



Mark's Gospel
The Story that Changes
Everything
Group Member Booklet

Mark: The Story that Changes Everything

Many of us think we know Jesus, what he was really on about, and how he might have handled a range of situations had he lived in our day and age. And we could be right. But there are plenty of others who hold quite different views as to what Jesus was on about, and how he might interact with our modern world, if he was on earth today. But we can't all be right.

So to understand Jesus better, to see him more clearly, to know him better, we need to go back to the source, the primary documents that testify to his life and person and mission. That is precisely what Mark's Gospel does. But Mark is not a series of disconnected stories and episodes and parables and miracles with which we have a degree of familiarity. Mark's Gospel tells a single, unified story. And in the first verse Mark discloses his singular focus: it is the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As the earliest and shortest of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John), it was written well within the lifetime of those entangled in Jesus' story. But he tells his story for the benefit of those living after the time of Jesus, including us, to show us the extraordinary manner in which the Christian message originated. And to reveal a punchy but profound presentation of our Lord Jesus.

This term we will read the beginning of this beginning carefully, covering only the first three chapters. And we'll pay attention to how one episode flows into the next, and how each story, parable and miracle adds to Mark's portrayal of Jesus. And as we'll see, this singular story about Jesus is the story that changes everything.

May God's Spirit be at work in us as we study Mark's Gospel together this term.

Grace and peace

p.s. at the back of this booklet there are materials to help you share the Lord's Supper with your group, if you'd like to do that.

Study Timetable

We've prepared these small group studies to use following the Sunday message. Here's a suggested timetable for their use (but feel free to use them in the way that works best for you).

Sunday Sermon Date	Passage	Mid-week (growth group)	What?
		Leader training session: Thursday 28 January	
Sun 31 January	Mark 1:1-8	Praise & worship night: Wednesday 3 February	
Sun 7 February	Mark 1:9-15	8-11 February	Study 1: Preparation (Mark 1:1-13)
Sun 14 February	Mark 1:16-20	15-18 February	Study 2: Follow (Mark 1:14-20)
Sun 21 February	Mark 1:21-34	22-25 February	Study 3: Authority (Mark 1:21-34)
Sun 28 February	Mark 1:35-45	1-4 March	Study 4: Focus (Mark 1:35-45)
Sun 7 March	Mark 2:1-12	8-11 March	Study 5: Forgiveness (Mark 2:1-12)
Sat 14 March	Mark 2:13-22	15-18 March	Study 6: Old & new (Mark 2:13-22)
Sun 21 March	Mark 2:23-3:6	22-25 March	Study 7: Sabbath (Mark 2:23-3:6)
Sun 28 March	Mark 3:7-35	29 March to 1 April	Study 8: Team Jesus (Mark 3:7-35)
Fri 2 April		Good Friday	
Sun 4 April		Easter Sunday	
School holidays break			

3. Why did Jesus get baptised by John?

4. Then the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus from heaven in the form of a dove (v10) and God spoke to him from heaven (v11). What are we meant to understand by this?

5. What does Jesus' temptation in the wilderness further reveal?

6. This passage reveals the sheer uniqueness of Jesus, and his persistent obedience, especially compared to both the previous and present generation of Israelites. Is there an aspect of Jesus you have seen for the first time here? Is there perhaps an attitude of John the Baptist you need to mimic?

Pray

Praise God for the obedience of Jesus, the true human, the true Israelite, the true servant and true king.

Confess the way we so often underate Jesus' obedience to the ministry laid before him, for our sakes.

Ask that God might fill us a holy and reverent awe of Jesus, for his willingness to identify with us in baptism and temptation and even in taking on flesh and walking among us.

Growth Core #1

Start

Share how your Christian walk has been over the summer break.

Share

1. Read Mark 1:1-8. What does the first verse of Mark tell us about the story that follows? How does John the Baptist prepare the way for Jesus?
2. Read Mark 1:9-13. What does Jesus' baptism reveal about Jesus' person and mission?
3. What does Jesus' temptation reveal about him? How does this opening passage reveal the sheer uniqueness of Jesus?

Prayer

Praise God for the obedience of Jesus, the true human, the true Israelite, the true servant and true king.

Confess the way we so often underate Jesus' obedience to the ministry laid before him, for our sakes.

Ask that God might fill us a holy and reverent awe of Jesus, for his willingness to identify with us in baptism and temptation and even in taking on flesh and walking among us

Study 2: Follow (Mark 1:14-20)

Start

Many of us like to think of ourselves as natural leaders rather than followers.

What are the upsides and downsides of being a leader?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a follower? and

Share any feedback or reflections from Sunday's message.

Read

Mark 1:14-20 and share your first thoughts with the group.

Think and talk

1. What is the connection between the temptation of Jesus and the commencement of his public ministry? What does it mean for the kingdom of God to be near?
2. We're all asked to repent and believe the good news. What is the essence of repentance?
3. What is remarkable about the response of the two sets of fishing brothers? Do you think you would have been like them?

Growth Core #2

Start

Share any progress and confess any sin in your Christian walk since your last meeting.

Share

1. Read Mark 1:14-20. We're asked to repent and believe the good news; what is the essence of repentance?
2. What is remarkable about the response of the two sets of fishing brothers?
3. What don't we follow Jesus with the same urgency? What stops us from fishing for people?

Prayer

Praise God that Jesus brings good news, and that his kingdom is a kingdom of goodness.

Repent of the times when you have followed him hesitantly and half-heartedly. Ask for boldness to play your part in fishing for people, that is, sharing the good news with others and dragging them into the kingdom.

Study 3: Authority (Mark 1:21-34)

Start

What was the last thing you saw or read or experienced that was genuinely amazing?

Share any feedback or take-home points from Sunday's message.

Read

Mark 1:21-34 and share your opening observations.

Think & talk

1. Why did Jesus' teaching in the synagogue evoke the response of amazement from the people? Do you think they moved beyond this reaction to further faith?
2. What does the encounter with the demon-possessed man tell us about Jesus and his mission?
3. Which of these aspects of Jesus' person and mission do you tend to emphasise? Which do you minimize?
 - His authoritative teaching
 - His divine nature
 - His authority over evil
 - His mission of destroying Satan

Growth Core #3

Start

Share any progress, obstacles or setbacks in your Christian walk since your last meeting.

Share

1. Read Mark 1:21-28. Why are the people so amazed about Jesus in these verses? Do you think they moved beyond amazement to deeper faith?
2. Read Mark 1:29-34. What do we learn from the further miracles in this section?
3. Which of these aspects of Jesus' person and mission do you tend to emphasize? Which do you minimize?
 - His authoritative teaching
 - His divine nature
 - His authority over evil and disease
 - His mission of destroying Satan

Prayer

Praise God that Jesus is the authoritative teacher, the destroyer of evil, and the ultimate healer of bodies, hearts and minds, and no one less than God himself. Repent for when of the times when you've undervalued the person and work of Jesus.

Ask that God might help you to submit yourself to Jesus teaching, look to him for healing, and see him as the authoritative figure in your life.

Growth Core #4

Start

Share any progress and confess any sin in your Christian walk since your last meeting.

Share

1. Read Mark 1:35-39. From these verses what two things does Jesus mark out as his priorities?

2. If private time in prayer and public time preaching were the focus of Jesus' life, how do they influence our priorities?

3. Read Mark 1:40-45. What new dimension does the healing of the leper introduce, especially remembering that being unclean meant the leper (or anyone who touched him) was excluded? And what lessons does this hold for us?

Prayer

Praise God for Jesus' cleansing, which restores us in multiple ways, and his compassion upon us.

Repent of your own lack of focus as one of Jesus' followers, for your prayerlessness, and for any distracted attention and unhelpfully diverted energy. Ask that God might help you to feed on him in prayer and solitude, to support the spread of the good news in the ways open to you, and to always approach Jesus with willing boldness.

4. Which is easier: to forgive sins or heal paralysis?

5. What would you say to a friend who said the following things to you:

- “If Jesus really knew my struggles, he’d give me what I want right now, not forgiveness”
- “I’m not sure I’ve been forgiven because I keep stuffing up!”
- “I don’t think I need forgiveness; I haven’t really done anything wrong”
- “I feel forgiven for most things, but there are some things I’ve done that I don’t think I can ever be forgiven for”
- “If Jesus knows what’s in my heart, why would he want to forgive me? I just don’t deserve it!”

Pray

Praise God for the forgiveness of sins we have in Jesus, the meeting of our greatest need.

Repent of any unconfessed sins now

Ask for God to fill you with ongoing wonder at his gracious and miraculous forgiveness, so that you are just as amazed as the crowd in v.12.

Growth Core #5

Start

Share any progress, obstacles or setbacks in your Christian walk since your last meeting.

Share

1. Read Mark 2:1-12. What did the paralysed guy want from Jesus, and what did Jesus actually give him? What does this reveal about our greatest need?
2. Why were the teachers of the law unhappy?
3. Which is easier: to forgive sins or heal paralysis, remembering what it took for Jesus to be able to forgive sins?

Prayer

Praise God for the forgiveness of sins we have in Jesus, the meeting of our greatest need.

Repent of any unconfessed sins now

Ask for God to fill you with ongoing wonder at his gracious and miraculous forgiveness, so that you are just as amazed as the crowd in v.12.

Study 6: Old and new (Mark 2:13-22)

Start

What is something that typically causes conflict in your family or household?

Share your thoughts from Sunday's message.

Read

Mark 2:13-22 and discuss your initial impressions.

Think & talk

1. Why does Jesus' interaction with tax collectors and "sinners" cause such a fuss with the Pharisees and teachers of the law?
2. What does Jesus' interaction with Levi (v.13–17) show us about his posture towards sinners? What is the essence of Jesus' words in v.17?
3. If Jesus didn't look down on "sinners", how should we treat other people who we don't think do many good things?

4. What appears to be at the heart of the question about fasting from v.18, and how does Jesus' response shed light on the matter?

5. How do the next two parables further explain Jesus' treatment of social expectations and even the Jewish law itself?

6. Contrasting the incident with Levi with the questions of the Pharisees, what should we conclude about the person of Jesus and his ministry among us? And what difference does that make to our daily Christian lives?

Pray

Praise God that Jesus is a friend of sinners, who has come to heal us.

Repent of times when you've been more concerned with keeping rules than pursuing a humble relationship with Christ in which we recognize our need before him.

Ask for God to extend salvation to many unlikely types (at least according to our way of thinking).

Growth Core #6

Start

Share any progress, obstacles or setbacks in your Christian walk since your last meeting.

Share

1. Read Mark 2:13-17. What does Jesus' interaction with Levi (v.13-17) show us about his posture towards sinners? How does it inform our posture towards people who we might think of as sinners?
2. Read Mark 2:18-22. What appears to be at the heart of the question about fasting, and how does Jesus' response shed light on the matter?
3. If you contrast the incident with Levi, with the Pharisees' fixation with rules, what can we conclude about Jesus' ministry, and indeed the essence of the Christian life?

Prayer

Praise God that Jesus is a friend of sinners, who has come to heal us.

Repent of times when you've been more concerned with keeping rules than pursuing a humble relationship with Christ in which we recognize our need before him.

Ask for God to extend salvation to many unlikely types (at least according to our way of thinking).

Study 7: Sabbath (Mark 2:23-3:6)

Start

Are you in the practice of keeping a Sabbath? What do you do on a Sabbath? Has this changed at all over time?

Read

Mark 2:23-3:6

Think & talk

1. There is a flashpoint between Jesus and the Pharisees when Jesus' disciples pick grain on the Sabbath. What is the main issue here, and how does Jesus counter it (see Deuteronomy 23:25, 1 Samuel 21:1-6).
2. What is the general principle Jesus drives at, and what does it mean for us today?
3. What does it mean for Jesus to be the Lord of the Sabbath?

4. How does the episode in 3:1-6 further illustrate this principle, and also the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees over the Sabbath?

5. Has this passage changed your view on the Sabbath and how you might spend it? Has it changed your view on Jesus, and his person and work?

Pray

Praise God for his gift of the Sabbath, and for Jesus' authority to use it for good. Repent for when you have either ignored this gift of God, or treated it legalistically.

Ask that God might aid you to use the Sabbath in a good and godly way, to enrich your life and the lives of others, just as Jesus did.

Growth Core #7

Start

Share any progress, obstacles or setbacks in your Christian walk since your last meeting.

Share

1. Read Mark 2:23-28. Putting aside Jesus' specific response to the Sabbath controversy, what is the general principle Jesus states and what does it mean for us?

2. What does it mean for him to be Lord of the Sabbath?

3. Read Mark 3:1-6. How do we see the general principle from the earlier verses applied in this episode with the man with a shrivelled hand? And why do the Pharisees want to kill Jesus?

Prayer

Praise God for his gift of the Sabbath, and for Jesus' authority to use it for good. Repent for when you have either ignored this gift of God, or treated it legalistically.

Ask that God might aid you to use the Sabbath in a good and godly way, to enrich your life and the lives of others, just as Jesus did.

Study 8: Team Jesus (Mark 3:7-35)

Start

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of demons and the devil? Is it fear, or disbelief, or something else?

What did you learn or take away from Sunday's sermon?

Read

Mark 3:7-35 and share your first thoughts.

Think & talk

1. What has been Jesus' basic relationship to demons in Mark's Gospel up to this point?
2. What is the significance of Jesus choosing the 12 disciples in v.13-19? How do they contrast with the Jewish religious figures, the people in general, and Jesus' family in particular?
3. How does Jesus respond to the Jewish accusation that he is channeling Satanic power?

Growth Core #8

Start

Share any progress, obstacles or setbacks in your Christian walk since your last meeting.

Share

1. Read Mark 3:7-35. What is the significance of Jesus choosing the 12 disciples in v.13-19? How are they different from the crowds in general, the Jewish religious figures and even Jesus' own family?
2. How does Jesus respond to the accusation that he is driving out demons by the power of Satan?
3. What do Jesus final words in v.31-35 reveal about the essence of belonging to Jesus?

Prayer

Praise God that Jesus binds the power of Satan, and calls us into an alternative family of all who believe in him, regardless of ethnic background, social standing, natural abilities, financial resources, etc.

Repent for when you have not neither taken our enemy Satan seriously, nor your Christian family responsibilities seriously.

Ask Jesus to always give you a soft heart, that responds to his words and witness with faith and belief.

Extra material: sharing the Lord's Supper

This extra material is to assist you in sharing in the Lord's Supper together.

Someone will need to make the necessary preparations, to lead the Lord's Supper and to have the supplies of bread and wine (or juice) ready to go.

The words in italics are for the service leader to read out; the bits in bold are for everyone to say/pray.

Read

John 19:17-42 or Romans 5:5-11

Sharing together

1. Introduction

The leader will introduce the Lord's Supper

At the heart of the Christian life is active trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and his sacrificial death for sin.

In this symbolic meal, originating from Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples, we express and strengthen our trust in him, as we eat and drink with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Lord's Supper is an outward and visible sign of the grace shown to us in Christ.

As we share bread and wine together, we are invited to feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

We are faced again with God's love for the unworthy and are strengthened by faith in the one whose body was given and whose blood was shed for us.

Let us come then with heartfelt repentance and genuine trust in the Lord Jesus, recognising the significance of sharing in this way.

If in good conscience it would not be right for you to participate, please use this time to reflect on God's love for us in Christ.

2. Prayer of Confession

Allow some time for silent, private confession...

Knowing the goodness of God and the times we fail to respond with love and obedience, let us confess our sins together.

**Heavenly Father,
You have loved us with an everlasting love,
but we have often gone our own way
and rejected your will for our lives.
We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them.
For the sake of your Son who died for us
forgive us, cleanse us, and change us.
By your Holy Spirit enable us to live for you and to please you in every way,
for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**

3. Assurance of forgiveness

*God is slow to anger and full of compassion.
He forgives all who humbly repent
and turn to his Son Jesus Christ,
in whom there is no condemnation.*

4. Thanksgiving

**We thank you Heavenly Father for every spiritual blessing in Jesus our Lord,
in whom we have the forgiveness of sins,
the gift of your Spirit and the hope of sharing in your glory.
We who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of your
Son.
He loved us and gave himself for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
Therefore, we lift our voices to praise you, saying,
Glory be to God in the church and in Christ Jesus
throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.**

5. Words of Institution

We thank you, Father, that on the night before he died, Jesus took bread, and when he had given you thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying,

'Take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'
After the meal, he took the cup, and again giving you thanks, he gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

Therefore Father, we thank you for these gifts of bread and wine, and pray that we who eat and drink them, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, believing our Saviour's word, may be partakers of his body and blood. To Jesus Christ who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

6. Sharing the Supper

The service leader might say these words for every person sharing in the supper, or each person might say them to the person next to them as the bread and wine are shared around the group.

- 1. With the bread: Take and eat this, remembering that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith, with thanksgiving. Amen.*
- 2. With the wine/juice: Drink this, remembering that Christ's blood was shed for you, and be thankful. Amen.*

7. The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

8. Conclusion

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home.

Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.

May we who share Christ's body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring life to others; we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.

Keep us in this hope that we have grasped;

so we and all your children shall be free,

and the whole earth live to praise your name. Amen.

9. The Grace

The Grace is not a prayer to God but a blessing that should be said to one another.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

And the love of God

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit

Be with us all, forevermore. Amen.

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