

mark

C O M E F O L L O W M E

L I F E G R O U P
M A T E R I A L

Bracken Ridge
BAPTIST CHURCH



T H E G O S P E L O F

M A R K

The Gospel of Mark chronicles Jesus's journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. Along the way, the Messiah gathers a ragged band of disciples. As crowds grow and dwindle on the road to Jerusalem, only a few stick by the Suffering Savior on the road of discipleship.

In this 11-part series on the Gospel of Mark, author and speaker Francis Chan invites us to walk with him along the ancient ways of the Master. Tracing the steps of Jesus and the Twelve through Israel, Francis explores the major themes of the Gospel of Mark, and asks: Are we willing to take this journey to embrace discipleship?

Accessing The Material

On the following pages you will find all of the information needed to go through the Mark Life Group Material. There are corresponding videos that can be accessed through our "RightNow Media" account with the church. If you don't have an account, go to rightnowmedia.org/Account/Invite/BrackenRidgeBaptistChurch. After creating an account search "The Gospel Of Mark" to access the 11 weeks.

rightnow MEDIA

If you are unable for some reason to access the material through these different means, please simply email office@brbc.org.au or call 07 3261 5045.

THE G O S P E L O F

MARK

THE GOSPEL OF
MARK
—
FRANCIS CHAN

11
WEEKS

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Along with the Life Group Material, there is also a 12 week daily devotion that you can follow along with that corresponds with the Life Group Material. To access this material simply scan the QR code below or search "Mark Devotional" in Rightnow Media.



SCAN HERE

SESSION 1: MARK 1:1–13

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: Jesus is unlike any other savior, and he calls us to make him our first priority.

Head Change: To understand that Jesus Christ is holy, unlike any other.

Heart Change: To feel fascinated with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Life Change: To actively make Jesus Christ the priority of our lives.

OPEN

Jesus is a well-known figure, even to non-believers. But people have widely varying opinions about him. **How would you describe him? What makes Jesus unique?**

Whether you've had a relationship with Jesus for a long time, are a new follower of his, or are still wondering about who Jesus is, one goal of this study is that everyone would walk away with a greater appreciation of who Jesus is and how a relationship with him will dramatically alter your life.

READ

Read Mark 1:1–13.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Francis Chan's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how Francis answers the following questions:

In what ways is the good news that John the Baptist was preaching different from the usual way we use the phrase "good news"?

What sort of attitude should we have toward Jesus?

Show Session 1: Mark 1:1–13 (6 minutes)

DISCUSS

Mark opens by setting the stage for Jesus. The word he uses is "gospel." Most of us have heard the term a thousand times. But Mark here means he's about to tell the story of a victor. And in these first few verses, we get the origin story for this man who will save the world.

[Note: For background on John Mark, the author of this Gospel, see the Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of this session.]

Francis Chan started off the video by wading into the waters of the Jordan River and remembering the baptism of Jesus. John the Baptist had been baptizing people who were repenting of their sin, telling them about the one who was to come. John understood exactly who Jesus was. He went so far as to tell the people he was not worthy to untie his sandals (1:7). **Why do you think John felt unworthy to untie Jesus's sandals? What does that say about John?**

Describe your attitude toward your sin. Does it evoke as strong a reaction as John's? Why or why not?

Francis asked us if we truly grasped the immensity of the Incarnation. He tried to imagine what it must have felt like for John the Baptist to stand in front of his Creator. Think about your own Christian life. **In what ways has Jesus become too familiar? Do you find yourself taking him for granted? How?**

Read Mark 1:9–11.

In these three sentences, Mark mentions the three persons of the Trinity in action together. **What is each one doing? How are they working in unison?**

Francis also emphasized the uniqueness of the gospel, the good news from God on a completely different level from what we often describe as good. **In what way did he describe the good news?**

[Note: For further study on euangelion, see the Go Deeper Section 2 at the end of the session.]

Reading this opening passage, what do you expect from Jesus? What kinds of things do you anticipate from him as Mark's Gospel goes forward?

Read Mark 1:12–13.

After being baptized, Jesus departed from John. The text says that "the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness." So he went, and there he experienced forty days of hunger and temptation. Mark doesn't give a lot of details. **What do you think Mark wanted to communicate with this short summary of Jesus's experience in the wilderness?** (Jesus's temptation helped prepare him for the work God had for him to do.)

Looking back at your life, do you see evidence of God using challenging times to prepare you for something he had for you to do in the future? If so, share that with the group.

[Note: For further study on ekballo, see the Go Deeper Section 3 at the end of this session.]

Mark opens his gospel with a dramatic picture that depicts Jesus as the Son of God. C. S. Lewis once famously wrote that we must not fall into the trap of merely considering Jesus to be a good moral teacher:

Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. (*Mere Christianity*, p. 56)

Who is Jesus to you? Have you decided to trust that he is indeed the Son of God? If not, what is holding you back?

If you do believe Jesus is God, what kind of savior has he been in your life? How are you living daily with that reality?

LAST WORD

The Gospel of Mark examines Jesus's claim to be the Son of God. As we work through this study, we will see much more evidence to bolster Jesus's claim. Once Mark establishes Jesus as the Son of God, he then asks us how we plan to respond to that truth. **Will you keep your ears open and willing to hear? And if you already believe, what will you do with his teachings?**

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Background

When it comes to studying any book of the Bible, it's good to start with some background. Let's take a brief look at the historical context and purpose behind the Gospel of Mark.

Author

Of the four gospels, Mark is easily the shortest. It's also anonymous. The gospel itself does not specifically name "Mark" as its author, but the bulk of church history since the second century has affirmed it as so. Most likely, the same John Mark who traveled with Paul during his missionary journeys wrote this gospel.

For more information about John Mark, see Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 14:51–52; 15:37–39; Col. 4:10; Phlm. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:13.

Purpose

Writing from Rome in the first century, Mark penned his gospel following two major themes: First, a thorough look at Jesus and, second, the true nature of discipleship. Since it was written to a largely Gentile (non-Jewish) audience, Mark went out of his way to explain Jewish customs and described Jesus as both the Jewish Messiah ("Son of David") and Savior of the Gentiles. Even more, he emphasized the suffering and death of Jesus as the means by which we enter into a right relationship with God by faith. And the path of Jesus is the path we follow in true discipleship.

Mark wrote to Gentiles. John the Baptist spoke to Jews. Both wanted people to understand that Jesus was the most important person anyone could ever meet.

How does your faith background influence the way you see Jesus? Are you aware of potential blind spots, beliefs, or practices that you may have missed out on growing up in a certain tradition? How have you grown to know Jesus more holistically?

2. Peek at the Greek: euangelion

Despite being the shortest of the four gospels, Mark uses the term *euangelion* ("gospel") more than all of the others combined. It appears seven times (1:1, 14, 15, 8:35, 10:29, 13:10, 14:9) compared to Matthew's four. Neither Luke nor John uses the word in their accounts. Clearly, Mark intends to emphasize the "gospel" of Jesus to his readers. Rather than being simply a recycled philosophy or set of doctrines, this good news was unique—revolutionary even—and sourced in the Son of God made flesh. Mark's emphasis to his readers is true for us today—the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, provides the hope we long for.

Can you communicate the gospel message clearly? Write out the basic truths one must know and believe as a follower of Christ.

3. Peek at the Greek: *ekballo*

In verse 12, Mark says that the Spirit “drove” Jesus into the wilderness. He uses the term *ekballo*, which means, “force to leave.” The word appears fifteen other times throughout Mark’s gospel, most often in cases of exorcism where a demon is expelled. However, the idea here is not that Jesus was forced into the wilderness against his will, but rather he went as a result of divine mandate, as with the other uses of the term in Mark. In other words, Jesus went in obedience to the Father.

Way back in Genesis, in the beginning of the Bible, God makes a man and a woman and asks them to obey him. The Creator-God promises them everything: life, happiness, power, friendship, and rulership over all the earth. They just have to trust and obey. But they didn’t.

Re-read Mark 1:11–13. Then, if you don’t remember the story of Adam and Eve’s failure, read Genesis 3:1–15 too.

What mandates from God were ignored or disobeyed in the Genesis passage? What resulted from their rebellious behavior?

Jesus obeyed the directive of his Father out of love and trust. Too often we fail to obey God due to our selfishness and fear. We can’t seem to truly believe that his way is the best way, that he will strengthen us for the task he’s set before us. So we refuse his direction and end up losing out on the blessing he had planned for us.

Take time to reflect on your ability to discern God’s leading. Consider why you may be choosing to delay obeying.

Spend a couple of minutes in prayer, asking God to teach you more about Jesus as the Son of God through studying the Gospel of Mark.

SESSION 2: MARK 1:14–45

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: As disciples who follow Jesus Christ, we are called to surrender every aspect of our lives completely to him.

Head Change: To understand that true discipleship requires a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Heart Change: To feel motivated toward obedience by his love, not our guilt.

Life Change: To surrender every aspect of our lives to the Holy Spirit's transforming work.

OPEN

When have you ever felt God calling you to something drastically new? Perhaps a job, a move, a relationship shift. How did you react?

This session looks at the rest of Mark chapter 1, where Jesus begins his miraculous healing ministry. Francis Chan will continue his teaching through what these verses mean, and how followers of Jesus can apply them today.

READ

Read Mark 1:14–45.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Francis's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions:

What does Jesus focus on as he begins his preaching ministry?

What was unique about Jesus's invitation to the disciples to follow him?

How did the city respond to Jesus's miraculous healings? How should we?

Show Session 2: Mark 1:14–45 (10 minutes)

DISCUSS

In the last session, Francis showed us how the first thirteen verses give a pretty profound picture of Jesus's right to call people to follow him. And that's what Francis is excited about in this session—not only does Jesus have the right to call us, he *does* call us.

How did you feel after watching this session?

Read Mark 1:14–20.

Mark doesn't leave us wondering about the uniqueness of this Jesus. He makes sure we realize that this is *the* biggest moment in history. And he does it with one word: *kairos*, or "time" (in Mark 1:15). The word signifies an important, momentous moment rather than a specific time of day.

[Note: For further study on Mark's use of kairos, see Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of the session.]

Think back over your life. All of us have life-changing moments in our personal histories. Maybe our view of the world changed when we realized there was no recess in middle school. Or maybe life transformed when we were in our first car accident.

Describe a moment when life for you completely changed—where you knew the world was going to be different and there was no going back. How did you feel? Were you excited, afraid, nervous?

Right at the start of Jesus's ministry, he begins to gather his disciples. Blue-collar fishermen weren't ideal choices for a rabbi's students. **How did the disciples react to Jesus's invitation to follow him?**

Put yourself in their shoes for a moment. How do you think you would have responded if you had been in the fishing boat with Peter?

If we live comfortable lives, it's easy to see Jesus's call as an inconvenience. We have more to lose—more to give up—if we're going to follow him. **What do you stand to lose by following Jesus the way the disciples did? What do you stand to gain by following Jesus?**

In the first twenty verses, we've seen Jesus declare his purpose: to announce the kingdom of God and call people into it. Beginning in Mark 1:21, Jesus begins to demonstrate his purpose through miraculous works.

[Note: For further study on the concept of the kingdom of God, see Go Deeper Section 2 at the end of the session.]

Read Mark 1:21–34.

Throughout the video, Francis emphasized the authority of Jesus as a driving factor for discipleship. **Whom does Jesus use that authority to help?**

These verses give us the first glimpses of Jesus's power on display. He does not just *claim* to have authority—he proves it. **What were the people saying about his teaching (1:22)?**

What authority does he show with Peter's mother-in-law (1:29–31)? In what way was his encounter with her counter-cultural? (In the patriarchal society of that time, women were often marginalized. But all throughout Jesus's ministry he places great importance on women.)

Describe the kind of authority he demonstrates in 1:32–34. What does this tell us about the extent and nature of his power?

Because those oppressed by demons were not simply dealing with psychological disorders, Jesus casting out demons illustrates in a very practical way the kingdom of God replacing that of Satan in the world.

In this passage, what do all three of the people Jesus healed have in common? In what ways did his care for women, lepers, and a demon-possessed man demonstrate his new kingdom come to earth?

Mark's point with this presentation of Jesus's authority is that he has the right to extend the kingdom to whomever he chooses. And that includes the sick, marginalized, and hurting.

So what does this mean for us? How do we live differently in light of Jesus's authority?

Think of one person who grates on you—the last person in the world you'd want Jesus to offer the kingdom to. Why do you feel that way? What would have to change in your attitude in order to treat that person the way Jesus demonstrates in our passage this week?

Re-read Mark 1:35–45.

In the midst of healing many, Jesus gets up early and goes out to pray while it's still dark. **Why is this important? What implications does Jesus's actions have for us?**

What do the disciples say when they find Jesus?

How does Jesus respond? Are you surprised by his response? Why or why not?

[Note: For further study on the disciples' search for Jesus, see Go Deeper Section 3 at the end of the session.]

In the video session, Francis concluded by saying he hopes that when we encounter Jesus, our response will be, "I'll do anything to follow this man."

Two thousand years after calling his first disciples, Jesus still calls us to follow him. **How are you responding to him now? In what ways does your life, your priorities, your attitudes reflect his call on your life?**

LAST WORD

Mark wants us to see the full implications of Jesus, the Son of God, come to earth. The kingdom of God has begun in the hearts of those who choose to say *yes* to him. Followers of Jesus are world-changers but in an upside-down way—just like the one they follow. Jesus displayed his authority in ways that served the undesirable, the lowly, the outcast. He healed, he restored, he cleansed—all of the miracles we see in this opening scene of his ministry are directed to those outside the establishment. God shows no favoritism, and neither should we.

If we truly want to follow Jesus, we will love those he loves and serve those he was willing to serve. A healthy church is pursuing justice, lifting up the poor, coming alongside the hurting. Examine what you are doing personally to demonstrate the care of Jesus to those in need.

Decide what practical steps you will take to love someone outside of your usual circle. **Is there a way your group could serve those in need together?**

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Peek at the Greek: kairos

In Mark 1:15, Jesus says, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." The term he uses for "time" is *kairos*, which makes his audience think of a divinely appointed moment. For instance, the Greek translators of the Old Testament used *kairos* describe the birth of Isaac, which God promised would happen at an appointed time. Greek has another word that refers more specifically to hours-and-minutes time: *chronos*. By using *kairos*, Jesus's statement is far more significant than, "Hey everyone, it's 5 p.m. so God's kingdom is now here." He's referring to a moment of divine fulfillment, one in which all of the messianic promises in the Old Testament find their target in him.

Describe one significant, life-altering moment from your own life. Were you aware of its significance at the time?

In what ways did that moment influence your faith?

2. Background: What did Jesus mean by "kingdom of God"?

We've already established in Mark 1:15 that Jesus came in into this world to proclaim that the kingdom of God is at hand. His earthly presence signaled that God was done preparing. But what is the kingdom of God, exactly?

During the time of Jesus, the Jewish community anticipated a militaristic kingdom where God would rule over the nations through Israel. However, Jesus flipped that idea on its head. In his gospel, Mark uses the expression "kingdom of God" fourteen times.

From the start, in 1:15, Jesus says, "the kingdom of God is at hand." The verb he uses literally means, "has drawn near" and he immediately ties it to repentance and belief. Not once does Mark refer to "the kingdom of God" in terms of an outward militaristic kingdom, like the one anticipated by the Jews. Rather, Jesus declares that the reign of God begins with the internal surrender of his people.

In other words, we are no longer waiting. The kingdom of God is spreading even now, and it takes root primarily in the hearts of people. It's easy for us to get caught up in thinking similar to that of the Jews during Jesus's time. They longed for power and we do the same today. We talk a lot about Christianity's influence in culture. While there's nothing wrong with that, we have to remember that the kingdom of God begins first of foremost with a transformed heart.

God is at work creating a people, which means the focus of discipleship is helping people surrender and follow Jesus. Jesus did not come simply to change our circumstances, but to transform our hearts.

So, what do you come to Jesus looking for?

How have you witnessed the kingdom active in your life? What does it look like?

Does the idea that God does not always change our circumstances but is more concerned with our hearts frustrate you or comfort you? Explain.

Write out an honest prayer to him, confessing wrongheaded expectations of Jesus, and asking for a desire to surrender and follow.

3. Peek at the Greek: katadioko

Like Francis pointed out in the video, it didn't take long for Jesus's popularity to gain traction. Yet, after attracting one of his first crowds (v. 33) he steals away in solitude to pray (v. 35). Confused by his withdrawal, the disciples "searched for him" (v. 36). Interestingly, Mark uses the verb *katadioko*, which nearly always describes a hostile form of pursuit—like a bounty hunter chasing an escaped prisoner. The disciples are looking for Jesus because they feel like he's blowing the opportunity to capitalize on his growing fame. Instead, they find him praying in solitude. By using the verb *katadioko*, Mark suggests their misplaced craving for influence through Jesus, which is fundamentally a misunderstanding of the purposes of God.

Jesus's response to his own fame differs from his disciples' response. **Being honest, how do you think *you* would have responded to Jesus when you found him praying?**

Oftentimes the Christian life does not deliver what we expect it to. Hardships and struggle may dominate your life more than favor and happiness. **What expectations of Jesus do you have now?**

Reflect on Jesus's habit of withdrawing for prayer during significant events. **In what ways can you begin, or further, such a practice?**

SESSION 3: MARK 2:1–3:6

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: When we begin to recognize our sin, we can see Jesus as our savior and begin to obey him.

Head Change: To understand that only Jesus offers the relief all of humanity longs for.

Heart Change: To feel genuine relief through the forgiveness Jesus offers.

Life Change: To begin to obey as a result of Jesus's forgiveness.

OPEN

Think of a loved one who suffers from a serious physical injury. Imagine what life would be like for that person and family if you had the ability to heal them. Is there any reason you might refuse to heal them?

Last week we laid down the challenge to follow Jesus with our whole lives—surrendering our time, our comfort, and our expectations. But that's not the whole story. Something sinister stands in our way—something we didn't necessarily put there but have to deal with if we want to follow Jesus.

READ

Read Mark 2:1–3:6.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Francis's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions:

What is our biggest problem and how does God deal with it?

What was Jesus's inherent message to the Pharisees who kept getting angry at him?

Show Session 3: Mark 2:1–3:6 (10 minutes)

DISCUSS

Francis relayed the story of the paralytic whom Jesus healed. After all the healings we've already seen, now we focus on something more important behind the healings.

Take a moment and think about the things in your life you'd like Jesus to fix. **If he showed up one day and said, "Name it and I'll fix it," what would you ask from him? Why?**

Re-read Mark 2:1–12.

What obstacles did the paralytic face in his bid for healing?

How did he manage to get in front of Jesus?

Put yourself in the shoes of someone inside that house with Jesus. You're surrounded by everyday people as well as Jewish officials and teachers listening to Jesus talk about his Father's kingdom.

What would you—along with the people in the house—expect from Jesus when the paralytic comes down through a hole in the roof? How do you think you would have reacted to his initial statement?

For the Jewish leaders, miraculous healing in the name of God's kingdom was one thing. But *forgiveness*? That was one step too far. Here, Mark introduces the first of several opponents Jesus will face. These scribes, or teachers of the Law (v. 6), mentally objected to Jesus's statement of forgiving the man's sins. This reaction never works out well for the dissenters, since Jesus knows what they are thinking.

[Note: For further background on the Jewish religious leadership who opposed Jesus, see Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of the session.]

The onlookers expected Jesus to address the man's physical needs, but the savior who came for the lost addressed his most critical need—forgiveness of his sins.

How big of a deal is your sin to you?

In what ways does your perspective of your sin reflect God's view of it? Reflect on those you tend to minimize, ignore, or justify.

If you were able to choose, would you rather be healed physically of a life-altering ailment or illness, or forgiven your sins? Why?

By also healing the paralytic's legs and inviting him to get up and walk, Jesus confirmed his ability to heal his spiritual brokenness. As we follow Jesus's ministry, notice how often he connects the outward appearance with the inward reality.

As he pronounced healing for the paralyzed man, Jesus referred to himself in a new way: "but that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . ." (2:10). This title would have been known by the religious leaders as a reference to Daniel's visions, an apocalyptic image denoting *divine power*. He was not hiding his identity from the educated leadership. They knew what he was saying, and it enraged them.

What did Jesus's declaration mean for the Pharisees?

We often forget that Jesus the gentle rabbi is also the Son of Man riding on the clouds in judgment. **How do you reconcile these two characteristics of our savior?**

How does understanding Jesus as the coming king inform your perception of him and your relationship with him?

[Note: For further background on the Son of Man, see Go Deeper Section 2 at the end of the session.]

Read Mark 2:13–17.

Here, Mark fast-forwards the next scene to the moment where Jesus called Levi, the disciple we know as Matthew—the author of the first gospel.

What does Levi do when Jesus tells him, "Follow me"?

Reflect on your own history with Jesus. When you first believed, how quickly did you turn from your sin to follow Jesus's ways?

Jesus then goes to Levi's house and has a meal with many "tax collectors and sinners." Now, the Pharisees were really upset. These religious leaders threw a fit at the thought that this healer/teacher would dine with sinners. But they'd forgotten the lesson already—Jesus came to deal with that sin. Like the paralytic's sickness, he could heal sin too.

Read Mark 2:18–3:6. As you read, look for a few different things:

First, what's the focus of Jesus's ministry? People or theological correctness?

Second, who benefits from what Jesus says? Who loses out?

Finally, what do Jesus's words tell you about how God treats his people?

The cultural references in these passages may be confusing. But if we focus on what Jesus's words and actions mean for the people who heard them originally, we'll find something important.

Did you notice that Jesus's response to the Pharisees encourages celebration and health for his disciples? Jesus makes the point that, in everyday life, we do what's appropriate for any given situation—whether it's fixing a worn-out pair of pants, or keeping food from spoiling, or eating so we don't starve, or healing the sick.

How did the Pharisees respond to each of Jesus's teachings?

When those who follow Jesus recognize their sin and his ability to destroy its power, they're able to follow him into the kingdom of God. And that kingdom brings celebration and provision. As the king, Jesus can and does provide for his followers. In doing so, Jesus also proves that God wanted to do that from the beginning.

For example, what the Pharisees turned into a burdensome ritual (prohibiting work on the Sabbath), Jesus returned to God's original intent—rest and provision for his people. Francis described Jesus's actions as not just talking but *showing* the nature of God's kingdom.

Instead of embracing Jesus's freedom-giving interpretation of the Scriptures, the religious leaders respond by plotting to kill him. Throughout our passage, we have seen a clear escalation. At first, what began as antagonistic questioning (2:16) grew into a murderous rage (3:6)—one that would end in a crucifixion.

Why do you think they reacted that way?

Jesus always provokes a reaction. **What sorts of responses do people today have toward him? How do you deal with the negative ones?**

[Note: For further background on the Sabbath, see Go Deeper Section 3 at the end of the session.]

LAST WORD

No one reaches the point of rejecting God overnight. Francis left this week's video session asking us to consider the trajectory of our lives. Are we willing to say, "I'm done being a people pleaser, I'm going to please God"? Jesus demands a decision. He leaves no room for ambivalence—we are either with him or we oppose him. There is no in-between. Jesus is looking for followers who recognize their sin, submit to his authority, and follow him into life.

We've had a chance to look at the sin in our lives and confess it to God. We've looked at the areas where we fight God for control and worked to surrender those to him.

But as we saw with the paralytic, the disciples, and the man with the withered hand, Jesus offers life too. He expects us to offer him all of our lives and in return he offers us all of *his* life.

Jesus has come to offer you life. How will you respond? Resistance, or surrender?

Will you follow him into abundant life? What will that look like this week?

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Background: Who were the religious leaders opposing Jesus?

These "scribes" have been mentioned once previously (1:22). They were religious scholars and experts when it came to interpreting rabbinic law.

In Mark 2:16 we are introduced to the Pharisees, who were a group of separatists distinguished by their stringent adherence to rabbinic law. They "separated" themselves by refusing to keep company with "sinners," like those mentioned in the rest of Mark 2. And while some scribes were Pharisees, few Pharisees were in fact scribes.

Regardless, both groups knew the Scriptures backward and forward. They devoted their lives to the very words of God yet failed to recognize God-in-the-flesh. Even worse, they also accused him of blasphemy (2:7) and plotted his death (3:6). Clearly being an expert in the things of God doesn't mean we actually know him.

Today we have more access than ever to information. With the Internet and smartphones, the Bible is at our fingertips at all times. And yet we so quickly forget that, fundamentally, we're sinners in need of a healer.

What value does easy access to Scripture have in your life?

In what ways have you found yourself acting more like a Pharisee (legalistic, graceless) despite having access to Scripture? To what do you attribute that tendency?

Take the next five minutes and spend some time praying. Confess your sins to Jesus. Admit your need for him. Ask him to reveal to you the sins that you're ignoring or forgetting. And then listen. Allow him the time to work in your heart and mind.

2. Background: The Son of Man

Jesus twice refers to himself, in today's reading alone, as the "Son of Man." This title would have been recognized by religious leaders as an allusion to the prophet Daniel, who led Israel's spiritual journey during exile. In Daniel 7:13-14, Daniel has a vision of the apocalypse (end times) in which he saw "one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom."

By taking on this title, Jesus identified himself as divine, possessing God's own authority. As the incarnated God, his authority included mastery over spiritual issues, such as forgiving sin. No wonder the religious leaders struggled to accept what he was saying. They were not looking for God himself to visit them.

Jesus uses the title later in Mark when he refers to his suffering, death, and resurrection (8:31; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33-34, 45; 14:21 [twice], 41); and his glorious return (8:38; 13:26; 14:62). As such, Mark's use of the term emphasizes Jesus's destiny even more than his identity. The truly human savior must suffer and die. But he is more than just a man, so he must also be raised from the dead and return in glory.

Read Daniel 7:9-18. List all the descriptions of the "son of man" in that passage.

Now read Daniel 10:16–19. What similarities do you see?

Then turn to Revelation 1:9–16. How does this passage align with Daniel?

In what ways does this depiction of Christ change or expand your view of his character and person?

How does Daniel's vision and Revelation 1 influence your prayer life?

Recalling Jesus's identity as Son of Man, pray with hope and confidence for spiritual and physical healing—yours or a loved one's.

3. Background: Origins and Practices of the Sabbath

The word "Sabbath" means "cease," "rest," "complete rest," or "desist," and occurs, in its various forms, one hundred and four times in the Old Testament alone. Though the word does not appear in Genesis, the concept of Sabbath is shown in Genesis 1:1–2:4, where God creates the world and all living things in six days, then rests on the seventh.

Exodus 20:11 clarifies that the seventh day is meant to be the Sabbath day, holy and blessed. The text implies that, because God rested on the seventh day of creation, humankind should follow his example and rest on the seventh day. But over the centuries, as Israel turned from Yahweh, they abandoned the regular practice of Sabbath. The prophets pronounced judgment on their idolatry and unfaithfulness, citing among other sins their profaning of the Sabbath.

After the exile, Nehemiah stressed the importance of the Sabbath celebration (9:14). During the intertestamental period, several hundred years before Jesus, religious leaders attempted to legislate how one must observe the Sabbath.

The Sabbath regulations, as interpreted by the Pharisees, lost the intent of the Sabbath prescribed in the Old Testament. Therefore, the rules they observed were human made, not God made, and able to be broken.

The Sabbath proclaimed at creation was intended to serve mankind as a holy day, giving blessing, and observing God's rest and restoration. Nothing of Jesus's or his disciples' actions in Mark 2 and 3 were contrary to the purpose and intent of the Sabbath observance. As such, Jesus was not rewriting the law, but fulfilling and clarifying the original law.

Do you observe a Sabbath—an intentional time of rest? What does it look like?

How do Sabbath rests influence your spiritual life? Your physical and emotional health?

Write down a list of steps you can take to implement a regular Sabbath.

SESSION 4: MARK 3:7–4:34

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: True disciples have a heart condition that is committed to God's kingdom rather than the applause of people.

Head Change: To recognize that discipleship is about advancing the kingdom of God.

Heart Change: To feel confidence in our acceptance through Jesus.

Life Change: To work at bearing fruit in keeping with our discipleship.

OPEN

When you first came to know Christ and followed him, what did you imagine he would ask of you? What sort of sacrifices or adventures? What strange lands or people did you expect to be asked to serve for God? How did you react to those ideas?

In this portion of Mark, we'll begin to understand what it looks like to actually walk with Jesus. Scripture never promises an easy time following Jesus, but it does make it clear that exchanging obedience to the Savior for worldly comfort is a cheap trade.

READ

Read Mark 3:7–4:34.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Francis's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions:

What sort of followers were the primary focus of Jesus's ministry?

What did Jesus require of those who wanted to follow him?

What kind of "crop" will true disciples produce?

Show Session 4: Mark 3:7–4:34 (11 minutes)

DISCUSS

Francis started off the video by explaining Jesus's discipleship model. He explained why the varied terrain near the Sea of Galilee was ideal for illustrating the different kinds of soil in the Parable of the Sower. Not everyone was privy to the true meaning of Jesus's teachings. He chose just a few to mentor up close.

We could make a big deal about the suitability of the disciples but take a closer look at Mark 3:7–19. **What sets the disciples apart from the crowds following Jesus?**

Discipleship is no “add-on” program. It’s not something we can have in addition to the rest of our pursuits. Francis summarized Jesus’s message in chapter 4 by saying, “You want to follow Jesus? You have to give everything up.”

Think about that for a second. **If you were to pursue true discipleship, what would you stand to lose? Are you okay with that?**

Take a minute or two and think about how Francis presented the two groups of people: the called-out disciples and the crowds. **If you were to look at your life honestly, which group would you belong to?**

What’s one thing this week you can begin to surrender to Jesus in order to better embrace the call of discipleship?

The challenge of Jesus’s road of discipleship lies primarily in what it costs us. Success in Jesus’s mind is completely different than success by the world’s standards. We have to live in this world, yes, but to be a disciple of Jesus means prioritizing his call over everything—even family, as Jesus points out in Mark 3:31–35.

Read Mark 3:7–35. Mark is playing with two main themes, but he splits them up across four sections of text (which are easier to see in a print Bible than digital). Those four are Mark 3:7–12, 13–21, 22–30, and 31–35.

Read each of the passages. What similarities do you notice between 3:7–12 and 22–30, as well as between 3:13–21 and 31–35? Note especially the main characters in each vignette apart from Jesus.

[Note: For further study on the “unforgivable sin,” see Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of this session.]

Mark bounces from the theme of Jesus and demons to Jesus and his true family and back again. The four stories together form a whole, all driving at one main idea. In the first section (3:7–12), the very demons Jesus casts out validate his identity and his mission. In the third section (3:22–30), the scribes attempt to invalidate Jesus’s ministry by saying he does his miracles by Satan.

What’s the irony in the way those two passages work together? What do you think Mark is trying to say about the scribes?

This passage comes with a significant warning—be careful in dismissing Jesus. Most of us don’t set out to attribute the work of Jesus to demons like the scribes did. And most of us won’t call him insane.

But Jesus has placed a demanding call on each of us. When that demand runs up against our expectations for how our lives should go, we have a choice to make—do the will of the Father and follow Jesus, or dismiss him.

Reflect on a situation in which life did not meet up with your expectations. **How did you reconcile those events with your faith?**

In the video session, Francis pointed out that Jesus intentionally taught in parables to limit his audience. The massive crowds that followed Jesus for what he could do for *them* would miss the point, but the disciples who’d given up everything for Jesus would get it.

[Note: For further study on Jesus’s parables, see the Go Deeper section 2 at the end of this session.]

Read Mark 4:1–20. The Parable of the Sower is one of Jesus’s most famous parables, and for good reason. It lays out the path of true discipleship for us along with all the possible pitfalls along the road.

In your own words, describe the dangers of each of the problematic soils.

Jesus is describing discipleship, a journey that is constantly challenged. **Choose one of the soils in the parable and apply it to someone today. If he or she were like the soil with thorns, for instance, what might be happening in that person's life? Use your imagination.**

Think about the four soils. If you're a believer—or even just starting out learning about Jesus—chances are you're not the first soil where the call to discipleship never takes root. But even if we don't fit the first category, that doesn't mean we automatically fit the last one.

For each of the three kinds of soils after the first, reflect on your spiritual journey. **During what times in your life did your faithful following of Jesus struggle to take root?**

Has there been a particular struggle or temptation that has threatened to entangle your discipleship?

We live in an era—particularly in the United States—where we've come to expect our lives to make a big impact on the world. Our professions, our talents, our churches—we want it all to make a difference. But in the last three parables in our text for this week, Jesus paints a slightly different picture of success.

Read Mark 4:21–34. As you do, consider what Jesus is saying about the way the kingdom grows. The kingdom definitely grows into a world-changing enterprise. But notice what Jesus likens each of his disciples to: not the whole city, not the whole harvest, and not the whole tree.

Instead, the kingdom grows with the small contributions of many parts: a single lamp, a single grain, or a single mustard seed.

Would you describe your life as world-changing? Why or why not?

Will you continue to follow Jesus even if it means a lifetime of obscurity?

What would that kind of faithfulness look like for you in your context?

LAST WORD

Take a moment to consider the scope of what discipleship is all about. Think back to the scene that Mark has painted for us so far: Massive crowds have been following Jesus. He's drawn both positive and negative attention from nearly everyone—including his own mother and brothers.

Now put yourself in the shoes of the disciples, watching this whole thing unfold. Jesus has been talking in parables to keep the mysteries of God's kingdom hidden from the masses, but still—this new kingdom Jesus has been talking about looks well underway. Doesn't it?

Jesus calls us into discipleship in order to grow the kingdom of God. And that kingdom will, ultimately, change the world. But our contributions are likely to be small—hardly noticeable. And that's okay, because the kingdom is what matters—not our fame.

The promise Jesus offers is, in the end, a huge kingdom built by God himself. We have the opportunity to play a small part in building it. Is that enough for you? Are you willing to be a small part of God's great story?

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. What Does it Mean: The Unforgivable Sin

In Mark 3:22–30 we find one of the more difficult teachings from Jesus—the so-called unforgivable sin. Here, the scribes confront Jesus about his teachings. They've begun to spread the rumor that he is possessed by a demon named "Beelzebul," which was a high-ranking deity worshiped in Canaanite religion. Jesus easily points out the flaw in their logic, however. If Jesus worked for Satan, why would he cast out demons that *also* work for Satan? He would be fighting against his own cause.

But then Jesus utters a frightening statement: "But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (3:29). Clearly, it's a warning, but what does it mean? And how can we know whether or not we are guilty of such a terrible sin?

Note the verb in Mark 3:30. Most translations say "they were saying" (*erchontai*) and, while that's accurate, the verb's tense in Greek implies an action that occurred on a habitual basis. In other words, this wasn't a one-time event. The scribes *regularly* and *continually* attributed the works of the Holy Spirit through Jesus to the power of Satan, which is what Jesus declares unforgivable.

Despite the seriousness of Jesus's accusation, we should not miss the hope in Jesus's words before his warning: Jesus says, "all sins will be forgiven" along with "whatever blasphemies" when we turn to him. But someone who's made a habit of declaring Jesus a servant of Satan demonstrates his or her refusal to turn to Jesus in repentance.

So, if you're worried about whether or not you've committed the unforgivable sin, you can be sure already that you haven't committed it. Your heart is sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and you're chasing Jesus. All the other sins you may have piled up in your life are forgiven in him.

How have you grown in your understanding of the permanence of your salvation?

How would you describe blasphemy to a young believer?

Take the next five minutes and spend some time praying. Thank the Father that, through Jesus, you have complete forgiveness. Then ask the Holy Spirit to continue to prick your conscience over sins in your life so that you never develop a trajectory toward hardness.

2. Peek at the Greek: parable

In Mark 4, Jesus puts on his Master Teacher hat, assuming the posture of literary expert. Instead of merely telling the people what to do and why they should do it, he begins painting word pictures: "The kingdom of God is like..." Listeners were forced to engage with the story on multiple levels in order to understand what he was trying to communicate.

These parables (*parabole*) were stories that illustrated a truth, also known as symbolic speech, figure of speech, an allegory, or even a type. Jesus often taught in extended metaphors, appropriating familiar cultural scenes (agriculture, family, weddings, finances) to teach a larger truth about the kingdom of God. He sometimes borrowed language from Old Testament parables (compare Isaiah 28:23–39 with Mark 4:13–20).

But Jesus employed an extra element in his parables: he often included a symbol for himself, inserting himself into the narrative. For instance, in the Parable of the Sower, he is the sower. We know this because he explained it to the disciples privately. That story gives Mark's readers (us) a clear, implicit affirmation that Jesus understood his divine identity. His sense of identification with God was so deep that he consistently incorporated imagery and symbols from the Old Testament that depicted God:

- the bridegroom of the kingdom (Mark 2:19–20)
- the good shepherd (John 10:11, 14)
- the vineyard owner with authority to do what he wishes with what is his (Matt. 21:40)
- the one with authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:5)
- and the lord with authority to reward the faithful. (Matt. 25:14–30)

Jesus purposely taught through parables in order to naturally divide those who followed him around seeking miracles from those who devoted themselves to him. As we read his parables, we are faced with a similar choice.

Read Mark 4:30–32. Identify each element in the parable and the overall message. Ask yourself these questions:

- **What does this tell us about God?**
- **How does it point us to Christ?**
- **How should it change us?**

SESSION 5: MARK 4:35–5:43

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: Because Jesus is a compassionate, powerful God, we can and should come to him with our concerns and needs.

Head Change: To know with confidence that Jesus is present with us in every circumstance.

Heart Change: To feel gratitude for the transformation God has brought about in our lives.

Life Change: To face our fears with the faith that God is our refuge.

OPEN

Have you ever taken a risk on something? Perhaps you applied for a job or moved out on your own. Or you queried a publication to gauge interest in your writing. Or you put your name down to volunteer somewhere new. **What was it like to wait for the risk to pay off (or not)?**

In this passage we find several people risking everything when they connect with Jesus. They decide the potential negatives are worth the potential rewards of following him, approaching him, worshipping him.

READ

Read Mark 4:35–5:43.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Francis's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions:

What difference does Jesus's presence make in the lives of those who are undergoing challenges?

How do the different people he encounters through his miracles react to Jesus?

Show Session 5: Mark 4:35–5:43 (11 minutes)

DISCUSS

In the video session, Francis taught from a boat on the very sea described in the passage.

Put yourself in the shoes of the disciples. **What do you think it would have been like to experience the storm now that you've seen the sea itself?**

Though most of the disciples were seasoned fishermen, they were still afraid. They knew the power of storms on the Sea of Galilee—their fear wasn't based on a little choppy water. They recognized a powerful storm when they saw it. And—recognizing authority when they saw it—they turned to Jesus for help.

In the same way, we experience fear in the course of our everyday lives that's well-founded. As we walk the road of discipleship, we have to recognize that Jesus sees and acknowledges the reality of our fears.

Reflect back on a time in your life where a situation or set of circumstances left you feeling afraid. **In the midst of that fear, what did your perspective of God look like?**

The disciples had seen Jesus heal many people and cast out demons, but they weren't prepared for him to have authority over the weather. **What sort of ideas about Christ did you have when you were a new believer, which you later discovered were wrong? What have you learned about who Jesus is as you've followed him?**

Francis noted that as followers of Jesus we shouldn't be afraid of anything. Jesus expects the same faith from us that he did from the disciples. **Do you have trouble trusting him with specific fears? If so, which ones and why?**

Read Mark 5:1–20. Look for parallels between the storm on the Sea of Galilee and the hoard of demons in the man from Gerasenes.

What did you notice was similar between the two vignettes? What was different?

Just as the storm, wind, and waves fell immediately silent at the voice of Jesus, so also here do the demons possessing the poor man recognize Jesus. In fact, the parallels go deep into the original language: Jesus "rebuked" (*epitemesen*) the wind and commanded the sea to "be still" (*pephimoso*). The exact same terms appear in Mark 1:25 when Jesus heals the man possessed by a demonic spirit.

[Note: For further study on epitemesen and pephimoso, see Go Deeper section 1 at the end of the session.]

Once the Gerasene man is free of the demons, he immediately wants to follow Jesus. He wants to be a disciple. But instead, Jesus sends him home—not because Jesus doesn't want the man with him, but so that he can be a missionary to his town.

When we see God's power on display in our lives, it can (and should) motivate us to tell others about the God we serve. He is with us. He works on our behalf. **Do you find it hard to talk about what Jesus has done for you with those around you? In your neighborhood, at work, at church? If so, why?**

[Note: For further study on the cultural significance of the herd of pigs, see Go Deeper section 2 at the end of this session.]

Read Mark 5:21–34.

Just as the disciples put it all on the line to chase after Jesus, so too will a hurting woman risk everything.

After healing the demon-possessed man, Jesus returns to the western side of the lake and is greeted by a large crowd. Among the throng was a synagogue ruler named Jairus, who approached Jesus and requested his healing touch on his dying daughter. On their way to Jairus's house, Jesus is approached by another sickly woman.

What did you notice about the woman's attitude toward Jesus? How would you compare her confidence in him to the way the disciples viewed Jesus on the sea?

The woman had already spent her life's savings on cures for her condition. She'd bet the farm on the doctors and they'd failed her. But she had heard about Jesus. Like the disciples, she knew what Jesus had done for others, and she hoped he'd be there for her too.

What happened to her when she touched Jesus's robe?

Look at verses 32–33. **How is the woman similar in her approach to Jesus to the disciples or the townspeople from across the sea?**

How does Jesus respond to her?

Maybe you're in a situation like that woman. Maybe even though you love and follow Jesus, life has been crushing you under its thumb. Maybe you feel like you've screwed up one too many times—that you don't deserve Jesus's attention or help. But the picture we get of Jesus in this passage is a compassionate, loving savior who's waiting to respond to even the slightest bit of faith.

Jesus *wants* to be with you. **How does that fact—that Jesus wants to be with you—impact your daily life? What can you do to remind yourself throughout the day of this truth—that a compassionate loving savior wants to be with you?**

Read Mark 5:35–43.

Here, Jesus resumes his mission of healing the synagogue ruler's daughter. But by the time he's finished speaking with the woman who'd touched him in faith, messengers have already arrived. The girl's dead, they say. Don't bother, Jesus.

When in your life have you been to a place where you, like the messengers, felt too far gone even for Jesus?

What words would you use to describe that time in your life? What did it look like?

Notice Jesus's words to the little girl's father in verse 36. This entire week, people have responded to their circumstances with fear, but Jesus faces it head on. With tender words of love, he calls the girl awake—out of death and into life.

In the face of fear, Jesus is enough. No one is too far gone for Jesus.

How can knowing this truth impact your thought life?

Your emotions?

Your actions?

In what ways can you regularly remind yourself that no one is beyond the healing love of Jesus? And how will that impact the way you treat those around you?

LAST WORD

This week we've talked a lot about fear, about trusting in the power Jesus offers us, and about confidence in his care for his followers. Looking back at the moments in your life you discussed earlier, remember this: Jesus was (and is) there with you.

Take a moment and reflect on the words of the old hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Fear will come in hard times, yes. But alongside that fear stands the one who has the power to raise the dead. Cling to him today. Look to Jesus.

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Peek at the Greek: epitemesen and pephimoso

The account of Jesus calming the storm is one of his most famous miracles in all of the gospels. However, some of the terminology Mark uses to describe the scene parallels a previous miracle. Mark 4:39 says that Jesus "rebuked" (*epitemesen*) the wind and commanded the sea to "be still" (*pephimoso*). The exact same terms appear back in Mark 1:25 when Jesus heals the man possessed by a demonic spirit, which may imply some sort of evil presence magnifying the terror of the storm described here.

Mark frames the calming of the storm like an exorcism. Jesus speaks to the elements and they listen. The term translated "be still" can also literally read, "be muzzled" (1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18), as though the weather were a disobedient animal forced to submit to the command of its owner.

Reflect on the authority that Jesus demonstrated by speaking these words to forces of nature and demons.

How does that level of power fit with the image you have of Jesus?

Does it change the way you think of him? How?

2. Background: Of pigs and demons

Mark 5:1–20 includes one of the more bizarre parts of the story. What's the deal with the pigs? Other than the pigs, Jesus destroys something with his power only one other time (Mark 11:12–14, 20–21). So, what do we make of it?

Due to ritual cleanness laws, Jews didn't raise pigs as livestock. But Gentiles did. Herds like the one in Mark 5:1–20 were a source of income. Jesus doesn't actually command the demons to inhabit or kill the pigs, but he does give them permission.

The dramatic end to the demons' power displays Jesus's ability to totally dominate demonic activity. Previously, the possessed man lived in a cemetery, broke every form of restraint placed on him, and walked around naked, cutting himself with stones and screaming at nearby residents. At the command of Jesus, all of that changed. The demons departed, and he sat down calmly before Jesus.

Yet how do the people from the city respond? "They began to beg Jesus to depart from the region" (5:17). Jesus had freed a man from a legion of demons. But the townsfolk cared only that the freedom had cost them their livestock. Rather than praise Jesus for what he had done, they were terrified by his power and cared more for their pigs than they did for this man now free from demonic oppression.

Most of us aren't pig farmers. Following Jesus probably won't mean a complete collapse of our agricultural enterprise. But following Jesus does come with a cost. Sometimes the salvation he offers means depending wholly on him, instead of on what we've come to trust for safety—financial or otherwise.

What do you depend on to get you through your day—or through your life (a job, certain people, etc.)? Where does following Jesus rank compared to those things?

What would happen if they disappeared and all you had left was Jesus? Would you, like the townsfolk, turn on him? Or would you, like the demon-possessed man, turn *to* Jesus?

SESSION 6: MARK 6:1–29

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: Faithful following means doing what Jesus asks regardless of the worldly outcome.

Head Change: To know that following Jesus includes times of celebration and times of persecution.

Heart Change: To feel free from the burden of believing that we alone are responsible for someone else's salvation.

Life Change: To practically strategize how we may share the good news of Jesus.

OPEN

The phrase “No prophet is welcome in his hometown” originated with this passage. It relates to other sayings such as “Physician, heal yourself,” and “The cobblers’ kids have no shoes.” **What do these sayings have in common? In what ways have you witnessed one of them come to life?**

It’s tough going home sometimes. Even the perfect son of Nazareth endured skepticism and ridicule. His hometown folks were so busy going through the motions that they missed the miracle right in front of them.

READ

Read Mark 6:1–29.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Francis’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions:

How did the people in Jesus’s time understand the nature of God?

Why was Jesus unable to do miraculous works within his hometown?

What is the role of faith in effectively living in obedience to God?

Show Session 6: Mark 6:1–29 (9 minutes)

DISCUSS

As a society, we tend to glorify our public leaders, whether political, religious, or entertainment stars. They seem larger than life sometimes. But they have parents, and often siblings, who knew them before fame. Old friends, too, can serve as a humility check.

Nazareth was a small town, and the residents remembered Jesus just fine. When he came back home to preach, they thought they really knew him. “Oh, it’s Mary’s boy.” But then he began to teach them.

Read Mark 6:1–6.

How do his hometown people receive Jesus after he teaches in their synagogue?

In the video session, Francis made the point that it's easy to respond to this scene with the benefit of our hindsight. We're shocked that the crowds would reject Jesus. Yet, the same situations occur all around us today. People hear the gospel and dismiss it rather than embrace it.

Note especially the end of verse 3: "And they took offense at him." The word for "took offense" comes from *skandalizo*, where we get our word "scandal." His words were scandalous to them.

[Note: For further study on skandalizo, see Go Deeper section 1 at the end of this session.]

Think about your own spiritual journey. When you encountered Jesus for the first time, how did you respond?

Maybe you met Jesus as a child through your parents, or someone introduced you to him as an adult. Whatever the situation, there was a time where you had to decide what you were going to do with Jesus's call.

Now think about the possible objections you might have had (or maybe still do have) to Jesus. What objections to Jesus would you expect someone to have today?

Part of the road of discipleship includes sharing in Jesus's mission. That means we're going to be taking his gospel to other people. We'll face the same rejections or acceptance that Jesus did.

What sort of opposition to Christ have you observed personally? Share your stories.

Now consider those opposed to Christ, or at least uninterested in him. In what ways does your relationship with him give you empathy and compassion for the lost?

Read Mark 6:7–13, and as you read, look for details that mirror the way Jesus has already shown his disciples how to spread the message of the coming kingdom.

Jesus sends the disciples out two by two on a mission to spread the same message of repentance that John the Baptist did. The word "repent" (*metanoeo*) means to change your mind or purpose. The disciples were going out to exhort people to change their minds about God and their relationship to him.

What reactions does he prepare his disciples to face while they are out on the road? How are they to respond?

[Note: For further study on metanoeo, see Go Deeper section 2 at the end of this session.]

The disciples' message is the same one we hear. **What role does repentance play in your life? How did you "change your mind" about Jesus when you first believed?**

In what ways do you continue to repent in order to remain close to your savior?

What does Mark 6:7–13 say to modern disciples? How would you incorporate the message of this passage into your faith conversations?

Jesus doesn't wait until the end of Mark to send the disciples out to spread the message of the kingdom of God. Regardless of where your relationship is with Jesus, you have a part to play in his mission in the world.

How can you practically live like the disciples did here? How would you engage someone in conversation about the picture of Jesus you've seen here?

Repentance can be a hard pill to swallow. It requires humility to change, to admit you were wrong. Our next passage reflects this through a flashback to King Herod who had heard John the Baptist's call to repent. Let's just say that he didn't respond well.

Read Mark 6:14–20.

[Note: For further study on King Herod, see Go Deeper section 3 at the end of this session.]

What got John in trouble with Herod in the first place? Why, despite the trouble, did Herod keep John around?

We've seen some poor reactions to those who shared the message of Jesus, but none so bad as Herod and his wife. When John declared their marriage a violation of God's law, it got him thrown in prison. Herodias even wanted him executed. Herod kept John around, though, because of the message he preached. It intrigued him.

Now read Mark 6:21–29.

What choice does John have in the matter of his life or death? Why does he die?

Most of us won't face an angry queen or a militant machete because of our faith in Jesus. But the question we have to answer with each moment of our lives is simply, "Would we die for him?"

The cost of discipleship—the price of following Jesus—is *everything*. Up to and including our very lives. Many over the last two millennia have chosen death over giving up Jesus. Most of us won't face a choice that drastic, but we are still called to give up our lives for him.

Today, consider what you can surrender, put aside, or give away so that you can have the opportunity to show Jesus to someone else. Whatever it is, consider it practice. We are following the one who came to die for us all.

What have you sacrificed to follow Jesus? What opportunities did it open up for you?

What does dying for Jesus look like for you? Why is it worth the effort?

LAST WORD

This passage deals with some of the more difficult realities of following Jesus. His message doesn't always go over well. But he invites us to practice the mission before we may feel ready. And we've seen that following Jesus will cost us.

How has this week's study inspired you? Is there something you know you must "change your mind" about? Perhaps you sense a call to surrender or a situation in which to step out in faith. Share if you feel comfortable.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Peek at the Greek: skandalizo

In Mark 6:3, we find a word that gives us insight into a crucial aspect of what happens when we share the message of Jesus with others. Mark writes that when the Jewish community in Nazareth heard Jesus teaching, they “took offense.” The Greek word is *skandalizo*, from which we get the English term “scandal.”

Throughout the New Testament, *skandalizo* often shows up to describe Jewish reactions to Jesus. Sometimes it takes the form of a noun and gets translated “stumbling block” (See Rom 9:33; 1 Cor. 1:23; Gal 5:11; 1 Pet. 2:8). Like Francis pointed out in the video session, the problem with the people of Nazareth was their unbelief in the face of Jesus’s teachings.

In a day and age where we’re very hesitant to offend anyone, the true gospel is provocative—it always has been. That doesn’t mean we should be divisive or impolite when we tell people about Jesus. But we *should* expect the message itself to come across like a scandal.

Reflect on occasions when you have talked about Jesus and faced resistance. What sort of setting were you in—with folks you knew, with strangers, in person or online, etc.? What objections did your listeners bring up?

Why are we to persist in sharing the gospel despite opposition? What’s the point?

In what ways is your faith strengthened through uncomfortable faith conversations?

2. Peek at the Greek: metanoeo

One of the biggest reasons (if not *the* biggest reason) that the message of Jesus is off-putting to some is the issue of repentance. In 6:12, Mark says the disciples proclaimed that people should *repent*.

The word translated “repent” is *metanoeo*, which literally means to change one’s mind. In the Old Testament Hebrew, the word is *shub*, which means to physically turn around or turn back. If we take both together, repentance involves both our mind and our behavior. It involves turning our backs on all that is ungodly and turning to face what is pleasing to God—both literally in how we behave but also in how we think.

Mark makes repentance the hallmark requirement for salvation. No one can be saved without acknowledging their sin and clinging to Jesus.

What do we do with this information? The reason the gospel is so provocative is precisely because it demands change. Think about it—people might turn to God when it would mean a change from bad circumstances. But if life’s good, why change at all?

Even for us who already accept the message, change is hard. Repentance is still hard.

Think about your own relationship with Jesus. How has it changed your mind about various beliefs? Certain behaviors?

In what ways has your faith in Christ changed your goals and hopes for the future?

3. Background: Which Herod is which?

King Herod plays a part in several New Testament narratives. But we must be careful to know which Herod the authors are referring to.

Herod the Great

Herod the Great ruled Judea during the time of Jesus's birth. His reign lasted from 37 BC to 4 BC; he was the king whom the magi met, and who had the boys of Bethlehem murdered in his search for the baby Jesus.

Imagine having that sort of father. How might his sons have related to Herod the Great?

Herod the Great had numerous wives and children. After his death, his kingdom was divided among three of his sons, the northern portion of Galilee going to his son Herod Antipas. Antipas is the Herod we meet in Mark 6.

Antipas

Years before, Antipas had fallen for Herodias, who was both his niece (the daughter of his late half-brother Aristobulus,) and his sister-in-law—wife of another half-brother, identified in Mark 6 as Philip. Herodias thus had married her half-uncle and, with Antipas, married another one. The Herodian family was complex, to say the least.

When John the Baptist began his ministry, Antipas and Herodias lived together openly as husband and wife. As Mark 6 flashes back, we discover that John had rebuked Antipas for marrying her, as such a marriage went against the Law of Moses. In retaliation, Antipas imprisoned him but occasionally brought him out to hear his teaching. "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly" (6:20).

Herodias felt no such respect. She "had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death" (6:19). When her daughter danced before Herod at his birthday banquet (6:21–25), Antipas was so pleased that he offered to give her anything she desired. Her request—at her mother's prompting—was John's head on a platter. Antipas reluctantly granted her request (Mark 6:27–28; Matt 14:9–11).

In this story we find a lesson about pride and humility: the high-ranking Herodias was unwilling to accept censure from a wilderness preacher. **How well do you accept rebuke for sinful behavior?**

We also see the results of unwise, spontaneous promises: Antipas did not consider the potential consequences of his promise to give her "anything." **Have you ever spoken before you thought it through completely? Were you able to make things right?**

Crucifixion of Jesus

Later, Jesus appeared before Antipas as part of the trumped-up trial before his crucifixion (Luke 23:6–12). When Pilate questioned him, he learned that Jesus was Galilean and sent him to Antipas (Luke 23:2–5). Initially, Antipas was glad to see Jesus and hoped that he might perform a miracle (Luke 23:8; 9:9). But having questioned him with no response, Antipas sent him back to Pilate, concluding that he was innocent (Luke 23:10–11; 23:12, 15).

A third Herod: Agrippa

Whereas Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus (son of Herod the Great), Herod Agrippa was her brother. He deposed Antipas, his uncle, in 39 AD, to become ruler of a large portion of Judea, Galilee, and surrounding territories. He persecuted Christians, ordering the execution of the apostle James (Acts 12:1–3), and the imprisonment of the apostle Peter (Acts 12:3–19), after which Agrippa died directly as a judgment of God.

The contrast between the Herodian family and that of Jesus and John is stark. One dysfunctional family hungry for glory, the other—cousins—hungry for the glory of God. Every royal political machination was motivated by a self-centered pursuit of self-aggrandizement. John the Baptist and Jesus preached the Word of God, repentance, and holiness.

We may not be royals, but often we often seek fame and glory. **What does that look like in your life?**

Have accolades and praise filled you up emotionally? Made you think better of yourself? Or have they exposed an emptiness in your life? How?

How can the contrast between the Herods and John and Jesus help you reflect on your own motivations? How can you move from seeking your own glory to seeking God's instead?

SESSION 7: MARK 6:30–8:30

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: Because of his unique power as creator, Jesus renews and restores what sin and darkness broke.

Head Change: To understand Jesus's character and mission.

Heart Change: To feel excited at Jesus's ability to equip us to follow him.

Life Change: To live in light of our knowledge of who Jesus is and what he's about.

OPEN

There's something attractive about power. We like the freedom it gives us, the ability to do whatever we wish. Or so we think. **What sort of position do you hold that gives you power over someone else? And where is the limit to that power?**

Jesus, in this passage, is going to demonstrate real power, the kind that defies natural law and remakes religious law. Pay attention to those who benefit from his power.

READ

Read Mark 6:30–8:30.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Francis's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions:

What sort of power does Jesus have over the brokenness in our world?

Who or what is responsible for our sin?

How do believers come to understand the truth of the gospel? Through whose power does Jesus become clear in our minds?

Show Session 7: Mark 6:30–8:30 (15 minutes)

DISCUSS

Francis visited the site where scholars believe Jesus multiplied the fish and loaves to feed over 5,000 people. Jesus was in high demand during those days. After his apostles had returned from their missionary outing, they tried to get away for a break. But the crowds followed, and Jesus showed compassion for them.

Look at Mark 6:34–37. **How would you characterize Jesus's response to having his recharge time interrupted?**

He spends a full day teaching, then directs his followers to feed the crowd who had not eaten all day. Read 6:38–44. **How did the apostles' attitude differ from their master's?**

Francis notes the significance of the miracle of the bread and fish. **What difference does it make that Jesus can create something out of nothing?**

[Note: For further study on the significance of bread being made from nothing, see Go Deeper section 1 at the end of this session.]

Now read Mark 6:45–56. **What parts of the created world does Jesus display mastery over?**

Read Mark 7:1–23.

The Pharisees prove yet again that Jesus's miracles and teaching have not made an impact on their own thinking. Note the timing of their complaint about the disciples' unwashed hands.

Why does Jesus rebuke the Pharisees in 7:6–13? In what ways are they hypocrites?

[Note: For further study on the significance of a person's ceremonial cleanness, see Go Deeper section 2 at the end of this session.]

Consider your own righteousness. Have you added self-made "rules" that reveal someone's deeper holiness, in your sight? In what ways have you added to the gospel, like the Pharisees did?

Jesus clarifies what defiles a person in Mark 7:14–23. Francis noted that we often make the same mistake, blaming all sorts of external issues for our sin, as opposed to realizing the real issue is within our hearts. We have to change from the inside out. **What "external" things are you blaming your sin on? What has to happen for you to allow Jesus to change your heart?**

As we dive into chapter 8, note that Mark purposely organized his gospel to emphasize Jesus's power. This week's section shows repetition of key events: 6:30–7:37 mirrors nearly identically 8:1–30. We see two miraculous feedings, two sea trips, two confrontations with the Pharisees, two object lessons with food, two sets of healings, and two declarations of faith in Jesus.

Read Mark 8:1–10.

In what ways is this miracle of feeding the four thousand similar to feeding the five thousand in Mark 6:30–44? How are these two miracles different?

Read Mark 8:11–21.

After reiterating the results of both of his multiplication miracles in Mark 8:20–21, Jesus asks, "Do you not yet understand?" You can almost feel the sadness and confusion coming off the page. After all he's done, how can the disciples still not understand who Jesus is? But before we jump to condemn the disciples, **how do we, too, respond to Jesus in a similar way? Do you live in a way that exhibits a clear understanding of who Jesus is and what he's done for you?**

Read Mark 8:22–30.

In Mark 8:22–26, a man comes to Jesus to have his blindness healed—fairly routine, right? But it takes Jesus two tries to get him seeing again.

Before we start to wonder if Jesus somehow flubbed the miracle, notice that we've seen throughout the whole passage: two of everything. Mark's doubling-down effect comes to a point here. It takes two intentional actions on Jesus's part for the man to see clearly.

After restoring sight to the blind man at Bethsaida, and the “double effort” we’ve seen in this week’s passage, Jesus asks his disciples an important question in Mark 8:27–30. **What does he hope his disciples see clearly?**

Do they?

In what ways do you feel you see Jesus more clearly now? How does this passage increase your understanding of him and his mission?

LAST WORD

Next week’s study is going to put Peter’s confession to the test. In fact, Mark 8:22–30 forms the first of two bookends making the point that Jesus wants his followers to see clearly—not just who he is, but what his mission ultimately is.

Throughout our passage this week, Jesus has been teaching the disciples important lessons about not only what he’s doing in the world, but also how he wants them to live. Mark gives us a repeated set of stories to double-down on the point—discipleship is all about living the way Jesus lived.

But living in faithful obedience to Jesus starts with surrendering our hearts to him. Francis reminded us that it’s not so much about what we do, but more about the condition of our hearts.

As we conclude today’s lesson, take a moment as a group to be silent before God. **Have you allowed Jesus to change your heart? What areas of your life are you still holding on to? If you feel comfortable doing so, have a few people share with the group.**

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We’ve highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Background: Bread Made from Nothing

By including both scenes of Jesus feeding the multitudes, Mark assumes that his readers are familiar with their Old Testament. Let’s look back at an important Old Testament passage that should help understand the nuances of Mark 7–8.

Turn to Exodus 16:9–21. This section picks up after God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. The people started complaining pretty quickly, though, because they were out in the middle of the wilderness.

As you read the passage in Exodus, what sounds familiar to what you’ve read in Mark? (Think specifically about the location where Jesus takes the disciples prior to feeding the five thousand.)

What do you think the people eating the bread Jesus had just multiplied would have thought?

If Jesus is re-creating the something-out-of-nothing provision that Israel saw in the wilderness, what does that say about Jesus?

Jesus's provision through miraculous bread should immediately clue us in to two things: First, Jesus is God-in-the-flesh and he will provide for his followers. But second, he's not about simply satisfying our cravings. As the passage in Exodus goes on, God's frustration with Israel grows because, rather than trust him to provide, they ignore his instructions and try to take advantage of his provisions.

In the same way, Mark presents the Pharisees in chapter 7 as also taking advantage of God's generosity, using their own legal traditions to ignore caring for elderly parents.

So, as you sit down to eat your next meal, stop and pray for a moment. In your prayer celebrate the provision that Jesus offers you—not just in the food you're about to eat, but also in the resources you need to be about his mission.

In what ways have you been tempted to take God's generosity for granted? Discuss or write down actionable ideas about how to practice gratitude.

2. Background: Ceremonial Cleanness

The Pharisees attacked Jesus and his followers for eating without first washing their hands. Mothers everywhere may applaud them, but Jesus rebuked them. Why? The Pharisees were focused on the wrong thing. They were not so much concerned about cleanliness—as in, not carrying dirt or germs—but rather cleanness, a term describing ritual suitability.

The concept of cleanness goes back to the Law of Moses, in which God instituted conditions on how he could be approached. To be in God's presence, a person needs to be in a state of holiness. A person who is clean is in a state of holiness; therefore, becoming clean is essential for entering into the presence of God. Likewise, anything that makes a person unclean separates that person from God.

Generally, anything associated with health or life would be designated as clean. For example, a perfect one-year-old lamb was an acceptable sacrifice, but a lamb that was lame—or nearer to death, less than perfect—was unacceptable. If something or someone was unhealthy or associated with death, they were unclean. Skin diseases, illnesses, touching a corpse, or participating in sinful activities all could make a person temporarily unclean.

An unclean person could go through a process to become clean—make a suitable sacrifice (Leviticus 1:3–17), allow the right amount of time to pass (Lev. 15:19), participate in a symbolic ceremony, such as a ritual washing (Exodus 30:17–21). This was likely what the apostles did not do before eating, prompting the Pharisees' complaint.

In the Gospels, we see Jesus change the rules: he touched the unclean personally to cleanse and purify them, illustrating that he holds the power to transform the lives of individuals. Jesus's touch healed or restored dead people (Mark 5:21–24, 35–43), those with skin diseases (Mark 1:40–45), even those suffering an unnatural blood flow (Mark 5:25–34) to a state of cleanness.

In Mark 7:15, Jesus proclaimed that nothing going into a person can make that individual unclean—only things coming out of a person. In this passage Jesus abolished the defiling physical and animal aspects that made a person unclean.

He confronted the religious leaders by exposing their hypocrisy: they were very concerned about how the people followed every tiny regulation, which could be trumpeted about to show their "righteousness." They were too busy looking good to prioritize actually doing good: they were neglecting the commandments of God to love their neighbors, honor their parents, uphold justice, protect the vulnerable.

Consider your spiritual life. How are you busy following the rules, spoken or unspoken, in your faith tradition?

How have you unwittingly added conditions to your righteousness, behaving as if adherence to traditions or rules will determine how pleased God is with you?

It's easy to mask our inner motivations with outward activities. Think of your church or family life. **What sort of actions look righteous? Now, how can a person engage in those while inwardly being unrighteous? When have you done this? How can you avoid such double-mindedness in the future?**

SESSION 8: MARK 8:31–10:52

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: To be a true disciple of Jesus, we must lay aside everything we possess and all that we are to sacrificially serve like Jesus did.

Head Change: To recognize Jesus's mission for exactly what it is.

Heart Change: To feel acceptance in light of his call on our lives.

Life Change: To listen and follow him in laying down our lives.

OPEN

Most of us have a moment in our lives where we knew that something significant had happened. Whether it was an academic achievement, discovering a talent we didn't know we had, or watching the birth of a child. There are moments that change how we see the world. **What's the most life-changing thing that's ever happened to you?**

In this lesson we're going to look at a pivotal moment in the book of Mark—the transition that changes everything we're supposed to think about Jesus and his mission.

READ

Read Mark 8:31–10:52. (This is a fairly long section. If you don't have the time to read through all of it before watching the video, at least read Mark 8:31–9:13.)

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Francis's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions:

What is the difference between the disciples' expectations and Jesus's true mission?

Onto what kind of road, or journey, is Jesus inviting his followers?

What kind of hope did Jesus give them of his eventual victory over the world?

Show Session 8: Mark 8:31–10:52 (8 minutes)

DISCUSS

After Peter declares Jesus as the Christ (see Mark 8:27–30), we find a puzzling exchange between the two.

Read Mark 8:31–33. Jesus goes from accepting Peter's declaration to calling him Satan.

As Francis described it in the video session, what was Peter's misunderstanding about Jesus's mission? How do you think Peter (and, presumably, the other disciples) arrived at that wrong conclusion?

Read 8:34–38. **Based on this passage, what's the real mission of the Christ?**

Look for the attitude that Francis pointed out in Peter. Look for how Jesus counters that attitude, and what he offers in its place.

Thinking back to Francis's teaching and looking at what you've read, what do you think bothered Peter about Jesus's statement?

What challenge does Jesus lay down before his followers and the disciples? How does Jesus's challenge differ from Peter's implied expectations?

The Jews had been waiting for centuries for God's chosen one to come and set them free from political oppression. But throughout the story so far, Jesus has offered the disciples the chance to see him and his mission for what it really is—the overthrow not of Rome but of the kingdom of darkness. Jesus kept pointing them to his true purpose.

Re-read 8:34–36. Francis said that the road to glory will include suffering. **What kind of discipleship is he calling us to? What might that look like practically?**

Now read Mark 9:1–13. He begins with a promise to the disciples that some would see the kingdom of God come in power. **Put yourself back in the shoes of the disciples. What are you anticipating from Jesus after that statement?**

The text then jumps ahead almost a week later. Jesus has once again gone up the mountain, this time with Peter, James, and John. In this passage there are signs of the disciples' confusion—particularly of Peter.

What aspects of the event on the mountain do you think would lead the three disciples to thinking Jesus had changed his mind? Why?

Look back at Mark 1 and Jesus's baptism. **What similarities and differences do you see between that event and the Transfiguration? Contrast and compare who was involved, where and when the events happened, what was said, etc.**

The whole point of the passage isn't to get the disciples—or us—excited about Jesus coming in power to conquer Rome or whatever boogey man we hope he'll fight for us. It's about God making it absolutely clear that whatever Jesus says, we need to obey.

[Note: For further study on the Transfiguration, see Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of the session.]

What's the hardest aspect of discipleship for you? What presents the biggest challenge? Where are you having trouble obeying Jesus?

Read the vignette in Mark 9:14–29. The disciples get fixated on power rather than purpose and fail to cast out a demon. Jesus repeats his demonstration of power-used-for-compassion-not-conquering.

But in the middle, we find a heart-wrenching yet comforting moment. The father of the demon-possessed child knows that faith is the key to rescue. But he needs help. So, he asks for it.

We may be tempted to assume that having great faith means we never ask for help. But that's not right. **Are you willing to come to Jesus and ask for help? Are there areas of your life where you've not asked God to help you? If so, why?**

In the video session, Francis doesn't teach through Mark 9:30–10:52. As we work through this section, think about what each of these portions of Scripture say about being a true disciple of Jesus.

Read Mark 9:30–32. Here again Jesus reminds the disciples that he must die and raise from the dead. **Why do you think the disciples still didn't understand him?**

Read Mark 9:33–50. **What do these verses teach us about what it means to follow Jesus? Why is servant leadership so difficult to practice?**

Read Mark 10:1–16. **What do these verses teach us about obedience and discipleship?**

Read Mark 10:17–31. Compare the response of the rich young man to that of the father of the boy with an unclean spirit in Mark 9:14–29. In some ways it's the same request—each man asks something of Jesus. Each time the obstacle is the same: trust Jesus and surrender. But the response is different. The wavering father asked for help in overcoming his unbelief. But the young man left discouraged because he didn't want to surrender his life to Jesus.

What are you having a hard time surrendering to Jesus?

At the end of our passage for this week is Mark 10:32–52. Mark knows his stuff when it comes to literary arrangement, and this is no exception. The last session ended with a two-part healing of a blind man, while this portion ends with the healing of another blind man. In between, Jesus states three times that he's come not to conquer but to die. Unlike the first blind man who couldn't see clearly at first, Jesus's mission should be completely obvious now.

But right before we finish, Jesus's disciples have one last request for Jesus. Read Mark 10:35–41.

What are James and John asking for? What's Jesus's answer?

James and John were there when Jesus was transfigured. They know what he looks like in power and they want in on the deal, much to their comrades' consternation. Jesus, however, turns the conversation on its head. Jesus establishes a different metric of greatness—not power, but servitude. We are to be servants (*diakonos*) as we follow the example of our Lord.

How does Jesus's concept of greatness contrast with the world's?

Name one lie about greatness that you believed until you understood Jesus's perspective.

In what ways do you follow Jesus through serving others?

[Note: For further study on diakonos, see Go Deeper Section 2 at the end of the session.]

LAST WORD

Service and sacrifice. That's what it looks like to follow Jesus. No power. No glory. No fame. Just humble servanthood and self-sacrifice.

Take a minute or two and identify one person you can go out of your way to serve in the week ahead. It doesn't have to be a grand gesture—in fact it probably shouldn't be. Instead, focus on how you can surrender your own self-interests to serve someone else.

How can you discover needs of those in your community or church? What can you do to meet some of those needs? Think simply and practically. Utilize the resources in your group, then make arrangements to get out there and serve your neighbors.

The promise of glory that Jesus extends to each of his followers comes *after* we follow him in

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Background: The Transfiguration

The climactic event on the mountain revealed Jesus's divine nature in a physically changed and glorified manner. Some key observations about this impressive moment will help us understand why Mark (and Matthew and Luke) felt it significant enough to include in their stories.

Notice that God spoke, much like he did at Jesus's baptism. His words are almost identical:

Baptism: You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.

Transfiguration: This is my beloved Son; listen to him.

The audience has changed. Whereas the Father was speaking to his Son during his baptism, he was speaking to the disciples at the Transfiguration. He confirmed Jesus's identity and commanded obedience to him. "Listen" implies action.

How are you doing with that? How does your faith in Jesus influence your willingness to mold your life to his commands?

Who attended the Transfiguration? Other than Jesus and his three disciples, we learn that Moses and Elijah appeared in a transfigured state. Moses, the author of the Torah, had long represented the Law. In fact, we still call those first five books of the Bible "the Law of Moses." When teachers would proclaim, "Moses said," they would be quoting from the Law.

Likewise, Elijah represented the prophets, that other collection of Hebrew scripture that, along with the Law and Writings, completed the Hebrew Bible. In meeting with Elijah and Moses, Jesus demonstrated his superiority to them: his teaching fulfilled theirs perfectly, his coming sacrifice would supplant the old way of the Law, and he was *the* prophet predicted in Deuteronomy 18:18.

At the transfiguration the glory of the preincarnate Son of God temporarily broke through the limitations of his humanity. In this appearance, Jesus confirmed Peter's verbal proclamation that he was the Messiah.

How did Peter react? How do you think you would have reacted?

Peter was obviously overwrought watching this scene unfold. He saw Jesus in a completely different way. **In what ways does this vision of Jesus's divine glory change, enhance, or challenge your usual view of him?**

2. Peek at the Greek: diakonos

While describing his expectations for great disciples, Jesus uses two words in Mark 10:43–44. The first appears in verse 43 and is translated “servant.” It’s the Greek word *diakonos*, where we get our English “deacon” from. If the disciples want to be great, they must be a servant. The word implies the idea of a higher-powered servant in a household—one who might even be an administrator. It may not be the lordly position the disciples were after, but it’s not a terrible substitute. But then Jesus chooses a different word to drive his point home in verse 44. There, he says the first in the kingdom must be the *doulos*, or “slave,” of all. Unlike a servant, a slave in those days had no standing and no rights. He or she was subject entirely to the whims of his or her master. If the disciples wanted to be first, they would have to submit not just to Jesus but to each other.

A favorite term in modern Christian writing is servant-leader. It’s a popular way of describing how one should lead—with the manner of a servant. But what if we focused on the servant part alone, without the leadership aspect? **How would that change your attitude toward following Christ?**

What words or images does the term “servant” bring to mind? What emotions do you feel thinking about being someone’s servant?

What does it look like in your life to serve Jesus?

SESSION 9: MARK 11:1–13:37

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: The world's view of power differs drastically from Jesus's example of the king coming to sacrifice and serve.

Head Change: To understand that Jesus's view of power flips the world's view on its head.

Heart Change: To feel peace in the midst of persecution, knowing Jesus is with us.

Life Change: To shape our day-to-day lives to always be prepared for Jesus's return.

OPEN

Defying expectations can be exhilarating or intimidating. **Have you ever walked into a situation knowing that you were going to bring something other than what was expected? How did you feel? What was the reaction?**

This session looks at Jesus as he enters Jerusalem on his purposeful mission to the cross. The crowd has expectations, and the Pharisees are planning confrontations. The disciples are hoping for a coronation.

READ

Read Mark 11:1–13:37. (This is a fairly long section. If you don't have the time to read through all of it before watching the video, at least read Mark 11:1–33.)

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Francis's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions:

What were the people expecting when they welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem?

How did Jesus confront the religious leaders when he got to Jerusalem?

What did Jesus say was the destiny of his followers?

Show Session 9: Mark 11:1–13:37 (9 minutes)

DISCUSS

Francis explained the gravity of what faced Jesus's followers after his crucifixion. In the days preceding his death, Jesus taught them to expect hardship, rejection, and persecution because of their devotion to him.

How does Francis describe Jesus's last messages to his disciples?

How often do you hear preaching that reflects this message of surrender and suffering as opposed to the message that God wants you to be healthy and wealthy?

Read Mark 11:1–11.

It's finally Jesus's time to enter Jerusalem. He rides in on a donkey to cheers of adulation from the crowd. They expect a conquering king. **Do you think there was anything wrong with the people hoping for a king that would come deliver them? If you were there, how do you think you would have reacted?**

Even today, if we are honest, many of us wish that Jesus would return and right all that's wrong in the world—that he would drive out evil rulers and condemn people who cause harm and fix all the injustice in the world. **Why do you think he's waiting to return?**

[Note: For further study on the significance of the donkey, see Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of the session.]

The tension thickens as Jesus enters the city and goes to look in the temple. But it's late, so he retreats back to Bethany and returns the next morning.

Read Mark 11:12–26. This is a passage that seems hard to understand, but the fig tree stands as a metaphor for Israel and us. It looked alive but didn't have the fruit that Jesus expected and desired.

Mark is inviting us to question ourselves. **Are we truly following Jesus, or are we only "fair weather" Christians? What evidence is there of healthy fruit in your life?**

In Mark 11:25 Jesus brings up forgiveness, and the importance of forgiving others. **How does forgiving others align with bearing healthy fruit as a follower of Jesus?**

Read Mark 11:27–33. **Who's in power here? What does Jesus do to disarm them?**

Read Mark 12:1–12. **Who is this parable about? Why do you think Jesus decided to speak in a parable here?**

Most scholars believe that the "man" in the parable represents God, the "vineyard" is Israel, and the tenants ("vine-growers") are Israel's leaders. The meaning of this parable was clear to the religious leaders. Jesus had exposed their plot to kill him, but the approval of the people temporarily shielded Jesus from their wrath.

Read Mark 12:13–17. **Again, what powerful group challenges Jesus? How does he deal with their challenge?**

Now read Mark 12:18–27. **Who comes at Jesus? What does he say that nullifies their argument?**

Read Mark 12:28–34. **Who steps up to the plate this time? What's the result?**

So, what does this mean for us? What's Mark trying to point out? For those who've begun this journey of discipleship, the reality is we'll face powerful people who want nothing to do with Jesus.

Maybe you have already. If you haven't you certainly will. A boss. A family member. Maybe even a politician. The truth that Mark wants us to walk away with is simple: The powerful persecutors in our lives have no real power over us.

Has there been a situation in which your beliefs were held against you? How did you react?

In what ways did that situation impact your view of Jesus and the cost of following him? Is it still worth it? Was your faith shaken, or did it strengthen?

Read Mark 12:38–40. **Whom does he warn against? What aspect of them is he condemning?**

Now read verses 41–44. We see a living example of Jesus’s teaching in the preceding verses. **How does Jesus’s response to the widow’s miniscule offering reflect his perspective on power?**

[Note: For further study on the widow’s “mite,” see Go Deeper Section 2 at the end of the session.]

In Mark 13:1–3, we witness a conversation between Jesus and his apostles that foreshadows future events regarding the destruction of the temple. Then the two pairs of brothers, James and John, Peter and Andrew, privately ask Jesus when those violent events will happen.

Read Mark 13:3–13. You’ll see that Jesus doesn’t really answer his disciples’ questions. Rather, he focuses on how they can remain faithful to him during their future suffering and trials.

What are their responsibilities when facing persecution?

What hope does he give them for those critical moments when they must defend themselves to the authorities?

Describe a time you have needed the right words to defend your faith. What happened?

Read Mark 13:24–37. Remember that Peter (whose story Mark is transcribing throughout this book), James, and John were with Jesus when he was transfigured. Now, Jesus promises that one day he will return in that same radiance but with an army of angels at his back. In Mark 13:32–33, Jesus challenges the disciples to live every day in light of his return.

Most of us live in relative comfort, and our routines can lull us into a sense of stability—that everything will be the same until the day we grow old. So, here’s the question: **Are you ready for Jesus’s return? Are you living like he could return tomorrow? If not, why?**

LAST WORD

The path of discipleship will not be our “best life now.” Jesus gave us fair warning that following him would require sacrifice, involve suffering, and change our hearts completely. Jesus wants us to shape our lives to look like his—giving of ourselves every day in sacrificial love. That takes intentional thought every minute of the day.

We serve a servant-king. Jesus came not to lord his power over us but to serve us with every scrap of his life. He asks that we follow him and do the same, always prepared to receive him when he returns.

So take a few minutes and think about how you’d respond if Jesus showed up on your doorstep today.

How has following Jesus looked different than you first expected?

What circumstances tempted you to give up on him? What helped firm up your faith instead?

What does sacrificial love look like in your relationships?

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We’ve highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Background: Why was riding a donkey significant to Jesus's entry to Jerusalem?

Jesus instructed his disciples to find a colt that had never been ridden and bring it back to him before he entered Jerusalem (Mark 11:1–3). Matthew and Luke tell us that it was the colt of a donkey. Why a donkey, and one that had not yet been ridden?

Animals that had never been ridden were considered suitable for sacramental purposes, as seen in Numbers 19:2 and Deuteronomy 21:3, in which they were sacrificed to atone for another's sin. In 1 Samuel 6:7, two milk cows that had never been yoked (made to work in labor) were conscripted to pull the ark of the covenant back to Israel. By choosing to ride an animal thus far set apart from common work, Jesus added an element of sacrament and sacredness to his entry to the city.

Though we see the donkey as a lowly animal, in the Middle East it was considered a noble creature. Judges rode on donkeys (Judges 10:4, 2 Sam. 17:23) as well as royalty (2 Sam. 19:26). The donkey also denoted a king approaching in peace (whereas, a king riding a horse was declaring war).

So Jesus, by riding into Jerusalem on a never-before-ridden donkey, declared himself the Messiah—a savior coming in peace, not to overcome the Romans. He dramatically re-enacted the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The people—including the disciples—failed to recognize that he was coming not as a warrior but as the Prince of Peace. Their joyful adulation, while rightly directed at their savior, anticipated the wrong kind of salvation.

What ideas about Jesus did you have previously that you've since learned were untrue or mistaken?

The people saw in Jesus what they were hoping for, not what he truly was. **In what ways have you expected God to do things or be a certain way based on your circumstances rather than his Word?**

2. Background: What exactly was a widow's "mite"?

Jesus observed a poor widow quietly putting her donation into the temple coffers, praising her "mite" over the abundance that the Pharisees ostentatiously poured in. What exactly is a mite? The word is a contraction of "minute," from the Latin *minutum*, which is the translation of the Greek word *lepton*—the very smallest copper coin. Two mites made a farthing, or one *kodrantes* (quadrant), i.e., the fourth part of a Roman *as*.

How much might a mite be worth? Two of them together paid a farmworker's wage for about ten minutes' work. The poor widow—the Greek term specifies that she was a pauper—gave both coins. The fact that her donation consisted of two tiny coins is significant. She might have kept back one, but in spite of her extreme poverty she cast in all that she had.

What was Jesus's judgment on the widow?

Now, compare her story to that of Ananias and Sapphira, a couple in the early church who also gave to support God's ministry. Read Acts 5:1–11.

What happened? Why?

What was the difference between this couple and the widow in the temple?

Reflect on your own willingness to give generously.

SESSION 10: MARK 14:1–15:47

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: Despite being abandoned, Jesus accomplished his mission on the cross, laying a victorious foundation for our eternal hope.

Head Change: To know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus loves us.

Heart Change: To feel genuine affection for Jesus.

Life Change: To set out to proclaim the wonderful thing that Jesus accomplished for us on the cross.

OPEN

Are you a "lone ranger," or do you prefer to face challenges with a partner or team? Which approach works better, in your opinion?

In this session Mark takes us with Jesus right into the hardest part of his mission. He has support up until a point, but eventually he faces his cross alone.

READ

Read Mark 14:1–15:47. (In the video, Francis picks up his teaching at Mark 14:22. Read at least 14:1–21 to give you a background for what's to come.)

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Francis's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions:

How did Jesus feel about gathering with his disciples for Passover?

In what way does Jesus's suffering point to the love of God for us?

What is the cross about, according to Francis?

Show Session 10: Mark 14:1–15:47 (14 minutes)

DISCUSS

In the session, Francis pointed out that Jesus was looking forward to celebrating Passover with his disciples—his friends. **As you listened to Francis tell the story of the Last Supper and the events in Gethsemane, what emotions surfaced in you toward Jesus?**

Jesus knows full well what he's going to face the next day. And he knows that the friends that have stuck by him through everything on this journey to Jerusalem are going to abandon him. And yet he still shows them love—promising that his death is for their sake.

Think about the people in your life that you love more than anything. **How would you respond to them if you knew, in just a few hours, that they would betray and abandon you? What would you be feeling?**

Hold that response and those feelings in your mind for a moment. **What does it say about Jesus's love for us that he *wants* to spend time with us despite what he knows about us?**

Before we immerse ourselves in the Passion narratives, let's read Mark 14:3–9.

How would you describe the woman's gift to Jesus?

What were the guests at the dinner concerned with in regard to the woman?

How did Jesus respond?

Mark describes Simon as a leper, but he would have had to be healed since no leper would have dined with healthy people. Whether Jesus was the one who healed him or not, we can only speculate, but it's possible that this was Simon's way of thanking Jesus.

To pour perfumed oil over a guest's head at a dinner was a sign of high respect and adoration, which is exactly what she does. But rather than recognize the display of deep love and affection for Jesus, the gathered guests criticize her.

[Note: For further study on anointing with oil, and the deeper significance of the woman's act, see Go Deeper section 1 at the end of the session.]

Jesus's response should stop us in our tracks. He calls the woman's action beautiful because she honored *him*. Throughout the book, Jesus's expectation for his disciples is that they join him in his mission by serving others. But here at the end, knowing there's little time he has left with his followers, he acknowledges the woman's love and devotion to him.

What value do you find in praise and worship, whether in song or reading or praying? How does that practice enhance your relationship with God?

Often we equate worship with singing, but it's much more than that. Worship involves obedience, prayer, speaking well of God, appreciating his works, and more. **What is your favorite way to worship God?**

Read Mark 14:12–42. **What are the disciples doing or saying? What does Jesus do? How is he feeling?**

The road to the crucifixion winds ever closer for Jesus. After supper he takes his friends to the Mount of Olives, where he tells them what is about to happen. They then make the short walk to Gethsemane, where Jesus goes off alone to pray.

In the session, Francis talked about the deep anguish that Jesus finally gives vent to in the garden. Jesus is wrestling with the road ahead of him. And his friends can't stay awake with him for even an hour. In a way, they've already begun to abandon him.

Nothing on this road of discipleship is beyond Jesus's experience. He knows your pain. That's why he can completely represent us to God. That's why he can stand in our place at the cross. That's why he can weep with us in our own pain.

Empathy is much more powerful than mere sympathy. **How has someone comforted you out of an experience of their own that was similar to yours?**

Jesus's time in the garden helps us see how human he really is. **How does his anguish there, anticipating his coming suffering, help you identify with him more closely?** (See Hebrews 5:7.)

Read Mark 14:53–72.

Recall how Jesus's identity as the Son of God was affirmed by the Father twice: at his baptism and at the Transfiguration. Jesus gradually revealed his identity only to his disciples, keeping that information close.

The Jewish high priest asked Jesus if he was the Messiah (14:61–65). **How did he answer, and how did the high priest respond?**

Peter subsequently was questioned about his relationship to Jesus. **How did he respond?**

It is ironic that two Jews heard the Son of God affirm his true identity, yet the one who should have recognized the Messiah (the high priest) rejected him as a blasphemer and the other (Peter), who knew beyond a doubt who Jesus was, denied knowing him for fear of human authorities. It may be tempting to mock them, but let's turn the question to ourselves. **Would you recognize God's Holy One? Or do you have a certain image in mind of what he'll look like? Have you ever turned your back on him in fear of others' opinions?**

Read Mark 15:1–15.

Pilate, a Roman governor, asked Jesus an equivalent question (15:2). **How does Pilate's response compare to the high priest's?**

How does Mark describe Barabbas?

Based on 15:7, what does Barabbas offer the people that Jesus doesn't or chose not to?

The crowds that followed Jesus, much like the disciples, didn't want a suffering savior—they wanted a conquering Christ. Barabbas the murderer had earned his executioner's sentence in an anti-Rome uprising. *He*, not Jesus, was the warlike champion the people wanted.

Read Mark 15:16–32. Throughout the book of Mark, we've seen Jesus validate his claim to be the Christ. The Father himself twice confirmed Jesus as his beloved son. **Yet, how did the Jews, the Romans, and the passersby treat the divine king?**

Read Mark 15:33–39. Here at the end of the story, the words that were so sweet in the mouth of Peter—"you are the Christ"—become a curse in the mouths of all who see Jesus. All, that is, except one. **Who, in the end, understood who Jesus was?**

It wasn't the disciples—they'd run from Jesus's captors. It wasn't the Jewish people—they traded the Son of God for a murderer. It was a pagan Roman centurion—a man who represented everything the Jews wanted the Messiah to destroy. He got it.

Over and over in the sessions, Francis has been asking us if we *really* get it. Jesus is the Son of God. He lived and walked in the places we've seen in the videos. He is real. His life is real. His works are real.

Who is Jesus to you? What does that mean, then, for your life?

[Note: For further study on Jesus's final words on the cross, see Go Deeper section 2 at the end of this session.]

LAST WORD

This session ends on a somber note. Jesus is dead. He's been crucified. Those who were closest to him denied him. But remember Francis's words, "No matter what happens in your life, you should always be able to look to the garden, look to the cross and know that God loves you." Francis reminds us that nothing can compare to the love the Father showed us by allowing his Son to die for us.

Do we really get this? Have our eyes really been opened to the greatness of the gospel message? How should we respond?

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Background: Anointing with oil

The most common oil in Israel was extracted from the olive trees around the country. Olive oil was so plentiful that, in addition to regular use in hygiene and medicine, it was used as currency, along with animals and precious metals. King Solomon even used it as partial payment to Hiram in exchange for construction expenses with the temple (1 Kings 5:11).

But often, oil was used for sacred events:

- Some priests were anointed with a special God-ordained blend of spices and oil (Ex. 30:22–25). We see Aaron and his sons anointed, as well as all of the holy articles used in the tabernacle (Ex. 30:26–32).
- Similarly, kings were anointed with oil during their coronation or ceremonial calling (as with Saul in 1 Sam. 10:1; David in 1 Sam. 16:13, 2 Sam. 2:4; 5:1–5; Jehu in 2 Kings 9:1–6). In this sort of ceremony, oil was poured out onto the person's head.
- Prophets, such as Elisha, were anointed in the same way (1 Kings 19:16).

The pouring out of oil over God's chosen representatives displayed physically what had already happened spiritually: that person was being set apart—designated as holy—for God's special service. So when the woman approached Jesus and sacrificed her valuable jar of nard (oil) by pouring it over his head, those in the room understood the significance of her action. The fact that Jesus accepted and approved her behavior also spoke volumes.

Remember that all through the book of Mark, Jesus has been revealing his identity as the Son of God gradually. By now, on the cusp of his crucifixion, he's not hiding it anymore. He is the Messiah, a name derived directly from the Hebrew word for "anointed." As the Anointed One, he is the savior Israel has been waiting for. Different scholars, leaders, and citizens envisioned this Messiah in a variety of ways, but under Roman occupation, few were expecting a Prince of Peace.

Read more from the Old Testament about the Messiah, also known as the Anointed One, the Servant: Psalm 2:2; Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Daniel 9:25–26.

In each passage, what do you learn about the Messiah?

The Greek word for Messiah is Christ. Reflect on these mentions of the Messiah in the New Testament:

Matthew 1:17–18—**In what context is he mentioned? Why is it significant here?**

Luke 2:11— **Why is this good news to the shepherds?**

Acts 4:25–26—**Which Old Testament passage is quoted here? How are Peter and John applying it in their speech?**

The coming of the Messiah was the answer to centuries of prayer—Israelites longing for God to return and rescue them. We also benefit from his coming, since he came to redeem all humanity—not from the Romans, but from the rule of sin and death.

What does Jesus's title of Messiah mean to you? In what ways do you profit from his coming, all these years later?

2. Peek at the "Greek": "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?"

Actually, those words were not spoken or written in Greek, but in Aramaic, the everyday language that Jesus spoke. The phrase means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus was quoting the opening line of Psalm 22.

Other gospel writers record more of what Jesus says and does in his last moments on the cross, but Mark chose only this one phrase. He wants to lean into the true depth of suffering that Jesus endures for our sake—as the righteous payment for the sins of many.

In the first century, the Jewish Scriptures didn't have chapter and verse numbers. If they wanted to refer to a passage—particularly a psalm—they'd quote the first few words or line. So too here. Mark recorded not just the despairing words of Jesus as he suffered the full weight of judgment for sin, but also the hints of promised vindication.

Read through Psalm 22—all of it. As you do, consider how it might summarize the whole of the Mark's gospel.

How does the full context of Psalm 22 color the final moments of Jesus's life? What does the poem hint at that should give us hope?

Jesus was the suffering savior. Born to die, rejected by his closest friends and family, and murdered by the people he'd come to serve. Jesus's mission as the Christ was not to conquer, but to show compassion to a world stained by sin. In his faithful obedience to the Father, Jesus purchased salvation for many.

So that, as the writer of Psalm 22 says, "It shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it."

You were one of those "yet unborn." Someone told you about Jesus. **How did you come to faith in Jesus? What was that process or event like?**

How eagerly do you tell others about Jesus? Do you feel comfortable explaining to others why faith in Jesus is so crucial for them? Why or why not?

SESSION 11: MARK 15:40–16:8

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: Because we are convinced that Jesus is the Son of God and long-awaited savior, our lives should reflect our faith in daily obedience and faithfulness to him.

Head Change: To know that Jesus forgives our greatest failures in order to restore us to discipleship.

Heart Change: To comfort in knowing that no matter our status in the world, we can still follow Jesus.

Life Change: To commit to following Jesus on our own road from Galilee to Jerusalem.

OPEN

What sort of security does your home feature? Locks, alarms, something more elaborate? How does having a form of security make you more comfortable entering or staying there?

Mark wrote his account of Jesus's life in a way that would leave readers convinced that Jesus was both the Son of God and the long-expected savior. And if we trust in Jesus's identity, and his sacrifice on our behalf, then we will live with a sense of security in him.

READ

Read Mark 15:40–16:8.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Francis's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions:

What fears and dangers did the disciples face as Jesus was crucified, leading to their abandonment of him?

What happened to Peter after the Resurrection? How did he change, and why would he endure persecution later in life?

Show Session 11: Mark 15:40–16:8 (10 minutes)

DISCUSS

We are at the end of our reading of Mark's gospel, the climactic Resurrection scene. Some of your Bibles include more details about Jesus appearing to several disciples after his resurrection, a short concluding section. But scholars agree that verses 9–20 were not part of Mark's original manuscript. We will focus on verses 1–8 as we wrap up this series.

[Note: For further background on why verses 9–20 are disputed, see Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of the session.]

Read Mark 16:1–8 again.

Who visits Jesus's tomb?

At the end of chapter 15, right after the pagan Roman centurion confessed that Jesus was the Son of God, we're told that the only followers of Jesus who stayed with him until the end were these women. They witnessed where his body was laid, and here we see them returning.

In what ways have you felt invisible?

This scene at the garden tomb is the first time some of the women get a mention in the book of Mark. They're the silent followers. We know they were at the cross, watching everything (15:40–41), but they are silent in the text.

We've discussed the centrality of following Jesus on this journey of discipleship. But in a society obsessed with power and platform and importance, it can be easy to judge the success of our Christian life along those same lines.

But the women at the tomb argue differently. What matters is faithfulness, not power or prestige or popularity. This way of discipleship is the same regardless of who you are.

Popular Christianity, whether online or in the media or in your church small group, can focus on worldly benefits. The famous get attention. The do-gooders are praised. **Have you ever felt lost among all the "celebrity" Christians?**

In what ways can you encourage someone in their quiet obedience to Jesus?

In Mark 16:4–7, the women find Jesus's tomb empty. Instead of a body to prepare, they are greeted by an awe-inspiring angel, proclaiming the fulfillment of Jesus's promise: He. Is. Not. Here!

What does the angel tell the women to do?

Why do you think the angel specifically mentioned Peter?

The disciples had abandoned Jesus, but Peter had gone out of his way to deny he knew Jesus three times. It's not hard to put ourselves in his shoes after that kind of failure. But here the angel has a specific message from the risen Jesus for Peter: Jesus still wants him.

Have you ever believed that something you've done, thought, or said might be too much for Jesus to forgive? How have you dealt with that burden?

Peter is a comforting figure. **What does his story tell you about Jesus's capacity to forgive and restore?**

Notice verse 7: "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."

In the same breath Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him, Jesus also promised that, after he had risen, he would go ahead of the disciples back to Galilee (see 14:28). And here in the mouth of the angel, Jesus reaffirms his promise: "I'm going back to Galilee."

It may seem like a small detail. But even in the small things, God keeps his promises. **What promises have you seen God keep in your life?**

We all have some desires that are yet unfulfilled. How can this story encourage your faith that God has not forgotten you?

Are you ready to walk the road from Galilee to Jerusalem? From life to self-sacrificial death, so that others may know Jesus? Are you willing to bring people along with you and show them the way to follow Jesus?

What convinced you that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God?

How do you express your faith on a daily basis? What habits and values do you live out?

Jesus openly admitted that following him would not be an easy endeavor. How have you found that to be true?

How would you answer the question, "Is following Jesus worth it?"

LAST WORD

Mark wraps up his gospel by telling us that the women scattered from the empty tomb and kept their mouths shut because they were afraid. Throughout the story, even Jesus's closest friends responded to his power and mission in fear. So, Mark's asking us what *we're* going to do. Be silent and afraid? Or be confident in the knowledge that we serve the God-Man Jesus who paid the price for our redemption?

The choice is yours to make, and only you can decide. **Take a few minutes here at the end of this study and discuss what God might be asking you to do as a next step, both individually and as a group.**

Maybe it's simply getting right with Jesus like Peter needed to. Maybe it's willingly forsaking the distractions keeping you from following Jesus wholeheartedly. Maybe it's engaging with someone else who needs to know the gospel. Maybe it's embracing the truth of Jesus for the first time yourself. Maybe it's taking up Francis's challenge to go back and read the book of Mark again, for yourself and then be willing to evaluate your life in light of what the Gospel of Mark teaches.

Whatever it is, take a minute and write it down. And then spend time with Jesus in prayer. This whole study is pointless if we don't walk away changed by God's Word. The Christ has come. He died. He rose again.

So, what are you going to do now?

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Background: What is the "longer ending" of Mark?

Mark technically has two endings—the long and the short. Most Bibles will have a note starting in Mark 16:9 pointing out that the last two thirds of the chapter weren't in the oldest manuscripts. The long ending's also missing from over one hundred other manuscripts, and many of the early church fathers write as if they knew only the short ending of Mark. In addition, the tone and style of the original Greek in the long ending don't seem to match the rest of Mark's gospel, implying that it was composed at the very least much later if not by someone else entirely.

So why do we have it in our Bibles? The easy answer is that the large majority of manuscripts do include the long ending, and the early English translations of the New Testament adopted the long ending without question. Despite scholarly argument against the authenticity of the long ending, translational tradition kept it in each new edition of the English Bible. Even now, it's included almost as a nod to that tradition, despite nearly all English translations pointing out that it's probably not original to the Mark's gospel.

Should we be worried? Absolutely not. Virtually all scholars agree that the last twelve verse of Mark were added by someone else—most likely as a way to harmonize the Gospel of Mark with the other four gospels. That doesn't take away from the Bible's reliability, but instead shows us the importance of careful reading. Mark has a point to make, and he constructed his book in a very specific way. In order to honor his design, this study covers only the short ending of Mark.

What have you been taught about the short and long endings to Mark?

Does the history of the biblical text interest you, intimidate you, bore you?

Why do scholars care about such things, and how does it affect everyday readers?

