bible and shared with middle school kids for three decades was a hero. Perhaps ordinary people who dare to follow God and obey his Word can become heroes.

Movies are nice, but what we need to see in this life are *real* people who live heroically as they follow Jesus, the ultimate hero. As we begin our forty-day journey through the book of Romans, we meet such a hero in the apostle Paul. His devotion to Jesus, his boldness to speak (and write) the

truth, and his understanding of God's grace all serve as examples that we can seek to follow as we walk through the book of Romans.

SHARE

Think about the definition of a hero as being someone who has lived courageously with outstanding achievements and noble qualities. Who is someone you know who has lived such a heroic life? What is it about this person that makes them a hero in your eyes?

WATCH

Play the video for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts, questions, or key points that stand out to you.

Paul, an unusual but true hero (Romans 1:1–2)

Setting the scene: a prelude to a visit from Paul

A clear presentation of Christian doctrine from an unlikely source

The bad news first: the reality of sin and wrath (Romans 1:18–20)

How do we respond to sin?

Hedonism: pretending God does not exist (Romans 1:18–23)

Judgmentalism: ignoring our sinfulness and condemning others (Romans 2:1–3)

Legalism: trying to use religion to earn our way to God (Romans 2:17–29)

The bottom line: *grace!*

DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture. Use the following questions to help guide your discussion.

1. What impacted you the most as you watched Max's teaching on Romans 1–2?

2. Paul was profoundly aware of his sins and broken past. Why is awareness of our need for grace so critical if we are going to have sound biblical beliefs (theology)?

3. Max described the suit of good deeds and religious works he wore for many years. How would you describe a garment of self-righteousness you wore before you came to really understand the good news of the grace of Jesus?

4. **Read Romans 1:21–32.** What are some of the consequences that a person faces who lives as a hedonist (as if God does not exist)?

5. **Read Romans 2:1–4.** What are signs or indicators that we are focusing on the sins of others while ignoring our own failings? Why is this so dangerous?

6. **Read Romans 2:17–24.** If we compare ourselves to people who are living deep in sin and are rebellious toward God, how can this bolster a false sense of self-righteousness? If we compare ourselves to Jesus, what does this do to our arrogance and self-reliance?

MEMORIZE

In each session, you will be given a key verse (or verses) from the passage covered in the video teaching to memorize. This week, your memory verse is from Romans 1:16:

> *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*

Have everyone recite this verse out loud. Then go around the room again and have everyone try to say the verse completely from memory.

RESPOND

What will you take away from this session? What is a practical next step you can take that will move you toward fully embracing the grace of Jesus rather than being hedonistic, judgmental, or legalistic? Take a few moments to write down your thoughts.

PRAY

Close your group time by praying in any of the following directions:

- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have pursued your own hedonistic desires and forgotten to surrender to God's will for your life.
- Ask for the power of the Holy Spirit to help you stop judging others and look honestly at the need for repentance in your own heart and life.
- Pray for freedom from legalism and for deep understanding of God's grace in your life.

YOUR 40-DAY JOURNEY

SESSION ONE

Reflect on the material you have covered in this session by engaging in the following between-session learning resources. Each week, you will begin with a day to preview the biblical theme from the session. During the next five days, you will have an opportunity to read a portion of Romans, reflect on what you learn, respond by taking action, journal some of your insights, and pray about what God has taught you. Finally, on the last day, you will review the epic theme of the session, reflect on what you have learned, and review how it has impacted your life.

DAY 1

Memorize: Begin this week's personal study by reciting Romans 1:16:

> *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*

Now try to say the verse completely from memory.

Reflect: What does this tell you about the power of the gospel in your life?

DAY 2

Read: Romans 1:1–17.

Reflect: Among other things, the book of Romans is an introduction of the apostle Paul to the Christians in the city of Rome. If all you knew about Paul was found in these opening seventeen verses of the letter, what would you learn about his heart, relationship to Jesus, and care for God's church? Think about how you would picture Paul after reading these words.

Journal:

- As you read Romans 1:16–17, what do you learn about the gospel?

- Our faith is central to the gospel. What do you learn about the place of faith in this passage? How is your faith growing (if indeed it is)?

Pray: Ask for the power of the Holy Spirit to help you live by faith every moment of the day.

DAY 3

Read: Romans 1:18–32.

Reflect: As you read Romans 1:18–32, notice the recurring line in verses 24, 26, and 28: "God gave them over." It paints a picture of a downward spiral deeper and deeper into sin. What does this spiral look like in our world? In your own life?

Journal:

- Why do you think God, who loves us and wants us to be gripped by his grace, would give us over to our sin and allow us to keep running from him?

- What can you do to break the pattern of this downward spiral in your own life?

Pray: Confess where you see yourself running into sin and resisting God. Ask for power to turn back to God.

DAY 4

Read: Romans 2:1–16.

Reflect: We are all tempted to wear the judge's robe and spend too much time focusing on the sins and problems of other people. Think about your attitude toward others. What are some ways you can identify that you sit as "judge and jury"?

Journal:

- Why is God opposed to you and me sitting as the judge over other people?

- What are two or three ways that you tend to have a judgmental attitude?

Pray: Ask for forgiveness for any judgmental attitudes and actions and pray for eyes to see others the way God does.

DAY 5

Read: Romans 2:17–29.

Reflect: In the days of the apostle Paul, there were many people who lived with spiritual pride, religious arrogance, and bloated egos. The temptation to be a legalist and glory in our own "super spirituality" still exists today. Think back over the past week and take note of times that your attitudes, actions, or words were legalistic. What can you do to show more grace and respond with a less legalistic attitude toward others?

Journal:

- What were some of the legalistic and spiritually arrogant attitudes in the lives of the people to whom Paul was writing?
- What are some of the patterns of religious pride and legalism that can capture the heart of a Christian today? Reflect on your own life to make sure you are not exhibiting any of these patterns.

Pray: Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where legalism or religious arrogance has crept into your heart.

DAY 6

Read: Romans 2:21–32.

Reflect: We are messed up because of sin, and God wants to make us whole and healthy. This is the epic theme of these opening chapters of Romans. If we miss the truth that sin is more prevalent and dangerous than we think, we have not

read this passage closely enough. If we begin to see the greatness of God's grace and willingness to deal with our sin, we are starting to get the big message. What is one step you can take in your own life to stop the downward spiral of sin pictured in this passage?

Journal:

- How do these chapters in Romans open your eyes to the reality of sin and the vastness of God's grace?
- Write a brief prayer of thanks for the gift of grace God has lavished on you.

Pray: Thank God that sin does not have the final word, but that his grace is greater than all our sins.

DAY 7

Memorize: Conclude this week's personal study by again reciting Romans 1:16:

> *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*

Now try to say the verse completely from memory.

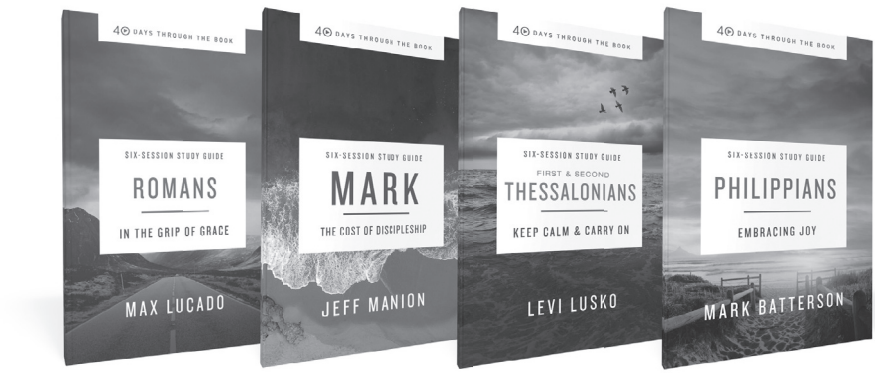
Reflect: What does God's gift of salvation mean to you personally?

40 DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK

Study Books of the Bible with Trusted Pastors

The 40 Days Through the Book series has been designed to help believers more actively engage with God's Word. Each study encourages participants to read through one book in the New Testament at least once during the course of 40 days and provides them with:

- A clear understanding of the background and culture in which the book was written,
- Insights into key passages of Scripture, and
- Clear applications and takeaways from the particular book that participants can apply to their lives.



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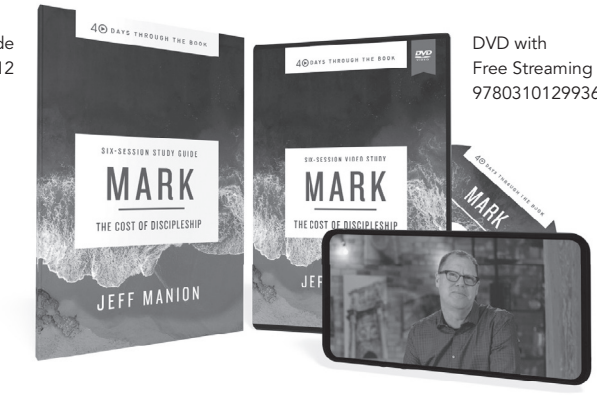


MARK

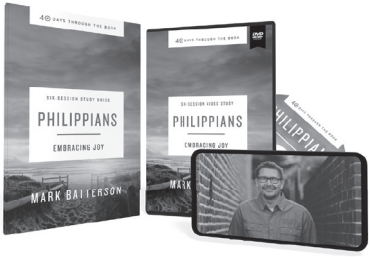
The Cost of Discipleship

Jeff Manion

Who is Jesus and what does it mean to follow him? The focus of Mark's gospel is setting up those questions and answering them. What we find is that he is our servant king who wants us to discover the way of the Christ.

Whether you are exploring the faith for the first time or you have a growing faith over a period of time, Jesus says "Follow Me." Will you join the company of Christ? Will you join our servant king in the mission of expanding the kingdom of God?

— MORE IN THIS SERIES COMING SOON! —



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MARK

IN THE COMPANY OF CHRIST

JEFF MANION

WITH KEVIN & SHERRY HARNEY

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Requests for information should be addressed to: Zondervan, *3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546*

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Welcome to the *40 Days Through the Book* study on the Gospel of Mark. During the course of the next six weeks, you and your fellow group members will embark on an in-depth exploration of John Mark's message to the believers in the Church. During this study, you will learn when he wrote the book, the audience for whom it was written, and the context in which it was written. But, more importantly, you will explore the key themes that John Mark relates in the book—and how his teachings apply to you today.

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INTRODUCTION

MARK

AUTHOR, DATE, AND LOCATION

John Mark was not one of the original disciples of Jesus. His name first appears in the book of Acts, after Peter miraculously escaped from prison and made his way to a home that belonged to John Mark's mother (see Acts 12:12). From there, the young man became a traveling companion of Paul and Barnabas, until he deserted them in Pamphylia, causing a rift between the two men (see 12:25; 13:13; 15:39). John Mark went on to travel with Barnabas, but scholars believe he maintained a close association with Peter, from whom he learned about the Savior. John Mark penned his fast-paced Gospel just a few decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus, in the early AD 60s, to believers in Rome and around the Roman world. This was a time of severe persecution, and his Gospel brought hope to those who were feeling discouraged. It also gave clarity for anyone who wondered what it meant to be a follower of Jesus.

THE BIG PICTURE

While the three other Gospel writers—Matthew, Luke, and John—focused on details of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection, Mark gets right to the heart of the matter. A few decades had passed since Jesus' ministry, and some people were growing a bit fuzzy about what it meant to be a follower of the Messiah. Persecution of Christians was intensifying, and there was a temptation among the believers to compromise, apologize, or simply give up on their faith. Sadly, some were doing exactly that!

So, Mark needed to take the early Christians back to the basics. With clarity and precise language, he pulls no punches as he explains exactly what it means to be a follower of Christ. As we read his words, we discover an invitation to ask: *Who is this Jesus? What does he expect of me? Is suffering a normal part of the Christian life? What will encourage and strengthen my trust in Jesus?* These are questions that all who put their faith in Jesus—at some point in their lives—will ask themselves, maybe again and again. These questions are not born of a lack of faith but serve to strengthen and stabilize our relationship with the Savior.

As we read John Mark's rapid-fire account of the ministry of Jesus, we find answers to these questions . . . and many others. When we embrace these biblical answers, our faith will solidify, our hope will deepen, and our pathway forward will grow clear. We fill find that God's strength fills us as Jesus draws near. So lace up your running shoes. Open your heart and mind. And come with your questions! Get ready to move as Mark's Gospel reveals what it means to follow Jesus. Your life will never be the same.

EPIC THEMES

There are several themes in Romans that are worthy of our focus. Some of these include:

- **Jesus has been given all authority.** This authority was clear for everyone to see. Jesus had power over the natural world, spiritual forces, sickness, and even death. As people encountered the Savior and recognized this, they were either drawn to him or resisted him (see Mark 1–3).

- **Jesus calls us and sends us out.** There were many people who flooded to Jesus and were drawn to his ministry. But out of the many, Jesus called twelve men to be with him and to go out with his message to the world. Jesus calls people near to him, and then he sends them out (see Mark 3–6).

- **Jesus was always willing to reveal God's truth.** Even those who walked closest to Jesus and witnessed his power, ministry, and character did not fully understand who he was or what he expected of them. Although many others seemed to be deaf to the truth of God and blind to who he was, Jesus was always ready to open ears and give sight to the blind (see Mark 6–8).

- **Jesus redefined greatness.** Jesus told his followers that he would suffer and die. He also declared on multiple occasions that after he died, he would rise

from the grave. He wanted his followers to understand that humble service was the path of discipleship. Greatness is found in following him and walking the path of sacrifice (see Mark 8–10).

- **Jesus is the King of heaven and ruler of an eternal kingdom.** Near the end of Jesus' life, as he came to Jerusalem, he presented himself as the King. The crowds celebrated this declaration, but the religious leaders challenged his authority at every turn and eventually had him put to death (see Mark 11–13).

- **Jesus rose from the grave.** Jesus, the servant King, was arrested, mocked, abused, tried, crucified, and executed on a cross. He was placed in a tomb and was dead for three days. But then he rose again in glory, power, and eternal authority over hell, death, and the grave. Jesus is still the King of all kings and rules today and for eternity (see Mark 14–16).

Those who prefer a slow and ambling journey through the life of Jesus that fills in every blank and has a flourish on every sentence will struggle with Mark's Gospel. But those who love to get to the point, who prefer direct communication, and who appreciate it when others tell it like it is, will delight in Mark's approach. So, as you start this journey, take a deep breath, say a prayer, and get ready to move at the rapid pace of Mark's Gospel.

SESSION 1

THE INVITATION

MARK 1:1–3:6

In the opening chapters of Mark, we see the meteoric rise of Jesus. We then witness conflict when the religious leaders decide they do not like what Jesus is teaching and how the crowds are drawn to him. Jesus is helping the people of his day understand who he is and what he expects of those who make the decision to follow him.

WELCOME

When expectations are crystal clear, everyone benefits. Just consider the workplace. Employers who give their new employees a written job description with detailed responsibilities and expectations avoid all kinds of future problems. Just imagine a boss telling a brand-new employee, "We don't have job descriptions or specific responsibilities for our employees. We just hope you figure things out as you go!" It would be a recipe for disaster.

Likewise, couples repeat vows at their wedding ceremony to set up clear expectations. The couple vows to stick together and love each other "in sickness and in health, for better and for worse," for as long as they both shall live. We have all heard these words at weddings. Why do they matter? Because any significant commitment involves setting up clear expectations and declarations of how the parties will conduct themselves.

In our modern world, we often end up skimming over words of commitment and rashly clicking the approve button. Just think about those agreements or contracts that pop up on a computer or tablet. When was the last time you actually *read* every word in these agreements? Most of us just scroll to the end and click "agree" without a second thought.

In the Gospel of Mark, we find that Jesus gave us clear expectations about *who he was* and *what he expects of us.* When it comes to following Jesus, we are wise to slow down and read the fine print. There is nothing better than being a disciple of Jesus, but there is also nothing that will call us to greater commitment and sacrifice.

So, as you begin this study, pay close attention to the words of this powerful biography of Jesus. It will reveal who Jesus is with staggering precision. It will also show who you are to be and what is expected if you are going to bear his name and accept the call to follow him.

SHARE

Think about when you first made the decision to follow Jesus. What did you think was expected of a Christian? How has your understanding changed and matured over time?

WATCH

Play the video for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts, questions, or key points that stand out to you.

Background information on Mark's Gospel

Two key questions in the Gospel of Mark:

Who is Jesus?

What does he want?

John the Baptist prepares the way (Mark 1:2–8)

Jesus is introduced (Mark 1:9–13)

Calling the first disciples—a mission of "kingdom expansion" (Mark 1:16–20)

Jesus' growing popularity (Mark 1:21–45)

Growing tensions with the religious establishment:

Conflict over **forgiveness of sins** (Mark 2:1–12)

Conflict over **friendships** (Mark 2:13–17)

Conflict over **fasting** (Mark 2:18–22)

Conflict over **working on the Sabbath** (Mark 2:23–28)

Conflict over **healing on the Sabbath** (Mark 3:1–6)

DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture. Use the following questions to help guide your discussion.

1. What impacted you the most as you watched Jeff's teaching on Mark 1:1–3:6?

2. **Read Mark 1:2–3, 7–8, 10–11, 24, and 27.** What do you learn about who Jesus is as you read these passages from a variety of different perspectives? How would you respond if a non-believing friend asked you, "Who is Jesus?"

3. **Read Mark 1:16–20.** When did you first accept the invitation to follow Jesus? How have you tried to live out the expectations that Jesus lays out in this passage?

4. The people of Jesus' day were amazed at his authority. In the opening chapter of Mark, we read how Jesus had power over demonic forces (see 1:21–28), illnesses (see verses 29–34), and relationships between people (see verses 40–45). How have you seen Jesus set a person free from the influence of sin? How have you seen Jesus bring healing into a person's life? How have you seen Jesus heal a broken relationship?

5. **Read Mark 2:1–12.** Why were the religious leaders so upset that Jesus declared this man to be forgiven of his sins? Why does Jesus have the authority to forgive sins?

6. **Read Mark 2:13–17.** In the first century, a Rabbi would never have been seen sharing intimate table fellowship with tax collectors and "sinners." What do you learn about Jesus as you read this passage? What are some ways you can follow his example when it comes to helping broken and lost people encounter the love and grace of God?

MEMORIZE

Each session, you will be given a key verse (or verses) from the passage covered in the video teaching to memorize. This week, your memory verses are from Mark 1:16–17:

> *As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."*

Have everyone recite these verses out loud. Then go around the room again and have everyone try to say them completely from memory.

RESPOND

What will you take away from this session? What is a practical next step you can take in the coming week as you seek to understand Jesus' expectations of his disciples?

PRAY

Close your group time by praying in any of the following directions:

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you learn more about who Jesus is as you walk through the Gospel of Mark together during the coming sessions.
- Ask Jesus to fill you with power to live in ways that fulfill his desires and expectations of his disciples.
- Praise Jesus for his amazing authority over all things and ask him to unleash that power in your life, home, church, and community.

YOUR 40-DAY JOURNEY

SESSION ONE

Reflect on the material you have covered in this session by engaging in the following between-session learning resources. Each week, you will begin by reviewing the key verses to memorize for the session. During the next five days, you will have an opportunity to read a portion of Mark, reflect on what you learn, respond by taking action, journal some of your insights, and pray about what God has taught you. Finally, on the last day, you will again review the key verses and reflect on what you have learned for the week.

DAY 1

Memorize: Begin this week's personal study by reciting Mark 1:16–17:

> *As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."*

Now try to say these verses completely from memory.

Reflect: John Mark tells a story of *good news* from the beginning to the end of his Gospel. Jesus, the Savior, has come. He is God's beloved Son, and his kingdom is breaking into human history. Whether you are a new believer or a long-time follower of Christ, what good news have you experienced because of your relationship with the Lord? How do you express your thankfulness that God has brought this good news?

DAY 2

Read: Mark 1:1–15.

Reflect: This section of Mark begins and ends with the words "good news." Mark starts by telling the world that the "good news" begins with Jesus the Messiah. Just fifteen verses later, we hear Jesus proclaim the "good news." In his own words, he declares, "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news" (verse 15). The coming of Jesus is good news in every way possible. How is Jesus the source of good news in the world and in your life? What are some ways you can share the good news of Jesus with people around you who live in a world saturated with bad news?

Journal:

- What were some of the conditions in the world at the time Mark wrote his Gospel that made good news so needed and welcomed?
- What are some things in our world today that make the good news of Jesus stand out?

Pray: Thank Jesus for leaving heaven, entering our world, and bringing good news to every person who will receive what he has to offer.

DAY 3

Read: Mark 1:16–28.

Reflect: Jesus' invitation was simple but powerful: "Follow me." All four of the men Jesus invited to be his disciples freely left their careers and began a new life. They stopped fishing with nets and began to fish for people. They followed their Rabbi, Jesus, and walked with him, traveled where he went, learned from his teaching, and became like their leader. What have you left behind so that you could follow Jesus and

engage in his plan for your life? What do you still need to lay down and surrender so that you can fully live for Jesus?

Journal:

- How has it felt to leave things behind, make sacrifices, and surrender your will for the sake of Jesus?
- What is one thing that you are having a hard time letting go? What step can you take to lay this down and follow Jesus with greater abandon?

Pray: Ask God to give you wisdom to see what still needs to be laid down and left behind as you follow Jesus. Pray for the courage to follow Jesus no matter the cost or the sacrifice.

DAY 4

Read: Mark 1:29–45.

Reflect: This section of Mark starts with an intense day of ministry where Jesus heals, leads a revival meeting, and casts out demons. It ends with Jesus healing a man with leprosy. In the middle of this action, Jesus slips away early in the

morning to find a quiet place so he can talk with his Father. He takes a walk in the dark, finds a solitary place, and prays. It seems the more intense life became, the more Jesus needed to be in the presence of the Father. How does busyness and an intense schedule impact your prayer life? What can you do to make space to pray and meet with Jesus on a regular basis?

Journal:

- What are some of the habits, patterns, and disciplines you have developed that have helped you better connect with God?
- What experiences in your day seem to push you away from God? How can you make space to meet with God during those times?

DAY 5

Read: Mark 2:1–17.

Reflect: There are many characters in this story. As always, Jesus is central. But as you read this story, pay special attention to the religious leaders (the teachers of the law). These are religious professionals. As Jesus is speaking, they ask

themselves a great question: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (verse 7). The answer is important: "No one!" Only God can forgive sins. But this is Jesus' point. He is God, fully divine, the Almighty One! Mark asks this question—"who is Jesus?"—again and again in his Gospel. Our Savior gives an answer in this passage . . . He is God! How has Jesus extended forgiveness to you as you walk with him each day? How will you pray for those in your life who need to know the forgiveness they long for is found in Christ?

Journal:

- As you think about this passage, what were the religious leaders right about? What were the religious leaders wrong about?
- Since Jesus is divine and fully God, how should this view the way you think about him, worship him, and follow him?

Pray: Lift up praise to Jesus as God Almighty, your Creator, and the One who paid the full price so that your sins could be washed away.

DAY 6

Read: Mark 2:18–3:6.

Reflect: There is a lot of intensity and emotion in this passage. A man with a physical ailment needs healing. The religious leaders are suspicious of Jesus and seeking to accuse him of breaking their laws. Jesus is deeply concerned for the man and cares about his condition. When he asks the religious leaders about the appropriateness of healing the man right then and there—on the *Sabbath*—they stay silent and stubborn. Jesus is angry and deeply distressed at the condition of their hearts. For them, religion had become more important than people.

At the end of the passage, Jesus heals the man. This should have brought joy to everyone—including the religious leaders. But they were so upset at Jesus breaking their rules that they want to have him executed. What are some ways religious rules and observances can actually get in the way of following Jesus? Are there any religious rituals, rules, or observances that are a roadblock to you following the Savior?

Journal:

- What are some of the man-made rules and regulations that can get in the way of following Jesus?

- In what ways do you need to focus more on your Savior and less on human regulations?

Pray: Thank Jesus for loving people more than upholding religious traditions. Pray for your heart and life to mirror his example of compassion and action that sets people free.

DAY 7

Memorize: Conclude this week's personal study by again reciting Mark 1:16–17:

> *As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."*

Now try to say these verses completely from memory.

Reflect: Come follow me! Go out and live for me! This was Jesus' call to his first disciples—and his call to us today. What does it mean for you to follow Jesus in the flow of a normal day? What are some ways that you sense Jesus is calling you to go out and live for him?

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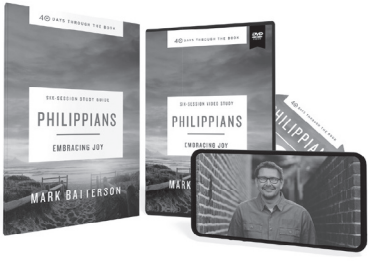

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