

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

MARK

THE BIG IDEA

JESUS' IDENTITY IS REVEALED NOT JUST IN WHAT HE SAYS, BUT IN WHAT HE DOES.



Theme and Purpose - Even in the first verse it is obvious that this gospel centers on the person and mission of the Son of God. Like the other gospels, Mark is not a biography but a topical narrative. Mark juxtaposes Christ's teachings and works to show how they authenticate each other. Miracles are predominant in this book (there are 18), and they are used to demonstrate not only the power of Christ, but also His compassion. Mark shows his gentile readers how the Son of God was rejected by His own people, achieving ultimate victory through apparent defeat. There was no doubt an evangelistic purpose behind this gospel as Mark directed his words to a gentile audience that knew little about Old Testament theology. Mark was evidently directed to a Roman readership and early tradition indicates that it originated in Rome. This may be why Mark omitted a number of items that would not have been meaningful to Gentiles, such as the genealogy of Christ, fulfilled prophecy, references to the Law, and certain Jewish customs that are found in other gospels.

TIMELINE

JESUS IS CRUCIFIED,
RISES FROM THE DEAD
AND RETURNS TO HEAVEN

33 A.D.

MARK (ALSO CALLED JOHN MARK)
ACCOMPANIES PAUL
ON MISSIONARY JOURNEY

44-47 A.D.

MARK WORKS WITH
PETER TO SHARE JESUS'
MESSAGE IN ROME

50-54 A.D.

30 A.D.

JESUS BEGINS
HIS MINISTRY

50-60 A.D.

MARK WRITES HIS ACCOUNT
OF JESUS' LIFE AND MINISTRY

HOW MARK FITS INTO GOD'S BIG STORY

- Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, God promised to send someone to rescue His people. That someone was Jesus.
- Through Jesus' life, God showed us that greatness is determined by how we serve others.
- Through Jesus' death, God made a way for all of us to have a relationship with Him.

HOW MARK FITS INTO MY STORY

- Mark shows how Jesus lived. The better we know Jesus and what He says, the better we can follow Him.
- Jesus wasn't the rescuer God's people imagined, and many didn't recognize Jesus as their answer to prayer. We, too, can miss out on what God wants for us if we're only looking for answers that fit our expectations.
- Like Jesus, we change the world by serving one person at a time and helping them connect with God.

EVENTS HAPPENED IN MODERN DAY ISRAEL

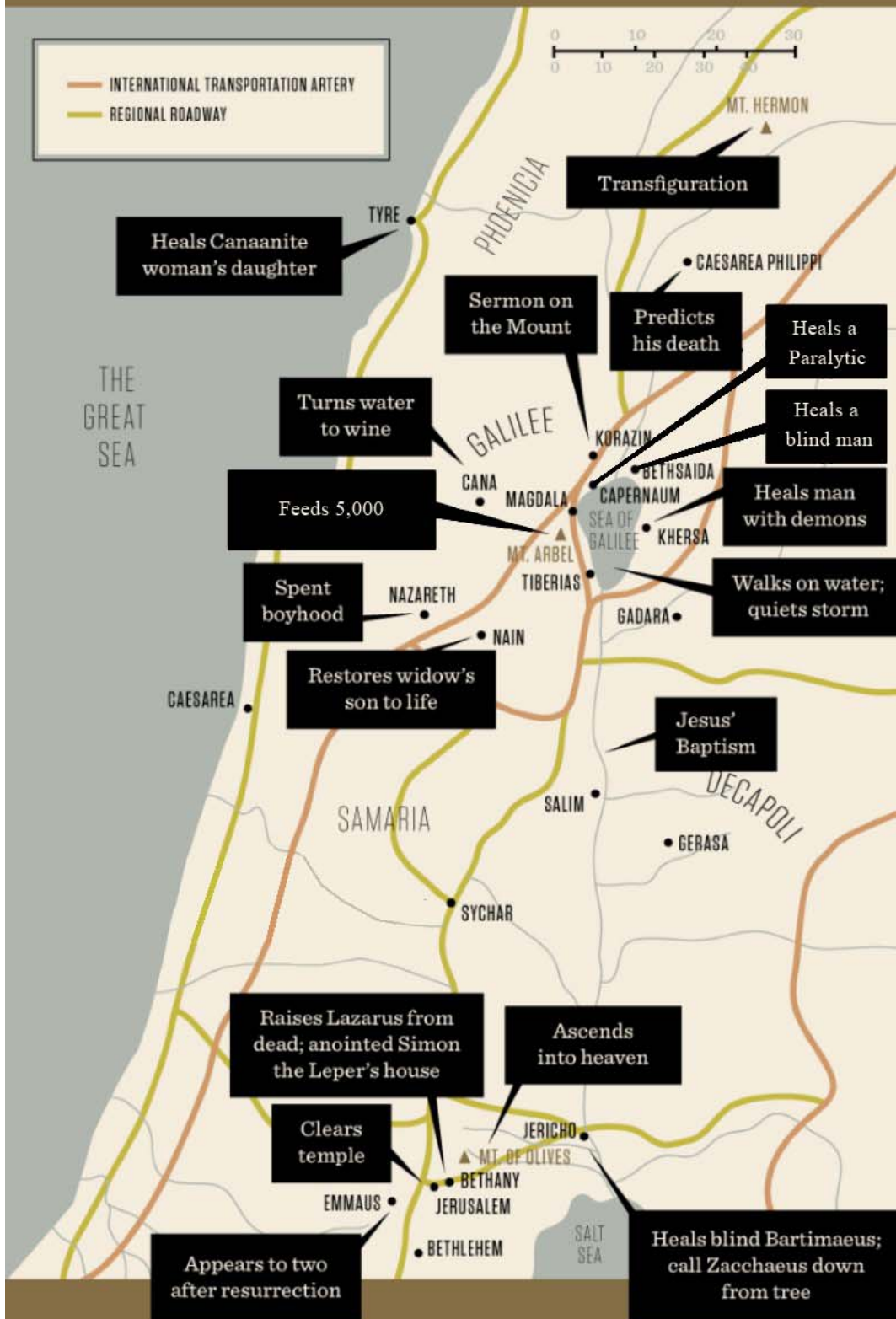
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KEY VERSE

"FOR EVEN THE SON OF MAN DID NOT COME TO BE SERVED,
BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM FOR MANY."

—MARK 10:45

Wanting Change vs. Experiencing Change

Mark 1:1-8

LeBron James, one of the NBA's top basketball players, recently returned to the Cleveland Cavaliers, a team based an hour north of his hometown. He had been playing for the Miami Heat the past four years, which never sat well with local fans. If LeBron would have stayed in Miami but told Ohio fans he missed home, his words would have been meaningless. Yet since LeBron returned, local fans rejoiced and even printed T-shirts with the word "Forgiven."

The difference between LeBron wanting to return to the Cavaliers and actually doing it is the same as the difference between wanting to repent of sin and actually doing it. In Mark 1:4, John proclaimed "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Confession is admitting our sin; repentance is turning from sin. Confession is part of repentance (**Mark 1:5**), but changed behavior makes our words genuine.

When we ask Jesus into our lives, we receive the Holy Spirit, who helps us change and repent of our sin. The Holy Spirit is who guides us to get help from a friend when we're struggling, to respond to a message, or to read the Bible. The Holy Spirit will always give us the direction and tools we need to take our next step. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can say no to temptation and turn from our sin.

Reflect:

- What have you been talking about doing that you need to take action on?
- Is there a sin you're constantly confessing but never beating? What step do you need to take today to move from wanting to change to seeing change happen?

Leaving Good Things Behind

Mark 1:1-28

When Jesus called his first disciples, Simon, Andrew, James and John, they were working, earning their livelihood as fishermen. They were all in a safe place doing good things, and they walked away without hesitation.

“‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’ At once they left their nets and followed him” (**Mark 1:17-18**).

While most of us probably wouldn't consider our lives perfect, they are filled with some good things -- loving families, fulfilling jobs, comfortable homes, relaxing vacations and rewarding volunteer roles. But what if, like these disciples, we were called to walk away from a good thing in order to witness a God thing? Would we do it?

The disciples' obedience allowed them to witness miracles. Shortly after they leave their jobs and families, Jesus leads the disciples to Capernaum where they watched Him drive an evil spirit from a possessed man. Soon news about Jesus was spreading all over Galilee. Little did the disciples know, Jesus was just getting started.

Too often we assume distractions have to be immoral, illegal or both. But if not for a willingness to leave safety, security and stability to follow Jesus, Simon, Andrew, James and John might have missed the opportunity to be part of the greatest move of God of all time.

Reflect:

- The disciples all took a step of faith in following Jesus. What next step is Jesus calling you to take?
- Has God called you to do something really big? What's holding you back? And, what steps can you take to change that?

Big Faith

Mark 2:1-12

Have you ever thought, “If God would do this one thing, I could have so much faith”? Maybe you’ve been praying for years that a family member would get saved, or maybe you’ve been praying for God to restore a relationship.

In **Mark 2**, we meet a few men whose “one thing” was seeing their paralyzed friend walk. They heard Jesus was in town and didn’t hesitate to load their friend up on a mat and take him to his only hope for healing. Just like those men, we have to be willing to take our “one thing” to Jesus, recognizing that He is the only place where healing, restoration or salvation can happen.

Sometimes getting someone to Jesus is not as easy as it sounds, and it definitely wasn’t easy for the men in **Mark 2**. Not only did they have to fight through the crowd, but they had to take their friend on the roof, dig a hole in it and then lower him at Jesus’ feet. We may have to use the same effort and energy to take our “one” to Jesus as well. That’s when our actions make the loudest statement about our faith. Our willingness to do the hard work and possibly get a little uncomfortable and messy says volumes for how much we trust that the Lord is going to show up. Just like these men’s faith led to their friend’s healing, our faith is the key to seeing God do what only He can do in our lives.

Reflect:

- What can we learn about Jesus from this passage?
- In what areas of your life do you need more faith?
- Who is the one person in your life that you want to meet Jesus? Pray for that person now. Do whatever it takes to invite them to church.

Jesus Meets Us In Our Mess

Mark 2:13-17

Jesus was known for pushing the boundaries of what people of his time would have deemed socially acceptable. He went places other religious people wouldn't go. He talked to people other religious people would never speak to. He was after relationships rather than rule following.

In **Mark 2**, Jesus had dinner with a group of tax collectors and sinners. When the religious teachers saw this, they immediately questioned Jesus' motives. They didn't understand why He would allow himself to be seen with such a motley crew. When Jesus heard their questions, He replied, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (**Mark 2:17**).

Jesus knew that those who were self-righteous, like the religious rule followers who questioned Him, didn't see their need for a Savior. But sinners, like those He ate dinner with, did. Sinners are exactly who Jesus came to save, and we all fall into that category. Jesus went to Levi's house for dinner, meeting tax collectors and sinners in their comfort zones. They didn't have to clean up for Him, follow a set of rules or change who they were to meet Jesus. The same goes for us today. Jesus doesn't ask us to be perfect before we can know Him. He is always willing to meet us in the middle of our mess.

Reflect:

- Are you allowing a "mess" in your life to keep you from knowing Jesus? What can you do today to let go of your mess and know that Jesus is ready to meet with you just as you are?
- What are you doing to reach out to people who are in the middle of a mess or hard time? How can you show Jesus to those around you who desperately need Him?

No Man Is an Island

Mark 3:7-19

Jesus was fully God, yet He did not do life alone! Jesus chose a motley crew to be His disciples. These were ordinary, working class men who were far from perfect. Judas ended up betraying Jesus and turning Him over to be executed. Peter denied Jesus publicly, Matthew was a cheater, and Thomas refused to believe Jesus rose from the dead until he touched Jesus' side. Despite that, Jesus still chose them all to follow Him.

In choosing these 12 to be His disciples Jesus models three important truths:

1. We cannot do life alone. Jesus did not enter public ministry until He had His "people" lined up. The disciples were closest to Jesus. They traveled with him, provided direction to the crowds, and served as bodyguards and friends. We cannot do what God calls us to without people around us.
2. People will let us down. Jesus knew the disciples would betray Him before selecting them. Jesus modeled forgiveness in the way He loved the disciples. When we open our lives to others we run the risk of being hurt, but we can take comfort in the example of Jesus offering forgiveness.
3. God can use anyone to spread the Gospel. In **Matthew 10**, Jesus gives the disciples the authority to act as His ambassadors. They healed the sick and preached the Gospel. The Holy Spirit gave the disciples direction and the words to speak. That same gift is available to all Christians. God equips those He calls.

Whenever you're tempted to think you can't make a difference, to believe you don't have the skills to do what God's called you to, or to give into the temptation to quit, remember this: No one is beyond God's ability to use.

Reflect:

- Are you trying to do life alone? Who do you lean on when times are tough and celebrate with, when times are good? Maybe your next step is to join a Life Group or get involved in the church.
- Relationships are messy, but Jesus showed us they were still worth pursuing. Is there someone you need to forgive, or someone you need ask forgiveness from?
- Who do you know that needs to hear the Gospel? What can you do this week to help those around you learn who Jesus is?

3 Reasons We Fear

Mark 4:35-41

It's easy to believe Jesus is Lord when things are going great. But what about when everything is falling apart?

In Mark 4, the disciples found themselves in the middle of a storm while Jesus was asleep on a cushion. Their reaction teaches us three things about fear:

1. Fear can make us believe Jesus doesn't care about us.
2. Fear is a lack of faith in Him.
3. Fear is a lack of knowledge of His power.

When the disciples woke Jesus up they asked, "Don't you care if we drown?" Jesus called their fear a lack of faith. This lack of faith stemmed from not recognizing just how powerful Jesus is. After Jesus calmed the storm, they stood in awe, saying "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!" (**Mark 4:41**).

Jesus is not only the Lord of our day-to-day lives, but the Lord of all creation. When we lose sight of how powerful Jesus is, we'll lack the faith to believe He is in control, and we'll respond to life's circumstances based on fear instead of fact.

We combat fear by choosing to believe that Jesus is who He is and He has conquered the world. When the person with authority over the wind and the waves is on our side, we have nothing to fear.

Reflect:

- What are you afraid of? How has that fear affect the way you live your life?
- What's one area of your life where you're saying "Jesus is Lord" but you're actions aren't showing it?
- Are you in a storm? What would it look like for you trust God to guide you through this season?

What Can Destroy You?

Mark 4:18-20

In **Mark 4**, Jesus spoke about the obstacles that a farmer faces when planting his crop. Occasionally, the seed will start growing and appear to be healthy, but then weeds grow up alongside the seed and kill the harvest.

There was nothing wrong with the seed the farmer planted. It was healthy, sturdy and strong, but it still encountered a problem. Like the seed, we also encounter weeds that make our lives unfruitful: worry, greed and envy. Jesus warned the crowd that some will hear His message and believe, but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things will come in and choke the message from them (**Mark 4:19**).

When these three areas affect our walk with God and our faith in Him, they will choke out God's words making it unfruitful in our lives. Becoming preoccupied with worry, wealth and what others have causes us to miss the true meaning of life. Wealth is a tool to meet needs and help others. When we use it for this purpose, we will see a great harvest of miracles in our lives.

Think About:

1. Where do you go for financial advice? What role does the Bible play in your financial decisions?
2. Do you remember the worst financial decision you ever made? What influenced that decision?
3. How can you protect yourself against weeds such as worry, greed and envy?

Your Story Is Priceless

Mark 4:21-34

Everyone loves a good story.

Gripping stories can launch us to the edge of our seat championing for the underdog to win the big game. Then, bring us to tears when injustice befalls the innocent. And then sigh with content when everything turns out alright in the end.

Jesus told 38 parables, or stories, during His three-year ministry.

He used storytelling to relate to us and communicate three facts about Himself:

1. Jesus knows what you're going through. In parables, Jesus used commonly known places and practical real life examples to teach us about Him and how to have a relationship with God.
2. Jesus loves you. Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn us, but to save us (**John 3:17**). He didn't push people away, but spoke truthfully by using stories, which would more often result in conviction instead condemnation.
3. Jesus has a purpose for your story. In **Mark 4:21-34**, Jesus reminds us of the power He has given us in our personal story. If we don't share the story of how we met Jesus and how He's changed our lives, we limit the purposeful impact Jesus wants to make through us.

What we think is boring about our stories can be the thing people relate to and the thing Jesus uses to draw them to Himself. Our story of how we met Jesus is our greatest tool to reach those far from Jesus and teach them to follow Him step by step! Following Jesus is not a religion; it's a relationship.

When we tell others about Jesus and how he has changed our lives, we are sharing more than words — we're sharing the most valuable gift, the Gospel!

Reflect:

- What is your story of how you met Jesus?
- How could Jesus use your story to help others know Him?
- Who is the one person you could share your story with today?

Have You Heard

Mark 5:1-20

Sometimes life leaves us in anguish — head down, beaten and without hope. The dreams of becoming something or someone great seem so distant. You wanted to accomplish so much and had every intention of making a difference, but instead you were left broken and trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of chaos.

In desperation, we cling to worldly things that give us hope of a new beginning. Jobs, material objects such as a house or car, relationships, even sometimes moving halfway across the world — they all fill the void briefly and then fail to sustain our desire to break from our past.

In Mark 5, we meet a man scorned by the people around him, doomed to live the rest of his days in bitter seclusion. Then, he met Jesus and all of that changed. How did the once wrecked man respond to Jesus' offer of a new beginning? "He went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed" (**Mark 5:20**).

When we meet Jesus, not only does He change our future, He changes our present. He fills us with love for Him and for the church. Like the demon-possessed man, we are moved by a desire to see the same change and restoration for others. So we bring them to the only place and to the only One who can completely restore our fragile potential.

Reflect:

- How has your life changed since you started following Jesus?
- Who was most influential in pointing you to Jesus? Maybe it was the person who invited you to church for the first time or challenged you to consider Christianity. How did God use that relationship to change your direction?
- Who do you know who needs a relationship with Jesus? How can you get them to a place where they can hear about Jesus?

My Way Or the Highway

Mark 7:1-23

Two toddlers are playing when one yanks a toy away shouting, "Mine!"

We teach kids to learn to share and work together to be successful in life, but how often do we follow our own advice? Adults don't yank toys from each other, but we still operate like "Mine!" is the most important word. We fight over "more mature" things like who makes the rules. Rule-makers have power, control access and judge the lives of others.

In Jesus' day, some of the most troubling rule-makers were the Pharisees, religious people who decided their ways were right and all other ways were wrong. They praised themselves and criticized everybody else. They had no clue about what God really wanted for, or from, His people. For the Pharisees, when it came to doing life, it was "my way or the highway." Jesus had little patience with their nonsense, saying to them in **Mark 7:9**, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!"

Pharisees still exist today. The modern equivalent are the church-going-self-praising Christians who expect non-Christians to act like Christians and believe all Christians should look and act like them. When rule-keeping becomes the basis for our faith, we're missing the point. Living well is not about following rules, but about living in relationship with Jesus and loving others the way He would.

Reflect:

- Take some time to think about why you do or don't do certain things. Is your motivation based on following the rules or following a person?
- What's one way you see modern-day Christians falling into the same trap as the Pharisees of Jesus' day?
- In **Mark 7:23**, Jesus says what's inside us will determine what comes out of us. What are you allowing to shape your heart? Does it need to change?

No Skipping

Mark 8:22-26

The account of Jesus healing a blind man in Mark 8 can seem confusing at first. People of Bethsaida “brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him” (**Mark 8:22**). This is a very understandable beginning to the story, but the next three verses are perplexing.

Jesus led the blind man by the hand outside the village. Jesus spit on His hands and placed them on the man's sightless eyes. Then Jesus asked the blind man, “Do you see anything?”

But why? Jesus could certainly heal the man in the village, and knew whether or not the man could see anything.

Without those middle verses, the story would go something like this: “Blind man touched by Jesus. Blind man’s sight is restored.” Without question, Jesus could have made that the facts of the encounter. But without **Mark 8:23-24**, this miracle would not have revealed important elements of our walk with Christ.

Despite God’s ability to do anything, His plan can include timing or steps necessary solely for us. In **Mark 8:23-24**, the blind man learns to follow Jesus wherever He leads. The blind man also learns to answer Jesus with honest recognition of his personal condition. And finally, he learns that Jesus heals on His timetable, not on ours.

Reflect:

- How seriously do you take all of Jesus’ commands?
- When you know the heart of Jesus and His nature, why is it easier to obey Him?

Get In the Game

Mark 9:30-41

When a soccer player gets a red card, it affects the whole team. A red card puts the offending player out of the game, which means the team must now play a man down — 10 versus 11. With 10 players, the team is still in the game, but the style of play changes. Instead of charging toward the goal, the team plays cautiously, defensively.

Just as it's not ideal playing 10 versus 11 in soccer, it's not God's plan for His church to be a man down. We are not fulfilling our purpose in Christ when we're sitting on the sidelines instead of loving and serving those around us. Jesus wants us to use the gifts and talents we've been given to share His good news with the world.

Jesus gave His life to His followers. He taught thousands, healed multitudes and held children in his arms. Through His life and His words, Jesus showed that everyone has an opportunity to reach out to others, serve them and share the hope we find in Him. Just like Jesus put others before Himself, He challenges us to do the same saying, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and servant of all" (**Mark 9:35**).

You are too valuable to sit on the sidelines. You can affect the lives of those around you in a way that no one else can. When we're all on the field impacting others for Christ, the good news of salvation goes farther and changes more lives than we ever thought possible.

Reflect:

- Think about the people you encounter every day. What's one way you can meet someone's needs and serve them today?
- What are you good at? What do you enjoy doing? How might God want to use those skills and talents in the church?

Clinging To God the Father

Mark 10:1-16

Have you ever noticed how a little child clings to a parent? With an open heart and open arms, he reaches out, trusting that he will be nurtured and protected in his parent's loving embrace. When fear and uncertainty overcome him, the child turns to his parent for answers and comfort.

As children, we're reliant on our parents for everything. But somewhere along the way, we let go of our parents and believe we can do everything ourselves. We seek independence and recognition. We insist on proving we are worthy of respect, admiration, and perhaps even worship.

Too often, the same pattern is true of our relationship with our Heavenly Father. We start out relying on Him for everything. But the larger our egos become, the less we believe we need a Savior. Another way for thinking about the word 'ego' is as an acronym for "Edging God Out."

In **Mark 10:13-16**, Jesus encourages us to become like children, because "the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." When we open our hearts and humble ourselves, we understand that we can't get into heaven by our own works. Instead, we must reach out to our Heavenly Father with a childlike trust, believing that He saves us because we can't save ourselves. Then, like a newborn baby, we begin to grow and thrive in God's love and protection.

Reflect:

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how self reliant would you say you are? Is your independence edging God out of your life?
- Jesus tells us that "anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" (**Mark 9:35**). Is your next step serving? Or joining a small group?
- Have you put your trust and belief in Jesus yet? If not, what is preventing you from doing so? Do you need to speak or pray with someone about it?

Tired of Not Getting Your Way?

Mark 11:1-33

“...whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

When we read a verse like **Mark 11:24** it sounds like all we have to do is ask God for anything and we can have it. But that's not entirely true. The truth is prayer isn't about taking our Christmas list to God and waiting for Him to deliver our presents. Prayer is about standing humbly before God and receiving whatever good gift He chooses to give us.

In **Matthew 6:33**, Matthew, one of Jesus' followers, writes, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” As we spend time with God, our thoughts and desires become more like His. When that happens, we can ask God for anything and He'll give it to us. Why? Because we will have been transformed through relational intimacy with Him to the point that we want what He wants for us.

That's the point of the Christian life. And it's the point of prayer. Prayer isn't about getting what we ask for. It's about getting more of God. Because it's only through God's love that we discover the soul satisfying peace and joy we really want.

Reflect:

- If you were to ask God for anything, what would it be?
- What do the things you're asking God for say about your priorities in life? Are your priorities in line with God's priorities?
- What is one way you can spend more time with God this week?

What's Your Brand?

Mark 12:1-7

The most expensive part of every pair of jeans isn't the material but the label. When we buy a brand, we're paying for more than the fit or the quality, we're paying for the status that comes with brand identification. Think about it, what do you think when you hear the following brands?

- Levi Strauss
- Gap
- Wrangler

In **Mark 12**, Jesus reveals that the most important brand we associate with is not on our clothes, accessories or cars. In fact, it's not one we put on at all.

Holding up a coin bearing the image of the Roman Emperor, Jesus said, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (**Mark 12:17**). The coin was branded with Caesar's likeness. But have you ever wondered what's branded in God's likeness?

We are. We were made in God's image. Through faith we belong to God, and His brand is on us.

Giving God what is already His means giving Him all of ourselves. Instead of finding our identity in the clothes we wear, the jobs we hold or the awards we collect, we find our identity in being followers of Jesus and God's beloved children. That label is more meaningful and powerful than any corporate logo.

Reflect:

- What are two to three phrases you regularly use to describe yourself (either in person or on social media)? What do those things say about where do you find your sense of identity or purpose?
- Is there any part of your life where you're not comfortable giving God control? What is it? What's holding you back?
- What does your life say about God's brand? Is there anything in your life that needs to change to better reflect who God is and what He's all about?

It's Ok To Want To Be Blessed

Mark 12:35-44

In **Mark 12**, Jesus sat down to watch people bring gifts to God. Those who were wealthy and gave a lot of money didn't impress Jesus. But when a destitute widow gave "two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents," Jesus said this woman put everything into the offering plate (**Mark 12:43-44**).

What do you think motivated the widow's gift? It would not buy much for the church. She must have expected God just to see it and bless it. She must have had no goal other than a heavenly one, since she put all her money into the offering plate.

When we give everything to God in some area of our lives, we catch His eye, and He rewards us. It is not wrong to desire this blessing. **Hebrews 11:6** says, "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe...that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."

God wants everything — especially those areas of our lives where we are most desperate, such as in our time, money, relationships or health. When we surrender what is precious to us, God gets the glory. We can trust He will do amazing things with what we give to Him. Desiring God's blessing isn't selfish; it's a declaration that we believe He is a great God!

Reflect:

- God is a good God who wants good things for His children. Do you believe this? Do you believe God will reward those who earnestly seek Him?
- What is one area where you want God to move your life? What is one way you can surrender this area more completely to Him this week?
- Do you trust God enough to surrender what He asks, knowing He will reward you?

How To Survive the End Of the World

Mark 13

If you look at what we watch and watch we read, our culture is obsessed with the end of the world. Some have a theory as to how it will happen — zombie apocalypse, alien invasion, Jesus comes back. Others have a plan for exactly when and where they think it will all go down.

In **Mark 13**, Jesus gives us a vivid description of the signs of the end of the world as we know it. He includes important details, warnings and instructions for those who love and obey Him. You might already have a bunker set up, but what does Jesus say we'll need to survive?

1. Peace - Jesus tells us not to be alarmed at the rise of natural disasters and evil in this world (**Mark 13:7-8**). In the midst of the chaos, we can walk in His peace.
2. The Holy Spirit - When we don't know what to say or how to explain what's happening around us, we can trust the Holy Spirit to be our guide (**Mark 13:10**).
3. Perseverance - Jesus tells us to be constantly on our guard as we share the Gospel. People will hate us for what we believe, but "he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (**Mark 13:13**).
4. The Bible - Jesus warns us to be on our guard against false teachings and teachers. As we study and seek God in His word, we will be able to distinguish truth from lies (**Mark 13:31**).

Jesus warns us about the future, not to scare us or to distract us, but so we will know how to live in the present. Desire to grow closer to Jesus day by day, and our actions and attitudes will be a sign to this world that Jesus is alive and that His return is near.

Reflect:

- Does the imminent approach of the end of the world make you uneasy or fearful? Why or why not?
- Who is Jesus to you and how is that affecting how you live your life?
- How does listening to the Holy Spirit and reading the Bible help us live our lives now and not just in the end times?

Why We Take Communion

Mark 14:12-26

What makes a gift good or memorable? It definitely has to be thought through. It more than likely came at a high cost, either financially or in time spent. It has to meet a specific need or desire to have the intended impact. Every time we think about that gift, it brings back the joy we felt and reminds us of the sacrifice the giver made for us.

No gift can out measure the weight, importance and sacrifice of Jesus' death on the cross. When we celebrate communion, or the Lord's Supper, we remember the gift of salvation Jesus gave each one of us.

In **Mark 14:24**, Jesus explains that this meal was about to mark the start of a new covenant between God and His people. Before Jesus' death, generations of Jews sacrificed animals at the temple to pay for their sin. Jesus' sacrifice paid the penalty for sin once and for all, and that's why we celebrate communion today. In Luke's version of this story, Jesus tells the disciples, "do this in remembrance of me" (**Luke 22:19**).

When we in faith take communion, it reminds us of the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf. But even more than that, in a supernatural way, Jesus is truly present, giving His body and blood with the bread and wine to us in communion so that our faith can be strengthened knowing He has forgiven us.

Communion is a time when we collectively reflect on the covenant that binds us together. It's also a time to individually reflect on the price Jesus paid for us to be saved from our sin and be in fellowship with Him because He continually forgives us from our sins.

Reflect:

- What are two ways that communion is a great reminder of the sacrifice Jesus made on your behalf?
- What's one way you can show gratitude for the gift of salvation?

What Drives Denial?

Mark 14:66-72

At some point, we've all been in a state of denial. We try doing things we did 10 or 20 years ago because we're in denial about our aging bodies. We live in denial about calories and tell ourselves one extra scoop of ice cream won't stop us from losing a few extra pounds.

Whether we're ignoring the truth about calories or the state of a relationship, denial is often driven by fear — fear of missing out, fear of getting older, fear of what other people will think.

Jesus knew the time would come when Peter would deny knowing him. And even though Jesus warned Peter that this would happen, Peter still found himself in a courtyard swearing he did not know Jesus (**Mark 14:54**).

Peter saw Jesus perform miracles and loved Him deeply. Peter never fathomed he would deny knowing Jesus, but fear drives us to do things we never thought we would do.

Peter feared the suffering and ridicule that might come with being associated with Jesus. If we're honest with ourselves, we often do the same thing. We become afraid of what others may think or say about us, so we keep quiet when friends make fun of Christians. We fear our association with Jesus might cost us a promotion at work, so we stay silent about our faith in the office.

Just like the rooster's crow reminded Peter of a time when he was closer to Jesus, Jesus calls us back as well. His invitation may come through promises in the Bible, a prayer answered or a phone call from a friend. Jesus always welcomes us back, no matter how far away from Him we walk.

Reflect:

- Are you denying knowing Jesus in any area of your life? What's one fear that might be driving your denial?
- What kind of support system do you have in place to help you fight through those fears?

Say Yes To Saying No

Mark 15:1-15

Mark 15 opens with the high priests bringing Jesus to Pilate. The priests wanted Jesus dead and refused to stop until He hung on a cross. Pilate knew the accusations against Jesus were false, and he was amazed Jesus let the priests throw Him under the bus for treason and for crimes He hadn't committed.

"Crucify Him!" the crowd screamed when Pilate offered to let Jesus go free.

"Crucify Him!" the crowd roared as Pilate again encouraged them to let Jesus go. As the crowd shouted, Pilate caved and condemned Jesus to death.

We all know how it feels to be caught in the middle. Your spouse wants to take a cruise, but your family is giving you guilt trips about coming home. Your supervisor tells you to set up the display one way, but the memo from your district manager shows the display another way. The stress we feel in those moments comes from a desire to please everyone around us.

When we make the desire to please others more important than doing what's right, it wreaks havoc in our lives. When we cave to people-pleasing, we sacrifice the ability to influence people. Pilate chose the crowd's opinion over what He knew was right and lost the chance to take a stand.

Few of us know what it's like to be a judge, but we do know what it's like to let friends, co-workers and teammates dictate what we think, say or do. Too often, we let what others think determine the careers we choose, the friends we make or the relationships we break.

It's time to stop trying to please others, and live for the One who is already pleased with us. God loves you fully and completely. What kind of change could we make if we started loving others the same way?

Reflect:

- Do you feel the need to please others in your life? Why or why not?
- How can you shift your focus from others' opinions to God's plan for your life?
- What's one way you've seen the desire to please others wreak havoc in your life?

You Are Not Alone

Mark 15:16-41

Have you ever felt abandoned by God?

Perhaps you didn't see the suffering coming, but in a moment your world turned upside down and you felt completely alone.

If you've ever felt this way, you are not the only one. As He suffered on the cross, Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (**Mark 15:34**). Jesus, the Savior of the world, was abandoned by almost everyone who claimed to love Him, and He was abandoned by His Father as well.

Jesus didn't have to suffer as He did. He could've spared His own life, but He didn't. Jesus chose to endure suffering like most of us could never even imagine. Why would He do that?

Jesus was fully God and fully man; He knew that with humanity comes suffering. Jesus endured the worst kind of suffering humans can endure because He is not a distant, far-off god. He is "Immanuel," God with us.

When you face trials and suffering, when you feel like God has abandoned you, remember the price that Jesus paid for you. Whatever you may be going through, no matter how alone you feel, you are not abandoned. Jesus is with you, and He wants to wrap His arms around you and offer you comfort and peace. Call out to Him. Offer Him your suffering, and let Him turn it into rejoicing.

Reflect:

- Is there any area of your life where you feel abandoned? Describe it to Jesus in prayer.
- Is a problem or decision weighing you down? What do you need to do to surrender that part of your life to Jesus and allow Him to heal it?
- Have you ever opened up to someone about the problems on your mind? Why or why not?

Galatians 6:2 encourages us to carry each other's burdens. Consider sharing how you feel with a trustworthy, Christian friend, a Group member, or a care volunteer. Not sure who to talk to? Reach out to a Stephen Minister [here](#).

The Most Powerful Truth

Mark 16:1-8

What if the resurrection never occurred? What if Mary and Mary Magdalene had walked up to the tomb and didn't find the stone rolled away?

Without the resurrection, the disciples never start the church or die in Jesus' name. Without the resurrection, Jesus was just another man. Without the resurrection, there would be no Christianity. The resurrection changed the world.

More personally, Jesus' death and resurrection accomplished three things for every Christian:

- Forgiveness — We have all sinned. Jesus died on the cross and took the punishment that we deserve. He conquered death to forgive us for our sins.
- Focus — The disciples went from scared men in hiding to men who boldly professed their faith in Jesus and started the Church! The resurrection gave them and should give us a focus in our lives.
- Future — Jesus proved that death is not the end! The resurrection gives us hope and a future that is beyond this world.

The resurrection is the most powerful truth, and it's the basis for our faith.

Reflect:

- When's the last time you thanked Jesus for your salvation?
- How is your future different because Jesus is alive?
- Think about your life. Where is your focus? Does it need to change?