

Discipleship: According to Mark

a study for campus ministry small groups



Preliminary Words to the Small Group Leader(s):

The following study is intended to take the participants through the Gospel of Mark considering the issues of how we are to read Mark, its message, and the implications that Mark has for our lives. The study attempts to provide the basics for accomplishing the first two of these goals. The third goal is provided for, but the leader should recognize that application is a matter of connection to the people involved, people with whom the author of this study is not interacting directly. As you lead the study, you are an integral part in helping the participants connect the dots from the text and its message to seeing the joys of the Gospel of Mark and discipleship come alive in the participants' lives. As such, the leader should see this study as a guide to help towards that end, a guide that should be molded through preparation and use so that it fits the needs of the group that uses it.

To help towards this end, the study provides suggested answers to the questions asked. These answers, especially on points of application, are merely to guide you the leader into understanding the goal of the question and not to provide an exact answer that should come forth from the question. The leader should provide opportunity for thinking and discussing so that the questions are considered and digested along the way. It's important to give enough time to process the faith, not just jump in with the 'right' answers.

It is also important to note that there is much repetition in the questions asked. The entire study is about discipleship. Discipleship is simple: we learn from God, we follow God, and God leads us. Things such as taking up our cross, seeing clearly, and listening are all a part of this discussion. In spite of this simple reality, this study takes ten weeks to consider the Gospel of Mark and discipleship because digesting this reality takes a long time; it is a progression and not a right answer. Towards this end there might be much perceived repetition; but hopefully this overarching goal guides your approach to the repetition so that it functions toward the growth of the participant.

God's blessings on your study of the Gospel of Mark!



Discipleship: According to Mark

Introduction

Leaders Guide

Goal: That the participant (Ttp) would get acclimated to the small group and its study.

Objectives: Ttp would start to get to know the people in the small group.
Ttp would gain a basic understanding of how they should approach Mark.
Ttp would be opened to the contents of Mark as Mark presents them.

Opening Prayer:

Heavenly Father, you sent your Son as our deliverer and our leader. As we get into this small group study, please be with us that we might grow in our understanding of what it means to be Jesus' disciples. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Getting to Know Each Other

As we begin our small group study, it is important to have an idea who people are and where people are from. This enables everyone involved to understand better the questions expressed and what lies behind the comments made. Even more significantly it helps people begin the process of growing together through the Word. After all that is our goal over these next ten weeks.

Getting to Know Mark:

Just as it is important for us to get to know each other, it is also important to get to know the Gospel of Mark. It is important to recognize how the Gospel of Mark has been written so that we can be more adept at hearing its message. This question of how you read the book may sound a little juvenile, but it is essential to reading the text. And so, let us consider a few pointers:

First, when you read, you need to recognize that things are written for a reason. John 20:31 reflects this intentional writing very clearly: "but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (ESV) The book of John thus should be read with this underlying intent in mind. While other books may not be as overt in their reason for writing, they are also written for a purpose. A book's structure, choice of language, etc. tend to reflect this purpose. As a result, when reading the Gospels one should not see them as just a random collection of stories seeking to function as a modern day history book, rather one should see the Gospels as persuasive writings that are unified wholes.

Second, it is important to recognize that the Gospel of Mark was written in the era in which people were not able to read much. Literacy rates were low and reading material was relatively few and far between. Documents in the church were often written to be read aloud to the entire congregation. Even documents read by an individual, to oneself, were generally read out loud; silent reading was not a common practice. As a result, when you read the Gospel of Mark, it is important to pay attention to matters that helped the hearers hear/present with/for retention. This aural/oral factor plays into understanding the persuasive goal of the book.

What are these marks? Several things play a part in following a narrative. One of the most significant marks is repetition. Repetition of key words, situations, types of information, etc.

help the hearer to understand the flow of the narrative and the argument being made by the book. Some examples of this in Mark are: 1. [terms] lake/sea is used at Mark 1:16; 2:13; 3:7; 4:1; 5:1; 5:21 (there are some other uses, but most are not found in places of prominence as these are); 2. [geopolitical locations] 8:27; 9:30, 33; 10:1, 32, 46; etc.; 3. [similar events] 8:22-26 and 10:46-52; 6:30-52 and 8:1-21.

Another thing to consider is the characters of the Gospel of Mark. While the people presented in the Gospel are historical people and the events historical events, they are presented in such a way so to characterize the people in the Gospel of Mark. As a result, the Jewish leaders fit a certain mold, the disciples another, the crowds another, etc. These molds are molds the Gospel of Mark uses to relate to its hearers and teach them.

Finally, much like the note on repetition, we find in the Gospel of Mark several occasions where two stories are sandwiched together. These accounts are intended to be viewed in light of each other and help the hearer make the intended connection.

Third, another thing to look for while reading the Gospel is thematic elements. Since the book is to be heard in one sitting, the themes that carry through should be picked up upon by a good reader and also a good hearer. Some examples of thematic elements in the Gospel of Mark are 'following'/'going before', 'hearing', 'seeing', etc.

Fourth, since the Gospel of Mark is a unified whole, refrain from mixing the details of the accounts from other Gospels. The Gospel of Mark communicates the details it communicates for a reason; it also does not communicate other details for a reason. Letting Mark be Mark is important to reading the Gospel.

Lastly, a basic outline may help your reading. Consider the Gospel of Mark as having four parts: 1:1-6:29; 6:30-8:21; 8:22-10:52; and 11:1-16:8. While these divisions certainly are intertwined, they illustrate the four primary divisions in the book. These divisions highlight various things within themselves and together they highlight the call to discipleship.

It is this call that the present study focuses on. Each week we will look at different issues of discipleship as they come out in the Gospel of Mark and throughout Scriptures. Week 1 we will discover what it means to follow. Week 2 we ask the question 'who do we follow'; what is Jesus all about? Week 3 we look at the followers and see who follows Jesus and who does not. Week 4 we will focus on Jesus' call to 'Hear'. Week 5 we will visit the theme of clean and unclean in Mark. For week 6 we will consider the call to 'take up your cross'. In week 7 we will hear the call to see. In week 8 we will visit the question of who gets it right. Finally, in week 9 we will conclude the study with the simple question 'what's next?'

Through these points of emphases we will address the entire book of Mark recognizing Mark's structure and emphases. To make this most functional, we will all need to read the Gospel of Mark in its entirety, ideally at one sitting (about an hour of reading); ideally, we each would read it once a week for the next nine weeks. This reading and rereading will improve our familiarity and make the discussion much more accessible.

Getting into the Text

Mark begins with what amounts to a title of the book. At Mark 1:1 we hear that this is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

With what expectations does this title leave you? What does the word 'beginning' entail? What does the word 'gospel' mean? What does it mean that the gospel is 'of Jesus Christ'?

In addition to the above questions, you might ask what it means by 'the Son of God' as well. This discussion may be beyond what you want to talk about. There is manuscript evidence against the inclusion of the Son of God in verse 1. Discussion of these words may include discussion of whether it is part of the text and this seems to be beyond the purview of the small group.

The answers on these things may vary and the question should be relatively open. 1. The term 'beginning' highlights the notion that the book is not intended to be the end of the story. The path of discipleship followed by Jesus continues. This reality will be seen throughout the study and if it is not realized here, it is not the end of the world. The final week will accent it. 2. The word 'gospel' means good news. It does not require Jesus to be involved even though we often include him in our use of the term. 3. The use of 'of' suggests a genitive construction. When you come across such a construction it is important to ask the relationship of that which follows to the preceding. Specifically, in this case, Jesus Christ could be the object of the good news: the good news about Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ could also be the one who is speaking the good news, cf. Mark 1:14-15. This relationship affects how one interprets the phrase. In this case both fit the situation: Jesus did teach the good news and he was what the good news was about. Whether both are intended is a matter that the interpreter must decide.

What does this mean with regards to expectations of what follows? Well, it is probably most beneficial to allow this to be an opportunity to get the mind thinking about the question rather than a situation that needs a definitive answer (the above 'answers' lead to some expectations in themselves).

How does this title raise your expectations for what the book holds concerning what it means to be a disciple?

Answers will vary. The goal of this question is to get the participants to start thinking about their expectations for the book and whether or not those expectations are healthy.

This Week

As you begin your journey and read through the Gospel of Mark this week, consider such things as repetition and the characters of Mark; consider the role of Jesus. Aim to get a feel for the book as a whole and to sense the gospel's message.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, you have graciously given us your Word in which we grow and mature. Please be with us as we read through the Gospel of Mark this week. Open our hearts and our minds that we might grow as your disciples and that the good news would continue to flow through us; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever, Amen.

Discipleship: According to Mark

Session 1: What does it mean to follow?

Leaders Guide

Goal: That the participants would grow in their understanding of the call to follow.

Objectives: Ttp would see the connection of John the Baptist, the disciples, and Jesus;
Ttp would see the implications of following;
Ttp would recognize the challenges to following in a culture of self;
Ttp would know the culmination of God's plan for fruit in Jesus;
Ttp would know in that culmination the forgiveness and strength we have.

Introduction

The game of Follow the Leader is an old favorite from when you were kids, or at least from when your parents were kids. The game is pretty basic. The leader of the game has the role of being in front of a line of followers who do whatever the leader does. If the leader hops, the followers hop; if the leader flails around wildly, the followers do the same.

This game presents us with a good initial understanding of following. Consider the game (or depending on the group, you can play it.)

- When the game is played, what is revealed about the role of the leader?
- What about the followers?

Answers may vary. The goal is getting the thinking started about what it means to follow. Ultimately there should be recognition that the leader has the task of setting the tone and determining what the followers should do. The followers are intended to reflect the leader. In fact, it could be said that the leader is the only one that should be seen; the followers, if following fully, would be acting in concert with the leader. These connections do not have to be recognized now, but they might be referred to again as this week's study ensues.

The Gospel of Mark has as one of its primary themes the call of Jesus to follow. This call is fairly familiar with many Christians, but it often remains ambiguous. As a result, the question before us today as we study Mark is "what does it mean to follow?"

Opening Prayer

The Text

Read Mark 1:16-20; 2:14

What happens in these verses? Describe the situations of these disciples' calls in your own words.

While answers may vary, the basic description should include some primary events: 1. People are working; 2. Jesus sees them and calls them to follow; 3. They leave their jobs and follow Jesus. This sequence happens with Simon and Andrew, James and John, and Levi.

Considering these examples, what do we realize is involved with following? Where do we see these implications most vividly in the world? Where do you see them in your life?

Following includes some very hard decisions. Sometimes following expects the leaving of your job, family, and general way of life. Truly following allows for such actions.

Read Mark 3:13-19 and 3:31-35.

[If time is going to be an issue for your group, this section, of them all, is most appropriate to shortchange.]

The Gospel of Mark calls its hearers to relate to the disciples. It expects people to connect with the disciples' challenges and to some extent with their call. What is involved in discipleship?

The Mark 3:13-19 passage should highlight verse 14. The disciples are called to be with Jesus. This classification is key to following and understanding chapter 4. This relationship is central to the call. We will see the implications and importance of being connected to Jesus in week 4.

Mark 3:31-35 highlights the reality of relationships for Jesus. When one is called to follow, the family is those with whom one is following. The call of Jesus transcends the call of the biological family. Cf. also Mark 10:29 where it is implicit that the call can involve leaving father and mother, brother and sister for the sake of the Gospel.

If people ask what it means by 'to some extent their call' you can take them to the example of Mark 5:1-20 where the demoniac is healed. In this instance, the man wants to be with Jesus, i.e., have the specific task of the disciples but instead Jesus has him follow in a different way. He is to go to his own community and tell them how much God has done for him. This sending in no way minimizes that the call to follow includes being with Jesus, i.e. connected to him and learning from him, but it does illustrate that not everyone is called to be one of the twelve apostles or in that specific type of role.

What implications do these instructions for the disciples have for understanding our call to follow?

Answers will vary. Some may reflect the new relationship those who follow have with the one they follow, i.e., God. It highlights how God is more important than family, i.e., we don't believe in the sentiment 'family first'. Others may note how important it is to gather with the Christian family and be connected to Jesus.

Read Mark 1:2-15 and 6:14-29.

Who follows whom in these passages? What do these passages highlight?

These passages highlight the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist. They highlight that Jesus comes after (which is another way of saying follows) John the Baptist. They also reflect the part of the story that is known; Jesus suffers and dies, i.e., Jesus follows John the Baptist.

Consider 2 Kings 1:8 and Mark 12:1-12. How do these passages add to the understanding of the role of John the Baptist and his connection to Jesus?

John the Baptist follows the line started with the prophets seeking fruit from the vineyard. This is accented by the quote from Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 at Mark 1:2-3 and by the description of John the Baptist. Jesus is the Son sent after all of the prophets which Jesus communicates to the Jewish leaders at Mark 12:1-12.

To be clear, Jesus is not the same as those who preceded him. This is made clear in the erroneous connection made by some at Mark 6:15 and reiterated at Mark 8:28. Nonetheless, he communicates the same desire of the Father and he will suffer the same types of struggles as did the prophets (and specifically here in Mark, John the Baptist) before him.

What does it mean to follow?

How do all of these passages relate to the question of what it means to follow? What do they teach us concerning what is involved in following?

Answers will vary. Some things of note would be the notions found in Follow the Leader. You reflect the lead of those who have gone before you. In this case following focuses on the following of the prophets, Jesus, and the disciples. But it is important to note that Jesus follows the prophets. He does this not because they have a higher place than he has (as we often think in the relationship between the disciples and Jesus) but because they are following the instructions/desires of the owner of the vineyard, God the Father. Jesus, like the prophets and disciples, were ultimately in the same line of following the reign of God. Thus for them to follow was to continue to heed God's desires over their own. God is the ultimate leader. If he calls us to leave our job, we do. If he calls us to suffer, we do. If he calls us to die, we do.

Relevance

What does this teach you about the call to follow in your lives?

Answers will vary. They probably would include discussion of how people are called to follow in spite of selfish goals and desires. This call includes matters of time management, budgeting, diligence in work, selection of a church based upon faithfulness to God's teaching and not family connection and/or friends, etc.

If desired and time permits, you can also look at John 3:30 as a supplement to the discussion. The John 3:30 passage highlights the succession of followers (and the ultimate call of pointing to Christ, the full expression of the will of the Father). Sometimes it is important to recognize those who go before us and also that the following continues after us. As people witness our words and actions pointing to Christ, it results in a continuation of this chain of following.

Another illustration is found in Philippians 1:18b-26 where Paul highlights God's desire over his own.

How have you experienced these implications in your lives?

Answers will vary. The goal here is to help people recognize that this call has implications and is not just theoretical.

Are there times when you avoided the call because of the implications? Where do you find struggles with this call?

Answers will vary. The goal of the question is to recognize the ease with which we dismiss the call just to avoid the consequences and to recognize that unfortunately this activity happens more frequently than it should.

How does Jesus' relationship to John the Baptist encourage you in the midst of your failure to get up and follow again?

Answers will vary. Be careful that answers don't focus on Jesus' example. While this is significant and may be included, ultimately what Jesus has accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection, as the full demonstration of God's will is what encourages us in the face of our failure. Only his action remedies our failure and picks us up to move forward in discipleship again. He is the one, through his faithfulness, who has produced fruit from the vineyard, from all those who believe.

Concluding Thoughts and Prayer

God has called each of us to follow him. In this call we have seen the fullness of what that means in Jesus; in his fullness he also gives us the power and strength to follow him and to be restored when we fail.

Throughout this week, consider your life. Look at the choices you make and the choices you don't make. How are you doing with following? Pray for guidance that you might be led to follow our Lord and live in the forgiveness he brings. Also take the time to read through Mark and look for some of the other examples of following, going before, coming after, etc. in it. Through it all see Jesus' faithfulness as he followed God's path for his life to the cross and the path he has opened for you as well.

Discipleship: According to Mark

Session 2: Looking Up

Leaders Guide

Goal: That the participants would recognize whom they are called to follow

Objectives: Ttp would recognize Jesus as the one they follow
Ttp would recognize that Jesus is the Son of God and its implications
Ttp would recognize that Jesus is the Son of Man and its implications
Ttp would glean from Jesus' ministry what Jesus was about
Ttp would draw connections with Week 1 to discover implications of the discovery of whom they follow.

Introduction

When kids are little they often are found clinging to their parent's leg in a crowd of people and being sure to go wherever that leg goes. Maybe you remember those days when you used to do that or you have had a kid do that to you. In your experience, how often did you take the opportunity to look up? Did you ever experience the shock to find out that when you finally did look up you found someone other than the one you expected? How did that make you feel as a kid?

The goal of this introduction is to highlight the importance of looking up and the reality that we frequently neglect to look up. Discussion of the matter can easily go off this course; so, as you lead, be careful to keep the goal in mind.

[Just to be clear, if the person doesn't remember it happening to them but remembers a time when a kid did that to them, have them share their impressions of how the kid responded when they realized that they were with the wrong person.]

Today we look up. Last week we addressed the question of what the task of following calls us to do. Today we ask the question whom do we follow. It is very easy to go about clinging to a leg, but it is important to look up; sometimes the one you see is not your parent...

Opening Prayer

The Text

Read Mark 1:1, 9-11; 6:1-6a; 9:2-13; 15:33-39.

What do these verses tell you about who Jesus is? What is attributed to him?

Jesus is labeled the Son of God and the Son of Man. He is the Son of God and the Son of Mary. He is true God and true man.

What do these titles teach us about who Jesus is? What do they mean? Cf. Ezekiel 12:1-2; 13:1-2, 17 and Psalm 2:6-7.

The term son of man generally conveys someone's humanity. Other implications of the term derive from the context of its use. Son of man=person.

The term Son of God is used in Psalm 2 to present the reality that the kings were considered sons of God in the sense that they were representatives for God as they led the people. God was to be the true king, the other kings were merely ruling in God's stead. cf. 1 Samuel 8:4-9. Thus the son was to reflect God himself. But while this was the type we find in the Old Testament, we also recognize that Jesus was Son of God in a fuller sense. He actually is the Son of God; he is God himself. He not only reflects God's desires but is God. We see this truth reflected in the contrast provided in Mark 6:1-6a, the pericope structurally parallel to the declaration at the baptism. Here, in chapter 6, we see that Jesus is son of Mary and his status of son of God is spurned.

How does Jesus' true divinity and true humanity encourage you?

Answers will vary. Some possibilities would include the confidence we have in him as true God and the comfort we have knowing that he understands our challenges as true Man.

Read Mark 1:14-2:12.

This first portion of Mark teaches us much about who Jesus is. But as it does so, we realize that addressing the question of who Jesus is reveals much more than mere titles and attributes; it reveals to us what Jesus is about and through that, what God's desires are. Consider the parts of this portion of Mark. What does each teach about Jesus and about God?

Mark 1:14-15

Many call these versus the beginning of Jesus' ministry. It is important to note then how he starts it. He proclaims the good news of God: The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the good news. This message is what he is about. A question for us as we study Mark is what exactly does that mean.

Mark 1:16-20

Jesus calls people to follow him. He is not just proclaiming to proclaim, but he is extending the message beyond himself and enlisting others to partake in the message and share the message.

Mark 1:21-28

Jesus teaches with authority, not like the scribes. His authority also allows him to cast out demons.

Mark 1:29-34

Jesus heals people.

Mark 1:35-39

Jesus is not just about healing people. He has come to preach.

Mark 1:40-45

Jesus cleanses the leper. Here it is important to note the statement of the leper: "if you will, you can make me clean." One manuscript has Jesus responding in anger here, an emotion reflected in the sternness of Jesus' instructions in vv 43-44. This reading is possible, but even the common reading of 'being moved with pity/compassion' communicates the same when you reach v41. Jesus states clearly: "I will, be clean." Jesus desires people to be clean.

Mark 2:1-12

Jesus has authority to and forgives sins. Here he reflects the power of God and the statement of the leaders of the Jews reflects irony. While they state it in anger about Jesus

blaspheming, their statement actually reflects the truth of the matter. God alone does forgive sins and he, through his Son (true God/true man), brings that gift to people.

How would you summarize what these passages teach us about Jesus? Cf. Mark 3:22-30.

Answers will vary. The reality that Jesus is about restoration and wholeness seems to be prevalent. This wholeness comes not only through immediate physical healing but more permanently through the ultimate healing he brings by his life and work. The one is used to point to the other.

The Mark 3:22-30 passage highlights this well. Here we see that Jesus is the man coming into the house and binding the strong man who is Satan. Jesus has come to earth to bind Satan and all his works and all his ways. We see this work illustrated in Jesus' activity, e.g., healing, forgiving, cleansing, exorcizing, etc. These are all a foretaste of the consummation of what Jesus completed on the cross, the consummation that will come at Christ's return.

Relevance

What does this mean for following? How does looking up instruct you in following?

Answers will vary. Hopefully people will recognize what Jesus is about and connect the dots to realize what we should be about. Going back to week 1, the follower reflects or reveals the one followed.

How do God's desires revealed in Jesus Christ get expressed in your life? Use real examples, even if they are examples from your 'friend's' perspective.

Answers will vary. The answers should reflect the reality that we often forget what the one we follow is about and focus on selfish desires. It may include positives as well, but recognizing our failure is important.

How should they get expressed? What would true reflection of the one we follow look like in day to day life? Use real examples, even if they are from your 'friend's' perspective.

Answers will vary. As the leader consider your life and situation and provide an example that might get people thinking.

How do we transition from what we should do to what we do?

We remember whom we follow. He is the one who heals, forgives, restores, etc. He is the one that picks us up and frees us to be about God's desires and not our own selfish desires.

Concluding Thoughts and Prayer

When we look up we see the one whom we follow. It is Jesus the one who heals us and restores us; the one who cleanses us from our sin and forgives us; the one who proclaims to us the good news he brings and teaches us God's will.

This coming week consider how you reflect this person whom you follow. If you were to look in the mirror at any point and time would you see your reflection as it is clothed in Christ or your old sinful self? Consider then how you can move forward accordingly. As you do so, pray for God's guidance and restoration that in Jesus Christ you would be empowered to reflect our gracious God. Also take the time to read through Mark and look for some of the other examples of opportunities to 'look up' in it. Through them continue to see the grace and forgiveness of the good news Jesus brings.

Discipleship: According to Mark

Session 3: That Guy

Leader's Guide

Goal: That the participants would rejoice in the credentials of the One whom we follow and not in their own

Objectives:

- Ttp would connect with the character of the Jewish leaders
- Ttp would connect with the character of the disciples
- Ttp would connect with the character of the outsiders
- Ttp would connect with the character of the crowd
- Ttp would look to the One whom we follow and his credentials
- Ttp would recognize the nature of each basic character
- Ttp would lose all arrogance in their own discipleship

Introduction

We all remember that kid in class who always knew the answer; who always knew more than the teacher; who always knew more than the professor; who always knew how to do things better than the boss/manager; who always had the better experience; etc. Sometimes that person would receive a label: 'know it all' or just 'that guy'. Have you ever experienced someone like that? Have you ever been someone like that (others can, but probably should refrain, from answering for you)?

Answers will vary. The goal of these questions is to get people thinking of situations and people in life for which they can consider the following questions.

What did you think about that person? What did that person think about him/herself?

Answers will vary. Hopefully people will recognize that the two perceptions (yours and that person's) are not the same. Some thoughts that people might have about 'that guy' relate to arrogance, ignorance, etc. Some may recognize that many times the people really have no clue and just want to feel good about themselves or make others look bad.

Whose perceptions were accurate?

Answers will again vary. People should recognize that there is probably some truth in the perceptions (held by either). They should also recognize that most perceptions have some error in them as well.

Today we consider the characters in the Gospel of Mark. As we do so, we want to recognize 'that guy'. Who is it? What makes the person 'that guy'? What makes someone not 'that guy'? As you do so, be attentive and don't forget that often the one labeled 'that guy' is unaware of his/her status...

Opening Prayer

The Text

The Jewish leaders

Read Mark 2:14-17, 18-22, 23-28; 3:1-6.

How do the Jewish leaders respond to Jesus' teaching? In what way are they 'that guy'? What attitudes and perspectives lie behind their responses to Jesus?

Answers may vary. A primary attitude we see in these episodes is one of arrogance. 1. In regards to the first episode, they recognize the standing social structure and matters of purity. Eating with tax collectors and sinners brings one into the same social status as they. They tell Jesus he is doing it wrong because he should not associate with that kind and condone what they do. 2. In regards to fasting, the people (implicitly connected to the Jewish leaders because the question relates to their practice and lies in the midst of their attacks) recognize the practice and observe it. They tell Jesus, that they know better and he is doing it wrong. Jesus redirects their thinking recognizing that with him there is no need to fast; it is time to feast. 3. and 4. In regards to the law, they recognize that the Sabbath law calls for ceasing of work. And so they attack Jesus for what his disciples do that can be classified as work (under the Sabbath law) and for what he does. Jesus responds recognizing the goal of the Sabbath as rest in the Lord and not depriving people of the Lord's desires in the name of the Sabbath. The Lord desires healing and the body's refueling.

In each case the leaders of the Jews seem to say: "Teacher, we are smarter than you are... Don't you know this is how you are supposed to do it?" Yet in each case the leaders of the Jews misunderstand God's intent and what Jesus is about. In their arrogance, they fail to hear Jesus' message.

How does the Jewish leaders' position in society play a part in their attitude?

Answers may vary. The point that the Jewish leaders are the ones who are trained in these matters probably does play a part in their felt need to correct him. But a bigger factor is likely what the Jewish leaders are poised to lose because of Jesus. These people are in positions of authority and Jesus is demonstrating far greater authority, cf. Mark 1:22,27; 2:10-12; they are probably concerned about losing their place in society.

Have you ever responded to Jesus' teaching like the Jewish leaders did? How? Why?

Answers will vary. Times that may relate: when we are exposed to a different way of doing things in church; when we have been acting a certain way for a long time and see everyone else doing a similar thing and disregard the teaching of Scriptures, e.g., tearing down people through gossip, speeding, drinking (in excess if of legal age), sex, etc. It is easy to argue against Jesus' teaching and seek to justify our own actions.

How does Jesus redirect the leaders of the Jews at these times? How does Jesus redirect our thinking?

Answers will vary. The main thing is to recognize how Jesus continues to teach us in spite of our arrogance through the Word. He continues teaching us much as a teacher does students even when they think they are smarter than they are.

The disciples

Read Mark 3:13-19; 4:33-41; 9:38-41.

Who are the disciples? What position did they have?

The disciples were people who followed Jesus and in general were with Jesus. They had access to Jesus for instruction and explanation. The Twelve, a more defined group of the disciples, had significant access to Jesus.

How do the disciples respond to Jesus' teaching? Are they 'that guy'? Why/why not?

Answers will vary. Ultimately they reflect 'that guy' to some extent. They get into the mindset that they have an 'in' and thus know better than others. Yet, they still often do not have a clue. A closer look at the character of the disciple will persist throughout this study and be a significant part of week 6. This being said, the disciples also respond very well sometimes. They do follow Jesus. The disciples thus are a mixed bag when it comes to whether they are 'that guy' or not.

What dangers do having an 'in' pose to a proper response to discipleship?

Answers may vary. One significant danger is that the response of discipleship can become a matter of status; when this happens, the disciples are not much different from the Jewish leaders in their response.

Have you ever responded to Jesus like the disciples? What did that look like?

Answers will vary. Some answers hopefully will reflect good responses and others bad.

The outsiders

Read Mark 5:1-43.

In these verses we find a demoniac that is outside the civilized society. In fact, the society he is outside is part of the non-Jewish (and therefore unclean) society; in this way you might say that he is outside outside the Jewish society. In addition he lives among many things that would put him even further outside Jewish society. How does he respond to Jesus' proclamation of the good news? Is he 'that guy'? Why/why not?

Answers will vary. Ultimately, the demoniac is not 'that guy'. He responds favorably to Jesus' call and wants to follow him. Jesus in turn sends him out to his own community to tell them all that he has done.

In these verses we also find two women. Both women stand outside the ritually clean part of society. The one woman has a flow of blood for twelve years. This flow of blood puts her outside the temple worship. She was ritually unclean. The dead twelve year old also is ritually unclean. How do the women (especially the live one) respond to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom? Are they 'that guy'? Why/why not?

Answers will vary. Ultimately, the women are not 'that guy'. They respond appropriately to Jesus' proclamation. The woman is commended for her faith.

What role did these people have in society? How does this relate to their response to Jesus?

They are all outsiders. As outsiders, they have no need to preserve themselves, their pride, etc.; they are nothing. Being nothing, they are ready to follow Jesus and have him be their identity.

Do you respond as the outsiders? What has that looked like?

Answers will vary. We respond like outsiders often when we are facing very difficult times. When we are cut down and humbled, we are much more open to hearing Jesus' proclamation of good news.

Relevance

What does all of this teach us about discipleship? Who follows Jesus?

The call of discipleship is fairly broad and the response to the call is equally broad. Humility and awareness are both important in our response to Jesus' call. It is easy to be 'that guy' and not know it. In the end, nobodies follow Jesus.

What challenges are present in following Jesus and avoiding being 'that guy'?

Answers will vary. It is easy for us to get distracted by pride, comfort, position, etc. Our sinful self naturally makes us self-important.

How do we learn from these examples and better rejoice in the good news of the kingdom of God?

Hopefully as we relate to the various characters our arrogance is reduced and we guard against becoming 'that guy'. And when we find ourselves in that boat, we turn to the disciples as those who also failed to get it and the gracious Lord who continued to teach and help them along the way. We learn that we need forgiveness in Jesus and His Spirit to support us.

Concluding Thoughts and Prayer

In life we run into 'that guy' time and again. This coming week consider how you respond to the good news of the kingdom Jesus proclaims. Consider both big matters and little matters in life. Reflect upon your thoughts, words, and deeds; recognize where your response falls. As you do so, continue to grow in Christ's teaching; grow in the good news he proclaims for you and other people who are sometimes 'that guy'.

As you read through Mark this week continue to observe the response of the various characters in Mark. Rejoice in the proper responses; learn from 'that guy' that crops up now and again; and celebrate the teaching our Lord brings to fruition by his death and resurrection.



Discipleship: According to Mark

Session 4: Listen!

Leader's Guide

Goal: That the participants would have ears to hear that they might rejoice in the reign of God Jesus proclaims.

Objectives: Ttp would recognize the call to hear in the Gospel of Mark
Ttp would see the need to die to ourselves and hear the word of the Kingdom, the word of life.
Ttp would recognize that Jesus heard God's word of the Kingdom and lived it; he heard it and shared it.
Ttp would grow in their understanding of the parables in Mark.

Introduction

Selective listening is a tool utilized by many children and adults. It enables expectations to be ignored and responsibilities shirked. It reveals that in life we often hear what we want to hear and not what actually is presented.

Consider a time in life when you experienced miscommunication because of selective listening. How did that look? Who misunderstood whom? Why did it happen?

These questions seek to get people to recognize the problem of listening. Often the problem extends beyond hearing words; it is a matter of processing them. These challenges inherent in the listening task humble us as we approach the task anew when we hear the call in Mark 4:3 "Listen!"

Today as we look at the Gospel of Mark, we find the call "He who has ears, let him hear." As such, we ask the questions: What does it mean for me to hear? How do we do at listening? and What is the message for which we are listening?

Opening Prayer

The Text

Consider Mark 4:1-34. As you do so, notice the use of the terms 'listen' and 'hear' (both the same verb in the Greek) and also the joining phrase "And he said" at 4:9, 11, 21, 24, 26, 30. This common language links the parables together into a coherent whole and guides us to 'listen' to it as such.

It might be noted that the phrase 'and he said' comes up at 4:13. This phrase uses the present rather than the imperfect in the Greek. As a result, the flow of the other verses is not carried in the same way at 4:13. Mark 4:13 does not seem to bear as much structural significance for the text as the other verses.

Read 4:3-20.

What is the parable and what is its explanation?

The parable is about the sower who goes out and spreads the word. This word, presumably, cf. the next question, is the word of the Kingdom of God. It gets cast out on those who

refuse to let it come in; on those who receive it quickly and then it dries up; on those who receive it and it grows until it gets choked out by other cares in life; and on those who receive it and it produces a great crop.

How do verses 10-12 instruct us in our understanding of the parable? With what are the parables dealing? Who understands the parables? How? Cf. Isaiah 6 and Mark 3:13-19, 31-35.

The parable is about the Kingdom of God. These mysteries are understood only among those who were around Jesus with the Twelve. The key is the connection to Jesus. In fact, the quotation from Isaiah highlights that Isaiah is to preach until the people lie desolate. There must be death before there is understanding. The people's pride and self preservation must be eliminated for God to be God and his reign to penetrate their hearts and minds. Only in the death of the people are there open ears to hear the mystery of the kingdom.

For this reason, the language of Mark 3, where the disciples are called to be with Jesus, is used. Going to Jesus is the means for understanding; understanding is not found within oneself.

How does the sandwiching of the parable and its explanation around 4:10-12 instruct you as to what it takes to be good soil? As to what inhibits being good soil?

Answers will vary. They should continue the same point as was made in preceding questions and reinforce it.

Our thinking and desires gets in the way. These things might manifest themselves in being closed to the word entirely, being discouraged by the persecutions connected to the faith, and being choked out by the cares of the world. We must look to Jesus and rely not upon our own understanding and desires; we need to understand through him.

What example do we have of good soil? How does that look?

Answers will vary. Jesus is good soil who heard the word of the Kingdom and lived it; his living produced fruit abundantly. All those who believe are part of that yield.

Read Mark 4:21-32.

Beyond the parable of the sower, what other parables does Jesus tell? What do they mean? How do they relate to the Kingdom of God?

Take some time to struggle with the parables trying to grapple with their message. As you do so, recognize that while parables carry some aspects of allegory they are not the same as allegories. Sometimes the parable carries a simple point; sometimes the parable can be explained with every working part playing a role; sometimes it is a cross between the two.

1. The goal is not for the Kingdom of God to be hidden. It is to be revealed. To be certain, this revelation of the Kingdom is spoken in parables, but it is not about the sower not throwing the word onto the ground; it is about understanding the Kingdom through Jesus.
2. The Kingdom of God produces more Kingdom of God. Lack thereof produces greater lack of the Kingdom of God. When you have relationship with God, the relationship builds upon itself. When you do not, the brokenness continues to separate you from God driving you further into selfishness, pride, and the like.
3. The Kingdom grows on its own by its own power beyond our understanding. We don't know how people receive the word or how it germinates in them. It just happens.

4. The Kingdom starts small and expands. Relationship with God penetrates people's lives until it is all consuming.

The Kingdom of God is God's reign. Kingdom is a verbal noun that highlights the activity of God's rule in people's lives. The Kingdom/Reign of God then is God being God in our lives and we living under his rule as his people.

Given the nature of the Kingdom of God, why are the instructions of Mark 4:3-20 so significant to understanding the parables? Cf. especially Mark 4:10-12.

The nature of the Kingdom of God calls for God to be God and for us to be his people. It is so easy for us to not want to let God be God; it is easy for us to tell God how it should be. But to hear the parables we must be knocked flat with lack of understanding so that we go to Jesus and understand only through him. Indeed in him we see what the reign of God looks like. Jesus listened to the Father all of the way to the cross.

Read Mark 4:33-34; 4:35-41.

How clear did Jesus make the parables to the disciples?

He explained everything, i.e., extremely clear.

What does the disciples' response to the storm teach us about how well the disciples understood the parables?

Even with all the explanation, the disciples did not get it. They still missed who Jesus was and what he was about.

Why did the disciples have difficulty understanding?

Answers will vary. This question is speculative and could produce any number of explanations.

Read Mark 7:31-37.

From where does true hearing come?

Jesus opens the ears of the deaf man. In him we are able to listen.

Relevance

How difficult is the proper hearing of God's word of the Kingdom? What gets in the way of your understanding?

Answers will vary. Here the preceding words of verses 10-12 could be considered, i.e. our pride and arrogance get in the way, or the different types of ground can be considered (or both). The point is to consider how many different things stop up our ears.

How do we get beyond those obstacles?

Answers will vary. Some may reflect the following: We go to Jesus in humility and ignorance conscious of our sin. We trust in him and not ourselves. Through the Holy Spirit, our brothers and sisters in Christ call us out and bring us back to the word of the Kingdom. Etc.

Do these parables make sense to us? Why or why not?

The parables often seem to make sense, but only to a certain extent. It seems like we want them to make sense, but we often fail to let God say what God says. We read what we want to hear. We don't like what they say and instead imply and so we miss them.

How does Jesus open your ears?

Sometimes we get knocked down in life. This experience can open our ears for God's word of the Kingdom. People can take us aside and talk to us. Etc. [Recognize that this question is similar to "How do we get beyond those obstacles, cf. above.]

Concluding Thoughts and Prayer

Selective listening is certainly not a bad thing. The question is a matter of what we are selecting to listen to. Consider your listening this week. How many different words do you hear? To which ones do you listen?

Continue your study of listening in the Gospel of Mark. What examples of listening and not listening do you see in the Gospel of Mark? How do you relate to these characters? What things are difficult for you to hear in the Gospel of Mark? Why? What encourages you to listen in the Gospel of Mark?

In your prayers request open ears to hear God's word throughout the week and for that word to shape your thinking, doing, and speaking that the Kingdom of God might be a present reality in your life.



Discipleship: According to Mark

Session 5: Placing Your Confidence

Leader's Guide

Goal: That the participants would look to Jesus for their confidence: He is the one in whom we put our trust.

Objectives: Ttp would recognize the structure of the unit from 6:30-8:21;
Ttp would see and understand the bread theme in this unit;
Ttp would recognize that there is plenty of bread to go around;
Ttp would rejoice in the fact that Jesus is the one who makes clean;
Ttp would find confidence in Jesus and not put their trust in themselves, their status, or their actions.

Introduction

Confidence is a finicky thing. In sports we find great momentum swings. These swings occur because a star player goes down; an unknown player steps up big; someone is seeing the ball really well; etc. There are various reasons for the swings, but almost all of them relate to confidence. What is a source of confidence at one moment becomes a source of concern at another. When confidence is there, momentum is present; when it is gone, so is momentum.

In discipleship, confidence also plays a big role. As we look at Mark 6:30-8:21 we see some common sources of confidence and Jesus' interaction with them.

Opening Prayer

The Text

Read Mark 6:30-8:21.

It is important to notice a few details in this section:

First, there are two key sequences that begin and end the section. In the beginning, Jesus feeds five thousand plus and the disciples go on a boat trip. In the end, Jesus feeds four thousand plus and the disciples go on a boat trip. In the middle of this unit, we find a Syrophenician woman who is pleading for Jesus' help. Jesus tells her that it is not right to give the children's food to the dogs. The woman rebuts that even the dogs get to eat the crumbs. Jesus feeds the woman as he heals her daughter.

Second, in the middle of this unit there is significant discussion of clean and unclean. This discussion is followed by the account of a Gentile woman, i.e. an unclean woman, who has a daughter with an unclean spirit asking Jesus for help and Jesus commending her for her faith. Furthermore, the two feedings each bear their own distinctive flavors. The first bears the characteristics that distinguish it as a Jewish feeding; the second bears the characteristics that distinguish it as a Gentile feeding.

The Jewish feeding is characterized by being in Jewish territory, familiar language of "sheep without a shepherd" [cf. Numbers 27:17], they would be sent to the surrounding countryside (as opposed to the long journeys that would have been in store for those in the second feeding), twelve loaves left over, and baskets that fit Jewish terminology and use. The Gentile feeding (4,000) is located in a setting outside of the Jewish territory, has people from far away participating [cf. Ephesians 2:11-13, i.e. far off is terminology for Gentiles], have seven loaves and seven baskets leftover, and the type of baskets seem to be more appropriate for a Gentile setting.

Third, there is steady movement in the geopolitical settings of Jesus' and the disciples' travel. Two significant points should be noted here: 1. At 6:45 the disciples are sent to go to Bethsaida; at 6:53 they arrive at Gennesaret. They do not arrive at their destination until 8:22. 2. This detour results in a travel pattern that takes them distinctively out of the Jewish territory and into Gentile territory.

Recognizing these details, note in particular what the disciples do in these verses:

How do the disciples begin and end this unit? What are their actions and what are their thoughts?

The disciples begin by reporting all that they had done. They had just returned from their mission. [The term apostles is used because they were sent out (in the Greek the verb is *apostello*).] Yet when Jesus asks them to demonstrate their new found skills, they couldn't do it. The same problem repeats in the feeding of the four thousand as they again fail to be able to feed the people. The failure is highlighted as the disciples are confused about the bread in the final boat account. The disciples didn't understand about it.

With what were the disciples having difficulty? Where was their confidence?

The disciples report what THEY had done. They seem to fail to understand that it is not about what they had done but what God is doing. The people sent are the product of the one sending. Likewise they missed the point about the bread. They had one loaf in the boat; they had Jesus! Jesus is the key to the feeding; Jesus is the key to understanding their sufficiency and confidence.

What was the discussion at the middle of the unit? What was the problem with the Jewish leaders here? What about the disciples? Where was their confidence?

The Jewish leaders were confused by the rules and expectations of cleanliness that defined them and their social circle. They missed the point of the Jewish cleanliness laws, i.e. to separate themselves from the practices of the nations. The focus of the cleanliness was not an issue of doing as much as an issue of being set apart.

The disciples seem to miss the boat on this one as well. They too have put their confidence in their own actions rather than the one who really makes them clean, Jesus and the reign of God he brings. God's gracious ruling of our hearts and minds is that which produces cleanliness.

How is the Syrophenician woman different?

She recognizes that her confidence has nothing to do with her. It is not about her status and it is not about her abilities. She trusts in the food of Jesus. She recognizes that Jesus is the difference maker and that there is plenty of 'food' to go around. There were twelve basketfuls more than needed in the Jewish feeding. There is plenty for the Gentiles too! For this reason she is willing to call herself a dog and trust fully in Jesus.

How does Jesus respond to these responses?

Jesus responds to the leaders of the Jews with a challenge. He responds to the disciples with strong rebuke and recognition of their ignorance. He responds to the Syrophenician woman with great applause for her faith and understanding.

Relevance

What does this teach us with respect to discipleship about placing our confidence? What difficulties demonstrated by the disciples can we relate to?

Answers will vary. Two difficulties that stand out are found at the beginning and the middle. The disciples looked at their own abilities rather than looking to Jesus, the one who sent them. They failed to see the confidence that comes from him alone. In similar way, the disciples and the Jewish leaders also demonstrated an emphasis on what they did. "It is about washing hands." No, it is about our God and what he has done for us through Jesus Christ.

These issues are issue we face in life. Without theophanies (where God is revealed to us in a special way), it is easy for us to forget that God is helping us and guiding us. It is easy to forget the power with which we do things. It is also easy for us to focus on our accomplishments and our groups to determine who is "in" and who is "out". Jesus is the key.

How do these passages free you up to be a better disciple?

In these passages we recognize two important realities. First, our place before God in his kingdom and our service to God for that kingdom is not determined by our own power or ability. It is God's. This truth reduces the stress on us significantly. Second, there is plenty of bread to go around. We do not need to hoard Jesus in fear of having enough for ourselves. We can freely invite people to the party and share the goodness of the food with others.

How do you get distracted from this freedom? Cf. Mark 8:14-21.

Answers will vary. It is easy to lose sight of the bread we have in the boat and get our minds wrapped up in other teachings. In our world there are many teachings out there that encourage us to put confidence in ourselves, in ten step programs, in friends and status, etc. These things can distract us from the true confidence we have in Jesus, the Son of God.

How can you remember the joy of this freedom?

Answers will vary. A few things that may help us: encouraging each other with God esteem, not self-esteem; remind each other that we are dogs but there are plenty of scraps for us; continue to be shown Christ, our hope and confidence; etc.

Concluding Thoughts and Prayer

Jesus helps the disciples consider their focus. He directs them to look to him for sustenance and strength. As you go into this week consider your focus. Where do you find your confidence? Where do you find your strength? As we have seen the confidence Christ provides, ask God to guide you to this bread as you face challenges in your life.

As you continue to read Mark this week, pay special attention to the disciples as they appear in these chapters and as they appear in the subsequent chapters. How does Jesus respond to the disciples?

Discipleship: According to Mark

Session 6: Take Up Your Cross

Leader's Guide

Goal: That the participants would understand the depth of the call of discipleship to take up your cross and follow Jesus.

Objectives: Ttp would recognize the structure of the unit from 8:22-10:52;
Ttp would understand the failure of Peter to see clearly;
Ttp would ask themselves what challenges they find in their lives with respect to the call of taking up their cross;
Ttp would rejoice that Jesus made his way to Jerusalem;
Ttp would grow in understanding the teachings of 8:22-10:52.

Introduction

"This is just a cross you have to bear." Have you ever heard that phrase before? What does this phrase mean to you? How do people use it?

This week we look at the 'on the way' section of the Gospel of Mark. In this section we find the stark reality that if anyone is going to follow Jesus he must 'take up his cross'. We also ask what this call means for our discipleship.

Opening Prayer

The Text

Read Mark 8:22-10:52.

Read Mark 8:27-9:1; 9:30-32; 10:32-34. What do you notice about these passages? What is happening in this section?

Jesus predicts his passion in each of these passages. Each of these passages also have Jesus being 'on the way' to Jerusalem. The geopolitical settings recognized throughout this section also demonstrate a movement to Jerusalem, i.e., the place of Jesus' suffering and death (this is accented at 10:32 but can be highlighted by look at the geopolitical settings throughout the section of 8:22-10:52 if desired).

For what is Jesus preparing his disciples? Cf. also 9:11-13 and 10:35-45.

Jesus is preparing his disciples for his suffering, death, and resurrection. He is also preparing them for their suffering and death. Jesus' response to Peter at the beginning of this section at 8:34 makes this quite clear. It is also reiterated at 10:39 where he explicitly tells James and John that they will suffer martyrdom for the faith just as Jesus does. The reference at 9:11-13 highlights the reality that Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist (the Elijah to come), has suffered and died already; these verses communicate more about Jesus and the ones who follow him than about what has already been recorded in Mark 6; it records that the cost of discipleship is taking up our cross.

Is Jesus' teaching an easy teaching for his disciples? How does Peter respond? How does James and John respond? How do the rest of the disciples respond?

This teaching is not an easy teaching for the disciples. This reality is highlighted by Peter's rebuking of Jesus (cf. 8:32-33). He treats Jesus' teaching as Jesus' treats the demons. James and John seem to have missed the point altogether. They seek after earthly glory and miss the reality that Jesus' going to the cross is his glory. The rest of his disciples seem to respond in a similar way.

What irony is found in 8:29-30? How do these verses relate to Peter's confusion at 8:32?

Peter makes this bold, and accurate, statement that Jesus is the Christ. But Jesus has to tell him not to tell people because he, nor the rest of the disciples, understand who Jesus is.

With this misunderstanding in mind why does Jesus tell the disciples not to tell anyone about the proclamation that Jesus is the Christ and about the transfiguration? Cf. 9:2-13.

They did not understand who Jesus is nor could they understand yet. The only way to understand Jesus is through the cross. In the cross Jesus lives the reign of God in its fullness. In the cross we can understand that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament and the summation of the Law and the prophets. In the cross Jesus demonstrates God's desires for him, but most importantly for us.

Consider the sections between the passion predictions. What additional failures to understand the call to 'take up your cross' do each of these sections indicate?

Mark 9:14-29

The disciples looked to themselves so that the job would be accomplished. They failed to believe (9:23) and that resulted in their failure to heal the boy. Taking up your cross means trusting God to take care of business as we simply trust in him as a trusting and humble child.

Mark 9:33-10:31

This section is lengthy and carries several minor points that highlight the misperception of the call to follow Jesus in the way of the cross. These verses demonstrate that the greatest in the kingdom of God is not concerned about position or status (whether it is yours or someone else's); that the hard hearts of people's personal desires contrast the call of the kingdom to listen to God's desires; that the call of the kingdom calls us to humility as we trust in God; and that the call of discipleship instructs us to give up all to follow Jesus.

Mark 10:35-45

Primarily, as discussed earlier, this section reveals a desire for status and position. The call to take up their cross and follow Jesus means that James and John should have been denying themselves rather than seeking the glory of the world.

Through all of these discipleship mishaps, where does Jesus go?

Jesus continues to follow God's lead, the path of discipleship to Jerusalem.

Relevance

Put into your own words the call to 'take up your cross and follow Jesus'. What is the extent of that call?

The call is the death of us. It calls us to follow Jesus to the cross. This may not mean the physical death of us; but it does mean that we see others' needs rather than our own needs being the ultimate determining factor in life's decisions. It kills our desires and rejoices in God's desires. It instructs us to let God be God and to let us be his people.

Are there any teachings you've heard today that seem particularly difficult? Why are they so difficult?

Answers will vary. The goal of this question is to really consider what lies behind our hesitation to listen to the instructions of the LORD or at least the challenge it is to implement them.

How does taking up our cross look today? What issues get in the way? Do they look similar to the issues the disciples faced?

Answers will vary (take some time considering this). Important in this discussion is the self denial and pure recognition that God is God and we are not. It trusts in his plan and not our agenda. All things in life that get in the way of this and lead to lack of trust and direction in/from God fall into the hindrance category. Taking up the cross is about dying to ourselves and living to God.

Concluding Thoughts and Prayer

The recognition of the cross 'we just have to bear' is often a missed recognition. Frequently the cross is a matter of lost comfort and rarely involves the death of oneself and one's own pride. The call is to sacrifice your own desires and seek to do God's. As you go about your week, try to evaluate your decision making. How do you do at listening to God's instructions rather than conveniently interpreting them as is comfortable for you?

In the coming week continue your reading of Mark and focus on the relationship of the two units that surround this 'on the way' passage. What does the first healing of a blind man teach us? What does the second?

Discipleship: According to Mark

Session 7: Seeing Clearly

Leader's Guide

Goal: That the participants would see clearly as they grow in the faith and face challenges to the faith.

Objectives:

- Ttp would recognize the seeing theme in Mark;
- Ttp would consider the challenges to seeing Jesus in the world;
- Ttp would grow in their ability to watch as we await Christ's return;
- Ttp would rejoice in the Lord who has seen and stayed alert;
- Ttp would rejoice in the Lord who continues to teach in spite of poor sight.

Introduction

Some people look at life with rose colored glasses. Others approach life as a great disaster waiting to happen, they see the negative possibilities. Still others don't look beyond their own nose. In life various things often shape our perspective and adjust our taking in of that which stands before us. We do not always see clearly.

Think of a situation in which your perception of reality was substantially different from the actual situation. What caused the discrepancy? How did you not realize it? What eventually brought the reality to your attention?

Answers will vary. The goal is to help people see that seeing is not always as easy as looking. Our sight is often adjusted and determined by other factors. We need to work at seeing clearly.

Opening Prayer

Text:

Read Mark 8:14-21, 22-26, 27-9:1.

What particulars do you notice about the healing Jesus performs?

The big thing here is the fact that it took Jesus "two" times to heal the blind man fully. A question may be why it takes Jesus two times. This question is not answered by the text. The greater question for understanding the Gospel of Mark is what this healing communicates to the hearer.

How does Jesus' healing parallel the subsequent interchange between Peter and Jesus? Consider also Jesus' words to the disciples in the boat.

This question gets at the significance of Mark 8:22-26. The need for further healing is echoed by Peter and the disciples' need for further instruction. Jesus has revealed himself to them and instructed them. Nonetheless, Peter still did not get it; he did not understand the cross.

Can you relate to Peter's failure to understand? When have you not seen matters of faith and life as clearly as you should?

Answers will vary. The goal of this question is for participants to recognize that people do not always understand.

What lesson is there for your seeing in this interchange? Is this an easy lesson to learn?

The lesson is quite simply, each needs to be aware of their potential not to see clearly. Peter makes a bold confession of faith, yet shortly thereafter Peter demonstrates that he does not understand. And as each needs to continue to see clearly, each needs to continue to be shown and taught by Jesus and his word.

What prevents your seeing clearly? What specific things/issues/etc. do you find most challenging?

Answers will vary. The goal of the question is to help each participant to consider the things they find most challenging and how these things prevent them from seeing as God would have them see.

What does Jesus do in the midst of their failure to see clearly? How does that encourage you?

Jesus continues to teach them. This persistent mercy encourages us as we rejoice that he continues to teach even when we fail to see.

Read Mark 10:46-52.

How does this healing differ from the prior? What message is communicated by this healing?

The healing takes one time. In contrast to the disciples after the healing at Bethsaida, here the disciples have been shown that Jesus being the Christ means that he must go to Jerusalem and go to the cross; it also means that those who follow must take up their cross as well.

How does Bartimaeus demonstrate clear vision?

Bartimaeus responds to Jesus in a couple of very clear ways. He responds in the way of the call narratives in Mark 1:16-20 and 2:14. He leaves his vocation (throwing of his cloak) and follows Jesus on the way. He responds as the disciples are called to respond; he makes his way with Jesus to Jerusalem, cf. Mark 11:1.

What does clear vision do in your life? What does this look like in your life of discipleship?

Answers will vary. This question seeks to get participants thinking about their lives as lives that are molded and shaped by the vision we are given in Christ. Continually being instructed in Christ means continually being molded and shaped as we follow Jesus to Jerusalem, as we take up our cross and follow.

Read Mark 13.

In Mark 13, the theme of seeing continues; it is highlighted much as hearing is highlighted in chapter 4. The Greek word for seeing is present at 13:2, 5, 9, 23, 33. At 13:35, 37 the Greek word changes to 'watch'.

The translations often translate this word in other ways, e.g., 'watch', 'be on guard', etc. In spite of these different translations, it is the same word for seeing that has been present in the key passages at 4:12 and 8:18.

Why does Jesus tell the disciples to see in chapter 13?

The words are a warning for the disciples as they face life following Jesus' death and resurrection and await his return. Jesus recognizes that there will be people who will try to deceive them and create misunderstandings. He recognizes that there will be persecution and opposition. For this reason he wants the disciples to see clearly; Jesus wants the disciples to focus on him.

What does Jesus not try to do for the disciples as he instructs them to see? Cf. Mark 13:32-37.

Jesus does not try to communicate to the disciples some sort of code for understanding when the end will come (even though that is essentially what the disciples were asking) or the definitive outline for when the end was coming. Instead, Jesus tells them that they will not know, indeed no one knows, the time when Christ will return. Rather than focusing on such things, they should focus on Jesus.

What does that teach us as we live out our days during these last days?

We need to be watchful. We need to keep our eyes open and continue to be instructed by Jesus; we need to not be deceived by false teachings.

How well do the disciples do at this task? Cf. Mark 14:32-42 (esp. 14:34, 38). What causes difficulty for them?

The disciples fail to watch (here the Greek word is the same as the instructions of Mark 13:35, 37. and instead fall asleep. Their weariness was a problem for them.

How well do you do at this task? What causes difficulty for you? What things get in your way of watching? How do you confront these challenges and keep them in check?

Answers will vary. Hopefully the participants will consider things such as schedules, friends, work, etc. that often consume people. The question of keeping these things in check should keep in mind the truth of Mark 8:22-10:52, i.e., Jesus keeps our eyes open and opens them further.

How well did Jesus do at this task? What comfort does this provide for you as you face the challenges of seeing today?

Jesus watched diligently throughout the hours of the night (cf. Mark 14:32-15:47); by his vigilance, he has brought us life and salvation. He has delivered us and continues to deliver us by his faithful endurance all of the way to the cross.

Relevance:

Does the call to see and perceive hold such an important place in our life of discipleship today? Why or why not? Cf. 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1; etc.

Answers will vary. Ultimately, the need to see is quite clear in Mark 13 where we see that people are trying to deceive. We also see it in the fact that the messages of 'truth' conveyed in the world today fail to hold to that standard. Relativity and gospel reductionism (reducing the message of the gospel to the cross, largely as a 'get out of jail free' pass, without seeing the cross in view of all of Scriptures) are rampant in today's world and we need to be alert with clear vision.

What tools do we use to see more clearly? Cf. 2 Timothy 3:10-17.

Scriptures provide the clarity in vision for us. This tool is utilized in the context of faith as we study with fellow believers and in view of the faith that has been passed down to us.

Concluding Thoughts and Prayer

Throughout the week look for areas in your life in which you may not be seeing clearly. Continue to search God's word and see what it reveals and how it shapes you for a life of discipleship. Pray God's guidance and direction as you grow in your vision, as he continues to open your eyes to his work and his ways.

For next week continue to read weekly through the Gospel of Mark and in particular focus on the characters found in Mark 11-16. Consider their roles in the story and their relationship to you.

Discipleship: According to Mark

Session 8: Close and a Cigar

Leader's Guide

Goal: That the participants would recognize their failures as disciples and rejoice in the one who goes to the cross as a true disciple.

Objectives: Ttp would follow the characters as they interact with Jesus in Mark 11-15;
Ttp would recognize the failure of the main character groups;
Ttp would see beyond their failure and rejoice in Christ's faithfulness;

Introduction

The first week of this study, as this study on discipleship and Mark were introduced, the assignment was given to read through Mark in one sitting, ideally once a week. Each week we were to pay attention to the development of the characters and themes in the Gospel and grow in our knowledge of the text. As we did so we would grow in our understanding of discipleship.

How have you done at this task? What did you find beneficial? What was challenging?

The goal of this discussion is to highlight success and failure. The first question is the key to this discussion; the other two are intended to make the question more natural. In addition to the simple question of whether people did the reading or not, it is beneficial to get into the layers of that reality. These layers probably will address the people who may have been reading it every week, but most likely read it sometimes out of obligation or the desire to keep up with that challenge. Ideally from this discussion will come the illustration that this assignment is a microcosm of discipleship. Just as we fail at a simple task aimed at strengthening our discipleship, we often also fail at the bigger call to follow Jesus. Our desire to dismiss an hour of reading a week is a small picture of our desire to dismiss the calls throughout life to take up our cross. We desire an easy faith, one of sound bites and happiness; we avoid at all costs a faith that calls us to act, work, and sacrifice. Today we find our failure, even when we are close to living out the call, and we find the success of our Lord.

Today as we approach these final chapters of Mark we face a difficult reality of discipleship: no matter how close you get, we all fail at some point and to some extent. Consider how easy it was to fail at a simple exercise aimed at growing in the faith. This assignment is a picture of the reality of discipleship. The call to take up one's cross and follow is much more difficult; we face this reality as we enter Jerusalem and face the real challenges that inconvenience us and call us to sacrifice, that call us even to die for the faith.

Opening Prayer

Text:

Read Mark 11:1-11.

Consider the call that we heard in Week 1's lesson. In Mark 1:16-20 we hear Jesus calling his disciples to follow him. They are called to follow and Jesus comes after John the Baptist. Recognizing this theme what does Mark 11:1-11 teach us concerning the call to discipleship? How does it communicate that message?

A key passage here is Mark 11:9. The call of discipleship leads us to follow in the path of those who went before and those who went after Jesus, even the path of Jesus himself. It calls us to go to Jerusalem and to take up our cross. It highlights this message with the procession in which some go before and some go after Jesus.

In so doing it also focuses our attention on Jesus, the one who comes in the name of the Lord. He is the one who is faithful and brings the kingdom of our father David. Thus it encourages us to follow and focus on Jesus.

Read Mark 11:12-25

Why are the accounts of the fig trees positioned where they are? What does the episode with the fig tree teach us?

The cursing of the fig tree surrounds the cleansing of the temple to communicate the lack of fruit the temple is producing, cf. similar ideas in Mark 12:1-12. Furthermore, and probably more significantly, it highlights that it is not the season for figs; it is not the season for the temple. Jesus is announcing the end of the temple. This end provides the theme for this unit of Mark (11-15) and finds its climax with the death of Jesus on the cross (destroy this temple...). Cf. also Mark 13(especially 13:1-2); 14:58; 15:29, 38.

What role did the temple play in the lives of the faithful in Judea/Galilee? Consider for example Luke 2:41. How does understanding the role of the temple help us to understand better the significance of the destruction of the temple? How does this theme relate to the call to discipleship, especially as the disciples face Jerusalem?

The temple was to be at the center of people's lives. To be certain this centrality of the temple should be a matter of God's centrality; unfortunately, God's centrality was not always seen as the point of the temple. The destruction of the temple would be a significant change in someone's perspective and a change in the focus of life itself. This destruction parallels well the call to take up one's cross; it echoes the call to die to oneself. We see this illustration played out as Jesus' death is connected to the saying 'destroy this temple...' twice overtly and once (15:38) indirectly.

Consider Mark 11:27-12:40; 14:10-52; 14:53-72; 15:1-21.

In week three we looked at three key characters in the Gospel of Mark. We considered the leaders of the Jews, the disciples, and the outsiders. We find those three groups highlighted again in Mark 11-15.

Leaders of the Jews:

How do the leaders of the Jews respond to Jesus and the good news of the kingdom of God? What obstacles do they face? Are they all out to get Jesus?

The leaders of the Jews tend to respond in defense and preservation of their authority. They do not want to lose their structure of life; they definitely do not want to take up their cross and follow Jesus. Their struggle to maintain themselves is highlighted in the parable of the vineyard where they reject the efforts of the owner of the vineyard, i.e. the tenants want to have the authority in the vineyard. But all the leaders do not fall into this category. The 'one of the scribes' asks Jesus a question recognizing his good answer; he responds to Jesus' additional response favorably as well. He follows this response up with a beneficial understanding of the kingdom of God. This exception within the character of the Jewish leaders is key to understanding that discipleship is not a matter of position (e.g. being a Jewish leader excludes you and being an outcast includes you); rather, it is a matter of taking up our cross and following.

Disciples:

How do the disciples do? How is 14:10-52 structured to highlight this truth? How do these responses relate to previous responses of the disciples in the Gospel of Mark?

The disciples fail Jesus. Each one fails. Judas and Peter fail; the inner three (Peter, James, and John) fail as well. The whole group does not follow all of the way to the cross. Take note how Judas is highlighted repeatedly as 'one of the twelve'. Earlier in the Gospel, cf. Mark 3:19, he is listed as 'who betrayed him'. Here, chapter 14, the emphasis is on Judas' connection to the disciples. Likewise take note how the disciples begin with a large group and then the emphasis whittles down to three

and then to one. All, even Peter, fail Jesus. They seek rather to save themselves; they fail to take up their cross.

[The significance of the man losing his white garment will be addressed next week.]

What lesson does the disciples' failure teach us as we follow Jesus and take up our cross?

Answers will vary, but the goal of this question is to recognize that we should not get into the mindset of "I am a good disciple; I always do..." We are all sinners in need of saving who fail regularly. We do not want to get complacent about our status nor be misdirected about our hope. Being a 'disciple' does not make one a follower of Jesus.

The Outsiders:

Who are the key outsiders in 15:1-21? How do these Gentiles respond to Jesus as he goes to the cross?

How do these responses relate to their previous responses?

The key outsiders are Pilate, the soldiers, and Simon of Cyrene. Although Simon might have been a Diaspora Jew, i.e., part of the Jewish people who were dispersed throughout the known world, he should be included here as an outsider since his sons names are mentioned to highlight his Roman (Rufus) and Greek (Alexander) influence.

These outsiders respond to Jesus by sending him to the cross. Even Simon, who 'helps' Jesus, does nothing more than send Jesus to the cross. Pilate is possibly the worst offense. He recognizes Jesus' innocence and sends him to be crucified anyway. He seeks to please the crowd, and save himself, rather than do what is appropriate.

In addition to these three characters, it is important to discuss two others:

The Women: (Consider 12:41-44 and 14:3-9; also 15:40-41, 47; 16:1-8)

How do the women respond to the call to the good news of the Kingdom of God? How does this relate to their role in the rest of the Gospel?

The women in the Gospel of Mark respond the most favorably out of any sub-character groupings. Here in Mark 12 and 14 we see this response continuing. They respond in humility and faith. The widow gave her whole life (literal translation of the Greek) and put it in the treasury. At the conclusion of the Gospel however, the faithful women shift in their response. They observe the crucifixion from a distance, and they leave the tomb in silence for they were afraid. Even the women did not make it to the end without failure.

Jesus Christ: (Consider especially 15:1-41)

How does Jesus live out the call of the good news of the Kingdom of God in Mark? What contrast do we find in his perspective and in these other character groups? What connections are present?

Jesus, in contrast to the leaders of the Jews, the disciples, the outsiders, and the women, lives out the call to discipleship fully and completely. He goes to the cross in humility and dies in the face of mocking. As the perfect servant, He does not desire to save his own skin, as we see the others do. He does not seek his own preservation of power and authority. Jesus seeks the good of those who need his faithfulness to sustain and encourage them on their life of discipleship.

Amid all of these characters, where does the Gospel of Mark place its emphasis? What does that teach us in our path of discipleship?

The emphasis is on Jesus' faithfulness. Yes, the text recognizes everyone else's failure and directs us away from ourselves. But central to all the other characters is Jesus' proper perspective and the continual movement Jesus makes as he goes to the cross. His focus is on the salvation of the world and our reconciliation with God. This focus reminds us in our discipleship to look to Jesus; it guides us to look beyond our failure but to trust in Jesus.

Relevance:

Consider your life. When you get to Jerusalem and need to go to the cross, how do you respond? To which characters do you relate? What are the sacrifices you are called to make? What obstacles do you find that make going to the cross difficult? With what areas do you struggle the most?

Answers will vary. If participants want to make connections to the characters in these chapters that may help people see the connection between the text and life. Some possible areas of struggle are: 1. pride—Peter; 2. greed—Judas; 3. power/control—Jewish leaders; 4. fear—disciples; 5. pleasing people—Pilate; etc. Ideally answers should provide more than 'pride', i.e., they should illustrate how that looks in their life. You might have them think specifically of the past week so that their consideration might be more pointed.

How does Jesus' faithfulness to us give hope in your discipleship failures and spur you on to continue on the path of discipleship through the Holy Spirit? How do you maintain the focus on Jesus' faithfulness and refrain from dwelling on your failure?

Jesus' faithfulness encourages us by forgiving us and restoring us. His faithfulness is not just successful discipleship on his part; it is also life-giving sacrifice for us. This life we have in him picks us up from our failure and pushes us forward to serve him in joy and confidence. It encourages us to look beyond our failure and to his faithfulness and his call to discipleship. In him we recognize that even though we "only get close" we still win the prize, i.e., the "cigar" [This statement reflects the saying "close but no cigar" not a promotion of a cigar as a "prize".] Jesus' faithfulness is always the key in our discipleship.

Maintaining one's focus on Jesus is difficult. It gets especially hard when we hear the instructions: 'you just have to' or 'you need to do this', i.e., when the emphasis is on your work rather than God's. Rather than focusing on what we do, the lesson of Mark is one that drives us to humility. It reminds us that the Kingdom of God is about God and his reign; it is not about our ability and goodness. It is about what God is doing in our lives not about us and our activity. It directs us ultimately to the cross of Christ; only in that cross does it send us forth in the call of discipleship.

How does this humble reality of discipleship free you in life? Do you think this message of humility is something that the people in your life need to hear? How can you share it with them?

Answers will vary. When we look to Christ as the one who gets discipleship right and supports us in ours, it helps us face failure. It enables us to face failure and say, 'I failed'; it doesn't change who I am and it certainly doesn't change the faithfulness of Christ. This freedom to fail is freeing beyond measure and it is something that others need to know as well. We are trapped in a success driven culture and society. People link their identity to how well they do their tasks, even their task of discipleship. They need to know that Jesus has been faithful and in him we have our identity; that is the nature of being his disciples. Communicating this joy is difficult; it confronts people's pride and self sufficiency. It may involve rejection and animosity; it may involve thanksgiving and joy. Regardless it is a freeing truth that needs to be shared.

Concluding Thoughts and Prayer

Throughout the week try to identify times when you are called to take up your cross. As you recognize those opportunities, those calls of discipleship, ask God to strengthen you and remind you of Jesus' faithfulness. If you take up your cross, give thanks in Christ. If you fail, look again to Christ. Continue to be molded and shaped by his faithfulness and his cross.

Continue to read through Mark. This week as you read through the book reflect upon the issue of discipleship and failure; consider especially the lesson of the ending of Mark, i.e. 16:1-8. Begin to consider how these verses encourage us in our call and send us out anew to follow.



Discipleship: According to Mark

Session 9: The Apprentice

Leader's Guide

Goal: That the participants would find power in the resurrection as they follow Jesus on the path of discipleship.

Objectives: Ttp understand the flow of the Gospel of Mark, even the flow out of the Gospel
Ttp would hear the restored call to follow
Ttp would find joy in their baptisms

Introduction

While apprenticeships are not as popular today, apprenticeships used to be a very functional way of training people for work in a new profession. The apprentice would learn how things work and skills for the practice of the trade. When the time came, the apprentice would become fully certified in the trade and be able to function on his own and at times the apprentice might be trained to take over the business or a facet of it.

Do you feel like you have been an apprentice of anyone in your life? Have you ever felt like you were following in someone's footsteps? How did that look? How did that feel?

Answers will vary. The goal of these questions is to get people thinking about what is involved with following in the footsteps of someone. People might consider the burden or the privilege that is involved. They might recognize the pressure of living up to standards, the training that prepared them, or the freedom to succeed or fail as one comes after a mentor. They should recognize the expectation of the apprentice flying on their own at some point in the training. The study will be looking at this notion with respect to the disciples and Jesus.

Today as we conclude our study of the Gospel of Mark, we recognize the continuing story of discipleship.

Opening Prayer

Text:

[Before we get into the text it is important to recognize a textual difficulty. The earlier manuscripts do not have the mid-ranged and longer endings of the Gospel of Mark. For this reason, and for significant textual indicators we recognize 16:8 as the text's original ending. For more insight into the ending of Mark, please read the notes included in The Lutheran Study Bible and other resources from Concordia Publishing House.]

Read Mark 16:1-8.

Consider last week's lesson. What did we learn from Mark 11-15?
Everyone failed but Jesus.

As we saw Jesus' death last week, today we see Jesus' resurrection. How did the women respond to Jesus' death? Were they acting appropriately? Cf. Mark 14:3-9.

The women were responding appropriately for the conventions of the day. They wanted to make Jesus' body ready for his final rest. But their actions were not needed. Certainly they were not

needed in view of his resurrection, but they also were not needed because his body was anointed beforehand for burial.

How did the women respond following the proclamation of his resurrection? What was the product of this response?

The women responded in fear and they did nothing; they remained silent.

In addition to the women's story, we hear Jesus' story. What message do we hear in the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection? Cf. Mark 14:26-31, 51-52.

The message here is simple: Jesus' words have come true. He is faithful. But even more so, the failure of the disciples, i.e. their flight at Jesus' capture, stands forgiven. The young man who left his linen cloth behind in flight now is found at the tomb clothed in a white robe. To be certain, we cannot claim that the young man listed in each passage is the same person; we can however recognize that the Gospel of Mark is making a clear connection between the flight of the disciple and the forgiveness of Christ. We also hear in this passage that Jesus indeed goes ahead of them into Galilee. Their failure was not the end of their discipleship; Jesus restores them on their way.

How does the message of these verses encourage you in your path of discipleship?

Answers will vary. This question should suggest relationship between the restoration experienced by the disciples and the forgiveness we too receive even in our failure. How this looks for individuals in their personal lives of discipleship will no doubt vary.

Where do these verses point you?

These verses point us back to the perfect faithfulness Christ displays in the Gospel of Mark. They point us to His accomplishment and His going before us into Galilee.

One final point of significance should be made before we move beyond the Gospel of Mark. The final verse presents a very odd ending. Not only does it end with the women's failure, it ends with a word that does not end sentences. The final sentence would fall under the category of incomplete. Furthermore, when one looks at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, another point comes up: the Gospel of Mark begins in mid sentence as well.

Why do you think the author did this? How does this enhance our understanding of the Gospel of Mark? How does this relate to the message of Mark 16:7? How does this relate to the title of the book? How does this address the question of whether the title's inclusion of 'the gospel of Jesus Christ' is an objective or subjective genitive?

The Gospel of Mark is about discipleship. It highlights that Jesus comes after John the Baptist. His story is the continuation of those who have gone before him [Notice also how Mark does not have a birth narrative like Matthew and Luke do.]. His story is continued with those who follow him. This story of discipleship does not negate his sole sufficiency as the Disciple. What it does teach us is that we are called to take up our cross too; we are called to a life of discipleship as well. The book then ends in mid sentence because the book continues. In addition, the call of Mark 16:7 reminds us that Jesus has gone ahead of us and we are to follow. In a sense, the Gospel of Mark says at the conclusion of Jesus' death and resurrection, you're next!

In consideration of the title—the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ: If the title uses a subjective genitive, i.e. the gospel Jesus Christ proclaimed, the implications are that the good news of the reign of God is not just about Jesus but also the good news about you. The reign of God has come to you; you get to follow in the life of discipleship and the mission of God. The other way to take the genitive is as an objective genitive, i.e. the gospel about Jesus Christ. In addition to the

matter of objective and subjective genitives is the reality that the title states that this book is the beginning. The gospel continues beyond these pages. It continues with you!

Beyond this primary point, another point can also be gleaned from Mark 16:7. Just as we are called to discipleship, we also find restoration and hope in Jesus. If you did not get the message the first time around, you can go back to Galilee and see Jesus there again. This message although different than that of the preceding paragraph, is noteworthy as well. It highlights the reality that discipleship is an ongoing task and we are called to continually go back to Galilee, to the beginning of the book (Jesus is in Galilee for the first section of the Gospel) and learn again and again the call to discipleship and the Savior who has gone before us.

Relevance:

As you consider the challenges seen through the eyes of the characters in the Gospel of Mark, what challenges do you find most difficult?

Answers will vary.

What encouragement does your baptism provide as you read today's text? Consider also Galatians 3:27 and Colossians 2:12-13.

Our baptism reminds us of the restoration we have through Christ's death and resurrection; we have been clothed in Christ.

How does the resurrection encourage you as you continue the life of faith giving to you in your Baptism?

The resurrection reminds us that death is not the end of the story. It encourages us by confirming the work and ministry of Jesus; it encourages us as we follow in that path. The path is legitimate and God pleasing; we can go forth with confidence and without fear.

Where do you go from here? How do you practice a life of discipleship from this day forward through the work of the Holy Spirit? What keys are important in such a practice?

Answers will vary. It is good to encourage brainstorming concerning ways to help yourself on the path and how to encourage one another in the group (and those outside). In the midst of the brainstorming of good and practical ways, we should all recognize the power of the one we are following. He sustains us and gives us strength; he gives us legitimacy and direction.

God has incorporated you into his mission, into his story. What does this truth of the Gospel of Mark mean to you?

Answers will vary.

How can you work with others to encourage each other and to keep the series of following in tact? Who might be your apprentice?

Answers will vary. Obviously, this statement does not put us on the same plain as Christ. Nonetheless, it is beneficial for us to recognize that the line continues through us as we live as his followers (after all, the leader is the one they see). Participants should consider who they can impact in their lives.

Concluding Thoughts and Prayer

As we have worked through the Gospel of Mark we have found a steady call to follow Jesus; a steady failure to follow perfectly; and a steady Lord who continued on the path of discipleship even when it meant death upon a cross. This steady Lord gives us renewal and strength as we continue on our path as his disciples. He goes before us into Galilee!