

MARK

Week 1: Mark 1-2

How to Use This Discussion Guide with Your Group

Start with a prayer, and then read the introduction from the sheet. Read the portion of the text from your Bible or an app (use whatever translation you're comfortable with, but we suggest the New Living Translation (NLT) or the English Standard Version (ESV)). Then read the summary paragraph(s) and talk through the questions for that section. You can work through this guide in one session or spread it out over several – whatever works for your group. As you read and discuss, consider how what you're reading applies to your life today. Don't forget to close with prayer!

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Mark abruptly opens by proclaiming the good news of Jesus the Messiah (Mark 1:1). The story depicts Jesus and the kingdom of God that He announces as advancing against both worldly powers and supernatural forces. While the disciples consistently struggle to understand His mission, Jesus proceeds unflinchingly toward the cross. Along the way, He calls those who would follow Him to take up their own crosses (8:34–38).

BACKGROUND

The Gospel of Mark is attributed by early church fathers to John Mark, whose mother was a prominent member of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). In the first century, it was not unusual for some Jews to have a Hebrew name (“John”) as well as a Greek one (“Mark”). Mark joined his cousin Barnabas and the Apostle Paul on their initial missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:5; Col 4:10). Somewhere along the way, he had a falling out with Paul, but they apparently reconciled in later years (Acts 15:37–40; 2 Tim 4:11; Phlm 24). Mark also is associated with the Apostle Peter’s ministry in Rome (1 Pet 5:13, where “Babylon” is generally understood to be a metaphorical reference to Rome). According to early Christian tradition, Peter told Mark all about Jesus’ earthly ministry, and Mark put these accounts in writing.

Among the four Gospels, Mark is likely the earliest. It might have been written even before Peter’s execution in Rome in the mid-60s AD. Because of Mark’s connection to Peter, the Gospel could have been addressed initially to the church in Rome. The Gospel may also have been written not long after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70.¹

1:29-39: JESUS HEALS

In the lakeside town of Capernaum, Jesus teaches in the synagogue. He frees a man from an evil spirit. This is the first example of Jesus being stronger than the power of evil. Later he heals Simon’s mother-in-law of

¹ John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016).

a fever. That evening, after the Sabbath rest is over, people carry their sick friends and relatives along to the house to be healed.

Jesus is already getting too busy to preach. Early the next day, after prayer, he decides to move on to other villages. His first priority is to announce the kingdom of God.²

1. What is your solitary place? Are you more of a morning or a night person?
2. How does Jesus' healing (vv. 30-31) compare with His exorcism (v. 25)? What new realm of authority is seen here?
3. How do you picture the scene in verses 32-34? Why does He silence the demons?
4. After a day like this (vv. 29-34), what pressures could Jesus feel as a new day dawns? What might He pray about? How might this relate to His decision to move on (v. 38)?
5. Where do you go and what do you do when you need to get away and be with God?
6. What is the greatest obstacle in your personal devotional life?
 - a. Finding time?
 - b. Finding somewhere quiet?
 - c. Being consistent?
 - d. Staying awake?
 - e. Keeping my concentration?
 - f. Knowing what to do?
 - g. Having the desire?
 - h. Other: _____
7. What insight do you see in these stories about Jesus and the kingdom?

2:1-12: PARALYTIC HEALED

Back in Capernaum, the pressure of life continues. There is such a crowd around Jesus that one man is lowered through the roof to get to him. This man is suffering from paralysis, but Jesus sees that his real problem is guilt. He tells him that his sins are forgiven. Some teachers of the law are outraged by this, because forgiving sins is something only God can do. To prove his point, Jesus goes right ahead and cures the man of his paralysis as well.³

1. When was the last time you had to go to the emergency room?
2. What would you be seeing and feeling if you were in this crowd (vv.1-4)?
3. Why are the teachers so upset? In their minds, how are sin and the authority of God linked (see John 9:1-3)?
4. Why didn't Jesus just heal the man like everyone expected? What new insight about the kingdom and Himself is He revealing?
5. In what ways is sin like a paralysis? What freedoms has Jesus' words of forgiveness given to you? Where do you need to hear that word again?
6. In this story, do you identify more with the paralytic, his friends, or the teachers? Why?
7. What event in your life brought you closest to God?
 - a. When Jesus healed me when I was hurting

² Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 448.

³ Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 448.

- b. When someone I was close to got really sick or died
- c. When some friends really supported me
- d. When I felt God's forgiveness
- e. No event has brought me that feeling
- f. Other