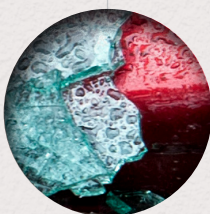


Mark | *Leader Guide*



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Adults • Fall 2023 • CSB

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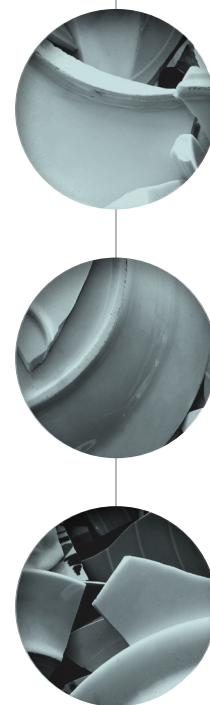
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*Evangelistic Emphasis



MEET THE WRITERS

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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review Lifeway's doctrinal guideline, please visit Lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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Explore the Bible
Adult Leader Guide
Fall 2023
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A WORD FROM **THE TEAM LEADER**

I've heard it said, "If you really want to get to know someone, drive across the state of Texas together in the summer without air conditioning. You'll see what they're really like." It's true. We get a front-row seat to a person's character and priorities when we spend time together, especially when challenges arise creating a less-than-comfortable experience. Difficulties reveal our communication skills and our ability to persevere through trials, among other qualities. Experiences like this can forge a strong, tested relationship, taking us beyond a superficial friendship.

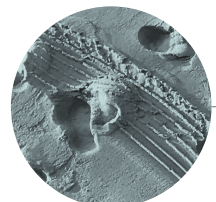
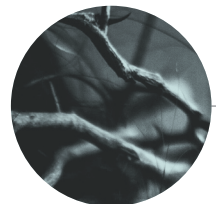
The Gospel of Mark is a fast-paced account of Jesus's earthly ministry detailing numerous events and experiences He encountered. Mark gives us a vivid depiction of who Jesus is, what He is like, and what He came to do. We get to know Jesus in the pages of Mark's narrative. In the very first verse, Mark identified Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus's divine nature is a major emphasis for Mark (1:1; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 14:61-62). We also see Jesus's humanity in this Gospel (4:38; 5:30; 8:12; 13:32). Jesus experienced hunger, tiredness, and a whole range of emotions, just like we do. Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension conclude this Gospel account, irrefutable evidence of Jesus's identity.

Jesus is both fully divine and fully man. He is God's Son and the long-awaited Messiah. Mark's narrative affords us an up-close view of this truth—and it is such good news. It is the foundation of our relationship with Him.

In Him,

Amber Vaden

amber.vaden@lifeway.com



Everything I Learned about Outreach, I Learned from an HVAC Company

By Dwayne McCrary

In the fall, the HVAC* service companies start reminding us about getting ready for the winter months. If we have a contract with a local service company, most of us get a card reminding us to make an appointment for our semi-annual HVAC check. If they don't hear from us, we get a second card and maybe a text. If we continue to ignore the reminders, we eventually get a call to schedule the semi-annual check. They warned us, so we are almost apologetic when they call for not already scheduling the appointment.

As the day of the appointment approaches, we get a reminder that they'll be coming between certain hours. On the day of the check, we most likely get a text letting us know they are on their way. Once at our home, they knock on the door, tell us why they are here (as if we didn't know), and enter with plastic booties covering their feet. They do their inspections, tell us if we need to take any other actions, give us an opportunity to ask questions, and are on their way. We may even receive a follow up text or email thanking us for the business.

We can learn some things from HVAC companies when it comes to reaching out to others.



1. WE NEED TO REMIND OTHERS WE ARE HERE.

Over the summer, people tend to be on the go more than at other times. We see more individuals taking vacations, participating in outdoor activities, and planning family outings. Our assumptions usually are that they know where we are when they're back home and are ready to settle down for a season. HVAC companies don't assume we know when to call them or that we know they're still in business. Instead, they remind us that we need them, and we should do the same. Keeping up with the people assigned to our Bible study group and our guests is part of being a good shepherd.

2. WE NEED TO GO ONSITE.

The HVAC companies don't expect us to dismantle our systems and take them in for review. Nor do they depend on a video app to walk us through how to check our system. They come to our house. We may think contacting someone in their home is old school, but research indicates the expectation of Sunday School leaders visiting people was introduced in the early 1920s. That time was filled with all kinds of challenges, including the aftermath of the Spanish Flu, with parallels to today (you can find out more about these parallels in the book listed in the article bio). Just like the 1920s, the post-COVID world requires us to go to people far from God if we want to reach them.

3. WE NEED TO MAKE APPOINTMENTS.

We are thankful that HVAC technicians don't randomly show up at our front porches. They make appointments so they can use their time wisely, and so we can remove stuff in front of the return air vent. We both win! The same is true when it comes to contacting someone face-to-face. We want to be good stewards of our time and allow them to make any preparations they may want to make.

The HVAC company usually sends a text to let us know they're about to be there, even though they already have an appointment. Doing so serves as a last-minute reminder to get ready for their arrival. When we are headed to a person's residence (who has been a guest or away for a few weeks), we can send a text to let them know we are on the way, even if we already have an appointment.

4. WE NEED TO REMEMBER WE ARE ON THEIR TURF.

The HVAC tech wears booties because he or she is on our turf. Most technicians wouldn't wear those same booties in their home. When we stop by someone's home, we need to remember that we're on their turf. The way we treat any pets they may have, the questions we ask, and the things that we point out about their home are important. Knowing the difference between asking why they display a picture versus inviting them to tell us the story behind that same photo matters.

5. WE NEED TO DO WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO.

Most of us know what to expect when the HVAC technician visits because they've told us on the cards, as well as when making the appointment. Imagine the surprise most of us would express if the technician began testing each chair in our living room. We would be looking for another HVAC company!

When we make an appointment to see someone face-to-face, we can explain why we're coming by and then be true to that explanation. One reason we may have for making an onsite visit is delivering our Bible study resources. This gives us a natural reason at least four times a year to visit everyone assigned to our Bible study group.

The HVAC tech wants to be thorough, but he or she knows we have other things to do. We need to follow that same practice when making a visit to a group member or guest.

6. WE NEED TO FOLLOW UP AFTERWARD.

Once the HVAC tech leaves, most of us get a summary of the inspection and some tips that may help our system last longer. This individual may also thank us for trusting their company with the hope that we will continue using their service.

After we visit someone face-to-face, we too can send a personal follow-up message, giving them a tip about the upcoming Bible study, how they might use the resource we dropped off, or information they requested. While this may seem like a small thing, a follow-up message communicates that we care.

Dwayne McCrary is the manager of adult ongoing Bible studies at Lifeway and teaches an ongoing Bible study as well. His most recent book is *Farsighted: Fostering a Culture of Outreach in our Churches and Bible Study Groups* (available at Lifeway.com/TrainingResources).

*HVAC: Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning

WORD WISE

Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Beelzebul

[bee EL zee buhl]—a reference to a Philistine deity (Baal-zebub, see 2 Kings 1:2). By the first century, the Jews used it as a name for Satan (Mark 3:22).

Centurion

[sen TYOOR ee uhn]—an officer in the Roman military who commanded one hundred soldiers (Mark 15:39).

Decapolis

[dih KAP oh liss]—region on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, the name was derived from ten Greek cities largely inhabited by Gentiles (Mark 7:31).

Denarii

[dih NEHR ih igh]—plural of denarius; one denarius was equivalent to a day's wage (Mark 6:37).

Ephphatha

[EF uh thuh]—Aramaic expression that means “be opened” (Mark 7:34).

Gethsemane

[geth SEM uh nih]—from a Hebrew word that means “press of oils”; a garden located outside of the city of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley on the lower slope of the Mount of Olives (Mark 14:32).

Salome

[suh LOH mih]—wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John (Mark 16:1; Matt. 27:56); possibly the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as alluded to in John 19:25; one of the women who were going to the tomb to prepare Jesus's body for burial.

Sidon

[SIGH duhn]—city located on the Mediterranean coast northwest of Galilee, about twenty miles north of Tyre, and an important port of trade; Jesus spent time in the region (Mark 7:31); Paul visited the place on his way to Rome (Acts 27:3).

Syrophoenician

[sigh roh-fih NEE shuhn]—combination of Syria and Phoenicia, the two areas were joined as one district under Roman rule (Mark 7:26).

Tyre

[TIGHR]—city located on the Mediterranean coast northwest of Galilee, twenty miles from Sidon, and an important port of trade (Mark 7:24,31). Some scholars believe Tyre was more populous than Jerusalem at the time Jesus visited there (Mark 7:24). Paul spent seven days in Tyre after his third missionary journey (Acts 21:3-4).

BIBLE READING PLAN

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Mark 1:1-8	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Mark 8:1-10	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Mark 12:18-27
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Mark 1:9-13	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Mark 8:11-21	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Mark 12:28-34
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Mark 1:14-20	<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Mark 8:22-26	<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Mark 12:35-37
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<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Mark 2:13-17	<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Mark 9:8-13	<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Mark 13:9-13
<input type="checkbox"/> 9. Mark 2:18-22	<input type="checkbox"/> 9. Mark 9:14-18	<input type="checkbox"/> 9. Mark 13:14-23
<input type="checkbox"/> 10. Mark 2:23-3:6	<input type="checkbox"/> 10. Mark 9:19-24	<input type="checkbox"/> 10. Mark 13:24-31
<input type="checkbox"/> 11. Mark 3:7-12	<input type="checkbox"/> 11. Mark 9:25-29	<input type="checkbox"/> 11. Mark 13:32-37
<input type="checkbox"/> 12. Mark 3:13-19	<input type="checkbox"/> 12. Mark 9:30-32	<input type="checkbox"/> 12. Mark 14:1-11
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<input type="checkbox"/> 15. Mark 4:1-9	<input type="checkbox"/> 15. Mark 9:42-50	<input type="checkbox"/> 15. Mark 14:22-26
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<input type="checkbox"/> 21. Mark 5:21-43	<input type="checkbox"/> 21. Mark 10:32-34	<input type="checkbox"/> 21. Mark 14:60-65
<input type="checkbox"/> 22. Mark 6:1-6	<input type="checkbox"/> 22. Mark 10:35-40	<input type="checkbox"/> 22. Mark 14:66-72
<input type="checkbox"/> 23. Mark 6:7-13	<input type="checkbox"/> 23. Mark 10:41-45	<input type="checkbox"/> 23. Mark 15:1-5
<input type="checkbox"/> 24. Mark 6:14-20	<input type="checkbox"/> 24. Mark 10:46-52	<input type="checkbox"/> 24. Mark 15:6-15
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<input type="checkbox"/> 27. Mark 6:45-56	<input type="checkbox"/> 27. Mark 11:15-19	<input type="checkbox"/> 27. Mark 15:33-41
<input type="checkbox"/> 28. Mark 7:1-23	<input type="checkbox"/> 28. Mark 11:20-26	<input type="checkbox"/> 28. Mark 15:42-47
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<input type="checkbox"/> 30. Mark 7:31-37	<input type="checkbox"/> 30. Mark 12:1-12	<input type="checkbox"/> 30. Mark 16:9-20
	<input type="checkbox"/> 31. Mark 12:13-17	

USING THIS GUIDE TO LEAD



School blog and Groups Ministry blog for additional helps on leading an ongoing Bible study group.

3. GATHER AND REVIEW.

Review the group plan and options again and collect any supplies you will need. Make sure you have additional copies of the ***Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide*** for guests.

BEFORE THE GROUP TIME

1. STUDY THE CORE PASSAGE.

Start preparing early. Read the passage, listing people, places, key words, key phrases, and actions taken. Use the commentary included in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* and the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* to dig deeper into the items you listed. If a QR code is available in a lesson, scan it to gain additional information on what's found in the passage. Write a summary of the session's main idea. Use the statement printed under each session title as a starting place.

2. CREATE A GROUP TIME PLAN.

Craft a group plan that helps the group discover and respond to the main idea. Consult the Group Plans in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*, which include ideas for integrating the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide*. Identify ways to engage the group, explore the text, summarize the lesson, and challenge the group.

For additional ideas or questions, consult *Explore the Bible QuickSource* and *Explore the Bible Extra* (which identifies a current event to introduce and conclude the lesson and is found at goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras). Review the items available in the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*. Look at the Lifeway Sunday

DURING THE GROUP TIME

4. ARRIVE EARLY.

Make sure you are the first person to arrive. Pray as you set up the area. Greet adults as they arrive and focus their attention on the Bible study.

5. LEAD THE GROUP IN A TIME OF BIBLE STUDY.

Use the plan you created, recording notes of how the group responded. Remember, every group experience takes a few unexpected twists and turns, so be flexible.

AFTER THE GROUP TIME

6. EVALUATE AND RECORD.

Review and implement the After the Session idea to encourage the group to put the truths they discovered into practice. Record prayer requests and other insights you gained about the group and specific participants. Use these notes to help you grow as a leader.

7. START PREPARING TO LEAD THE NEXT GROUP TIME.

MEETING THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE FAMILY OF ADULT RESOURCES

CORE RESOURCES

Use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* or *Personal Study Guide* and *Leader Guide* as the core resource for your group.

Daily Discipleship Guide

Resource for both the group members and the group leader. An alternative to the *Personal Study Guide/Leader Guide* model. Includes key words, commentary and questions for the group, daily Bible readings for personal study after the group time, and ideas for smaller groups to discuss the study. Leader helps with targeted teaching plans included in the back.

Personal Study Guide

Resource for the group members to help them prepare for and study during the group time.

Leader Guide

Resource for leaders of groups using the *Personal Study Guide*. Includes commentary and group teaching plans.

ADDITIONAL LEADER HELPS

Commentary

Provides additional insight into the passages studied.

QuickSource

Resource for leaders, providing additional discussion questions, an object lesson, and dig deeper feature. Also provides ease of use for an individual called on to step in and lead the group on short notice.

Leader Pack

Resource filled with posters, masters for informative handouts, and access to a digital leader pack (includes DOC files of the *Leader Guide* commentary, group plans, the pack items in PDF format, and other helps for the leader).



Find out more or order at goExploreTheBible.com

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

AUTHORSHIP

The Gospel of Mark is a concise account of the ministry, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While Mark's Gospel is technically anonymous, John Mark, a Jewish follower of Jesus, has long been given credit for writing it. While Mark was not one of the twelve apostles, his content had apostolic influence. Early tradition held that Mark obtained much of his information from Peter, who was a close friend as well as being an apostle. Peter even referred to Mark as "his son" in 1 Peter 5:13.

In addition to Peter's memory, Mark likely included his own experiences with Jesus. His mother, Mary, apparently opened her home for Christ-followers on several occasions. For example, many scholars believe Mark's family owned the upper room where Jesus shared His final meal with the disciples before His crucifixion. That also could explain how Mark, typically described as the young man who ran away naked (Mark 14:51-52), ended up in the garden of Gethsemane on the night of Jesus's arrest.

Mark likely wrote his Gospel from Rome to a primarily Gentile audience around the time of Peter's martyrdom. Scholars usually date this between AD 64-70. It is hard to pinpoint an exact date; however, Mark's attention to Peter's failures and ongoing Christian persecution under Emperor Nero during that period support that general timeframe.

Many view Mark as the first of the four Gospels. They believe both Matthew and Luke drew from Mark's Gospel for their writings. These three Gospels are known as the "Synoptics," a name taken from the Greek phrase meaning "seen together." It underscores the close connections that biblical scholars recognize between the books, suggesting that at least one of the Gospel writers relied on the others to some extent in shaping his own account of Jesus's life, ministry, death, and resurrection.

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

As noted, the Gospel of Mark was primarily written for Gentile Christians, possibly for his companions in the Roman church. Throughout the Gospel, he explained many Jewish customs that would have not been familiar to Gentiles living in Rome at that time.

Mark also translated numerous Aramaic words and phrases so his readers could understand them. In addition, Mark used several Latin terms rather than the Greek, likely as a way to help his Roman readers. He rarely quoted from the Old Testament because that would have been more compelling for Jews than for Gentiles.

While Mark's Gospel was written for Roman Gentiles, its purpose was clear in declaring Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. His opening statement affirmed that Jesus was God's Son, the Messiah. He also focused on the coming of God's kingdom, which carried messianic overtones.

Within the narrative of Jesus's ministry, Mark provided a message of salvation for anyone willing to repent and put their faith in Jesus. Many believers in Rome had already heard of the good news, including some who may have heard directly from Jesus during His time on earth. But Mark affirmed the message with a pastor's heart, challenging believers to apply the gospel to their daily lives. In that sense, Mark's Gospel focuses more on theology than on biography.

OCCASION

Mark's Gospel can be divided into three primary sections: Jesus's ministry around Galilee, His journey toward Jerusalem, and the Passion Week. Throughout Mark's narrative, he emphasized action. The frequent use of "immediately" or similar terms underscores movement as it jumps from one scene to another within the daily ministry of Jesus.

When compared to the other Gospels, Mark also drew attention to Jesus's perfect humanity and deity, highlighting His emotions as well as His miracles and teaching.

There is much debate on the Gospel of Mark's "longer ending" (16:9-20), which could be considered a fourth section. Questions about these verses have centered on the lack of continuity and a shift in writing style. Many scholars contend that the verses were likely added later by scribes as a way to complete the account with eyewitness accounts of post-resurrection appearances and Jesus's ascension. While it may not have been original to Mark, the content does correlate to material provided by other Gospel writers, meaning it is trustworthy.

MAJOR THEMES

Son of God/Son of Man: The phrase "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" provides strong affirmation for Jesus's full deity. Throughout Mark's Gospel, the Lord demonstrated His power in numerous ways. This would include His authority over creation (4:35-41; 6:45-52), demonic forces (5:1-20), and disease (5:21-43). He also displayed His power over death by raising people the dead (5:21-43) and by being raised from the dead Himself (16:1-14). Jesus also claimed deity through His right to forgive sin (2:1-12).

But Jesus also referred to Himself as the "Son of Man" (see Mark 2:10), a title that emphasizes His full humanity. But for ancient readers, especially those who knew the Old Testament Scriptures, that name would have meant so much more. The prophet Daniel used it in reference to the promised Messiah (Dan. 7:13).

Lordship: Each account of Jesus's acts demonstrates His lordship and authority. Jesus is Lord over Satan, as evident in His defeat of the accuser's temptations (1:12-13) and in casting out demons (5:1-20). Jesus is Lord over sickness as seen in His healing the

sick, whether it be a simple fever (1:29-31) or the terrifying trauma of leprosy (1:40-44). He showed Himself Lord over nature by calming storms and walking on water (4:35-41; 6:48-50). Jesus is Lord over the Sabbath and is the foundation and fulfillment of the law (2:23-28). Although Mark did not include many of Jesus's sermons and teachings, the power of Jesus's authoritative message captivated the crowds (1:22).

Discipleship: From the calling of His first disciples (1:14-20) and appointing the twelve apostles (3:13-19) to the commissioning of the church (6:7-12; 16:15), Jesus invested in the lives of the believers who would carry on His mission after His ascension. In His preaching, Jesus not only taught kingdom truths to the masses, but He also instructed committed followers by precept and example. On occasion, He had to rebuke the Twelve for their lack of faith (4:40), yet they grew in their understanding and their confidence in Him.

Suffering and Death: Mark talked about Jesus's suffering and death more than any other Gospel writer. Jesus prophesied His crucifixion and resurrection three times (8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34). Further, He sometimes asked individuals to keep His identity or His deeds a secret (1:34,44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36-37; 8:26,30; 9:9). These requests seem puzzling until we recall Jesus's focus on accomplishing His primary mission: dying for sin. He asked for secrecy so that His mission would not be hindered by those who wanted Him to behave only as a political deliverer (a kingly Messiah) or as a miracle-working prophet.

OUTLINE

- I. Prologue to the Gospel (Mark 1:1–13)
 - II. Jesus's Ministry in Galilee (Mark 1:14–8:21)
 - III. On the Way to Jerusalem (Mark 8:22–10:52)
 - IV. A Week in Jerusalem (Mark 11:1–16:8)
 - V. Appendix: Jesus's Appearances (Mark 16:9–20)
-

Introduced!

SESSION 1

Mark 1:1-13

Memory Verse: Mark 1:11

Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

Have you ever watched the inauguration of the President of the United States? Because of our access to television and other video resources, we're able to witness the fanfare associated with that important celebration. Jesus began His public ministry without the extraordinary displays of the affirmation afforded to presidents, kings, or other world leaders. He didn't make speeches or wear regal robes or a crown. However, His introduction turned out to be far from ordinary. An unequaled display of divine affirmation underscored the beginning of His public ministry.

As you begin this study on the Gospel of Mark, reflect on Jesus's identity, His baptism, and the heavenly affirmation that came with His introduction as the eternal Son of God. Ask God to reveal Himself to you in a special way in your preparation so you can point the adults in your group to Jesus through your words and actions.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

Scan here to gain insights about this week's study on Apple podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.



All your relationships have something in common. In one way or another, you were introduced to that person by someone, either another person or yourself. With family members who are older than you, it may be difficult to recall the exact moment of the introduction. Nevertheless, every relationship has some type of an introduction because each has a beginning point. Being introduced to someone has the capacity to change your life forever. (PSG, p. 10)

What introductions do you remember most clearly?

How did the introduction impact the nature of that relationship?



Understand the Context (Mark 1:1-13)

For centuries, the Jewish people had been longing for the Messiah's arrival. But since they were expecting a military leader who would free them from Roman rule, many missed the significance of Jesus once He burst onto the scene. Mark, an early follower of Jesus, provided what many believe is the first written account of His ministry and the monumental turning point His presence created in human history.

One signature element of Mark's writing style is his commitment to action, and the early chapters of his Gospel set that tone. Even in offering a brief introduction to John the Baptist and his ministry (1:1-8), Mark quickly emphasized the superiority of Jesus. And after setting that stage, he immediately set about focusing on the work and words of Jesus and how they validated Him as Messiah.

Foregoing information about Jesus's birth or childhood, Mark painted a picture of a Messiah on the move. His baptism (1:9-11) signified the beginning of His earthly work, followed quickly by a temptation in the wilderness (1:12-13).

Through these episodes, Mark showed that Jesus really was the Messiah. The baptism account revealed Jesus's special relationship with the Father, while the temptation demonstrated His dominion over the enemy. In each case, Jesus embraced His role as the One sent by God to redeem the world.

From those episodes, Jesus jumped into His ministry with both feet, preaching the good news of salvation (1:14-15) and calling disciples to follow Him (1:16-20). Throughout this first chapter—and

really his entire Gospel—Mark revealed Jesus as a “doer.” He focused on Jesus's message and His miracles, along with significant teachings. All of this led to the point where the messianic picture culminated: Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection in Mark's final chapters.

Mark's writing also highlighted the importance of following Jesus—not just physically, but also spiritually. As the Messiah, Jesus served as the bridge connecting God to humanity. Finding that new relationship with the Father required loyal and committed discipleship—a close following that produced a transformed life. So, the disciples were not just students learning at the feet of Jesus. They were also followers chosen to spread His message around the world.

After chapter 1, Mark continued providing evidence of Jesus as the Messiah. Through exorcisms (1:21-28), physical healings (1:29-45), and even a controversy surrounding the forgiveness of sins (2:1-12), Jesus demonstrated that He was the Messiah and that He was worthy of being followed.

As you read Mark 1:1-13, think about the role of John the Baptist. Why would his message make such an impact in first-century Israel? What can we take away from his example of pointing people to Jesus?



PRIOR TO THE SESSION: Conduct an online search to discover customs for meeting new people in various countries. (Examples: *Shaking hands, kissing on the cheek, touching noses, and so forth*)

ASK: **What is the most unusual way you have been introduced to someone?** Invite adults to discuss customs for making introductions. Share information from your research concerning ways in which various cultures introduce one another.

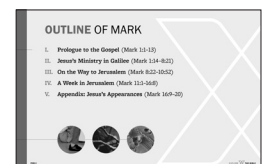
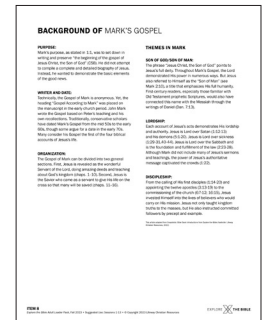
STATE: *Every culture has a way of making introductions because those initial connections mark the beginning point of a relationship.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud the paragraph under First Thoughts (PSG, p. 10) and discuss how introductions impact the nature of a relationship.

CONTEXTUALIZE: Use **Pack Item 8** (Handout: *Background of Mark's Gospel*), **Pack Item 7** (Handout: *Mark Time Line*), and **Pack Item 2** (Outline of Mark) to provide an overview of Mark's Gospel. Discuss Mark's identity, the date of his Gospel, its original audience, its purpose, and its major themes. Using Understand the Context (PSG, p. 11), emphasize that many scholars believe that Mark's Gospel was the first one written and that his audience primarily consisted of Gentile Christians.

TRANSITION: *Let's look closer at how Mark introduced Jesus to the initial readers of his Gospel.*

NOTES



Group Activity Option

Music

Play a recording of the song, "Beautiful Jesus," by Passion, Chidima, as adults arrive. You also can use it as the closing prayer. Invite listeners to reflect on the deity of Jesus. As they are listening, ask the group to consider what makes the name of Jesus so special. Encourage the group to keep their focus on the beautiful name of Jesus during the session and during the upcoming week.

Prophecy (Mark 1:1-3)

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. **2** As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. **3** A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight!

The Setting for Mark 1:1-13: Mark's Gospel is all about Jesus. From the very first verse, Mark let readers know that his narrative is about the gospel. While he didn't begin by sharing Jesus's birth, he did emphasize His earthly ministry. His writings were inspired by the preaching and teaching of Peter, with whom he was closely associated. Mark, also known as John Mark, was not an apostle, and his firsthand knowledge of Christ's ministry would have been limited. Peter's influence is evident in the way Mark wrote and the language that he used. Mark is also believed to be the first of the four Gospels written. These first thirteen verses include the prologue, the introduction of Jesus as God the Son, prophecies fulfilled through John the Baptist, and the beginning of Jesus's earthly ministry.

(v. 1) The beginning: Every great story has a beginning, and Mark began his Gospel with the introduction of the **gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God**. He didn't begin with Jesus's birth and early years, as Matthew and Luke did. Instead, he pointed readers toward **the beginning** of Jesus's earthly ministry. His first sentence is a declaration, a title page for the One being introduced: Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

There are three distinct "beginnings" in the Bible. Genesis 1:1 points us to the initiation of all creation. John's Gospel (1:1) emphasizes the pre-existence and deity of the Word (Jesus). And in Mark 1:1, readers find the beginning of the gospel, the opening act in the life and ministry of God's Son.

(v. 1) Gospel: The word **gospel** comes from the Greek "good news." Mark laid the foundation for what his Gospel was about—the good news that Jesus Christ would bring redemption and salvation for all humanity. The term originally meant any good news, but ultimately it came to represent the story of Christ's ministry and sacrifice as He provided salvation to the world.

(v. 1) Jesus Christ: The name **Jesus** comes from the Hebrew name "Joshua," which means "the Lord is salvation." The Greek word for **Christ** means "anointed" and corresponds to the Hebrew word "Messiah."

(v. 1) Son of God: Mark proclaimed the deity of Christ, affirming that Jesus is fully God and fully man. This is a recurring theme in his Gospel. He also included five additional situations where Jesus was identified as God's Son: His baptism, by demons, at the transfiguration, at His trial, and the centurion's confession. Each of these validate the truth that Jesus is the **Son of God**.



Son of God

Verse 1 of chapter 1 declares Jesus to be the Son of God. Learn more about Mark's use of the term "Son of God" in this Gospel.

(vv. 2-3) As it is written: Following the introduction of Jesus as the Son of God, Mark immediately pointed readers to two Old Testament prophecies: Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Both predict that God would send someone as a forerunner to the Messiah. This "someone" would prepare the way for Christ.

By quoting from these passages, Mark identified Jesus as Messiah and John as the **messenger** preparing the way. In ancient cultures, a royal official would announce a king's entrance into a village and make whatever arrangements were necessary. This included preparing the path for the king's entrance. Jesus was the ultimate King, and John the Baptist was the one **crying out in the wilderness**.

Mark's reference to these two prophecies was important to his message because they affirmed that Jesus's coming was part of God's plan all along. The ancient prophets had predicted the Messiah's arrival and the coming of His forerunner hundreds of years earlier.

EXPLORE Mark 1:1-3

1



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can know with confidence that Jesus is the Messiah.

- READ:** Invite a volunteer to read Mark 1:1-3. Direct adults to work in pairs to identify key words or phrases. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to report on their conversations. Lead a brief discussion on what they chose and why those words and phrases seemed significant.
- OUTLINE:** Using Explore the Text (PSG, p. 12), highlight the significance of these words: “beginning” (the starting point of Jesus’s work); “gospel” (good news, used by the Romans to describe a great announcement); and “Son of God” (emphasizes Christ’s deity).
- EXPLAIN:** *Mark did not mince words in establishing the gospel. A great event took place when the Messiah, the Son of God, came to earth.*
- ASK:** **If Mark’s audience was primarily Gentile, why did he refer to an Old Testament prophecy to introduce John the Baptist?**
- DISCUSS:** Point out that while Mark’s original readers weren’t Jewish, seeing Jesus as the promised Messiah could bolster their faith and help them embrace Him as the Savior of the world.

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 13). Invite volunteers to read the passages and discuss what these passages teach about John the Baptist as he prepared the way for the Lord.

Prepared (Mark 1:4-8)

4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. **6** John wore a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. **7** He proclaimed, “One who is more powerful than I am is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. **8** I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

(v. 4) In the wilderness: Mark emphasized that John’s ministry took place in the **wilderness**. The wilderness is often a reference to the Israelites’ four decades of desert wandering. It also pointed readers to God’s redemption that ultimately led His people out of the wilderness. John was known for his baptisms. While many religious leaders practiced baptism, few baptized as John did, fully immersing individuals under the water.

(v. 4) Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins: For most Jews, baptisms were just ceremonial washings, the ritual *mikvah* baths. These washings served as a public confession that they needed to get right with God. Gentiles who wished to adopt Judaism also went through a ceremonial cleansing. This one-time event symbolized their rejection of pagan practices and their acceptance of the “true” faith.

John baptized far away from the ritualistic practices of the temple. His baptisms were not focused on keeping the traditions, but the need for **repentance**—an individual’s complete turn from an old lifestyle to a new commitment. Mark used *metanoia*, indicating a change of mind or a conversion.

John’s baptism also focused on the need for **forgiveness** and personal preparation for the One who was coming. The Messiah would be baptizing with the Holy Spirit rather than water. Those who were baptized gave evidence of a changed life, but the baptism to come would carry the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

(v. 5) The whole Judean countryside: John was preaching something different than what the first-century Jews had been hearing. As a result, he created a great deal of excitement throughout the region. He provided the kind of message of hope and truth that the religious leaders of the day were not preaching. John’s preaching created so much excitement that it had people talking across the region. Great numbers were flocking to the countryside to hear him preach.

This would not have been an easy trip since the **Jordan River** is more than twenty miles from Jerusalem, including a descent of around 4,000 feet. Those who traveled to hear him were committed to hearing what he had to say. **Going out** suggests that people were continually coming. While some may have been motivated by “the show,” the majority were intent on hearing a new message after centuries of silence.

(v. 6) Camel-hair garment: While one might imagine **John** as a crazy man because he dressed in camel hair and ate strange things. But he wasn’t. In all likelihood, he was dressed like the prophets from the Old Testament. For example, Elijah dressed in a similar fashion. He was even likened to Elijah, who was expected to return before the day of the Lord and call the nation to repentance. While John’s personality was different from Elijah, his message was the same. In addition, the **locusts** he ate were considered a kosher food, and he could have harvested **honey** from local bees.

(v. 7) I am not worthy: John consistently placed his emphasis on Jesus, not on himself. While many religious leaders of the day built themselves up in the eyes of the people, John did just the opposite. Tying or untying the laces on sandals would have been a servant’s job. Rabbis taught that a master or teacher could ask their servant or pupil to do just about anything except tying or untying shoes. John indicated that he was not even worthy to perform this humblest act of service for the Messiah.

(v. 8) Baptize you with the Holy Spirit: While John was baptizing with water, he pointed toward a day when the Messiah would pour out His Spirit on His followers. John’s baptism was for the body, while Christ’s is for the soul. Rather than a post-conversion experience, John was describing the forgiveness and empowerment that the Spirit provides at the moment of salvation.

EXPLORE Mark 1:4-8

2



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can point others to Jesus as the Son of God.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Mark 1:4-8.

SUMMARIZE: Direct the group to briefly restate Mark's description of John.

ASK: **What was the focus of John's message?**

EXPLAIN: *John's message emphasized the coming Messiah. He never described himself or what he had to offer anyone. John was humble about his ministry. He only mentioned the One who was coming after him. The focus of his ministry was on Jesus, the Messiah.*

ASK: **How did John's message set the stage for the earthly ministry of Jesus?** (PSG, p. 15)

TRANSITION: *Mark did not provide a lot of extra details in his Gospel, so each verse is full of important information. After a brief description of John's ministry, Mark introduced Jesus's earthly ministry.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson

Secure a jar of honey and a jar of bugs. (*Note: Jars of bugs can often be found in the hunting/fishing departments of sports/outdoor retailers.*) Invite a volunteer to read Mark 1:6. Ask: **Why do you think John wore non-traditional clothing and ate locusts and honey?** Share that John likely could have been making a statement against the materialism of his day, but he was certainly identifying with the prophets of the Old Testament. Suggest that he wanted people to focus solely on his message of repentance. Ask: **How do our lifestyle choices point people toward the message of Christ or away from the message of Christ?**

Baptized (Mark 1:9-13)

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. **10** As soon as he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. **11** And a voice came from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased.” **12** Immediately the Spirit drove him into the wilderness. **13** He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels were serving him.

(v. 9) *Jesus came from Nazareth:* Mark followed John’s comments about the One who is greater with the statement that **Jesus came from Nazareth**. While the writer didn’t go into detail about Jesus’s life prior to this moment, we know that Jesus spent his early years in Nazareth. It was a tiny town, known primarily for the Roman army guard that was stationed there.

Key Doctrine

God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. (See Mark 3:11; John 1:1-3.)



The Greek Orthodox Church of John the Baptist is located at Bethany Beyond the Jordan. It marks the location where, according to tradition, Jesus was baptized.

(v. 9) *The Jordan:* Jesus would have traveled around fifty miles from Nazareth to reach the Jordan River. While we don’t know the exact location of Jesus’s baptism, we can speculate that John would have been preaching near a crossroads people would have used. It is also interesting to note that the **Jordan** was not used for purification purposes according to the Mishnah (an early record of rabbinic traditions).

Jesus didn’t have to be **baptized** for repentance because He was completely sinless. Instead, He chose to be baptized out of obedience to the will of His Father (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18).

(v. 10) *As soon as:* The Greek word *euthus* generally means “suddenly” or “next.” Mark used this word more than forty times in his Gospel. It emphasizes a sense of urgency throughout his Gospel.

(v. 10) *Being torn open:* Immediately after Jesus’s baptism, three things happened. First, the heavens opened. In Isaiah 64:1 the prophet announced that God would rend the heavens. Isaiah’s prayer was that God would come down and reside with humanity. God had answered Isaiah’s prayer through Jesus.

Next, the Holy Spirit descended **like a dove**. It is important to understand that the Spirit didn’t just rest on Jesus. He empowered everything Jesus did in His ministry and life.

(v. 11) *My beloved Son:* In Mark’s opening verse, he declared that Jesus was the Son of God. Here, he added that God was **well-pleased** with Jesus’s faithfulness. This was the first time that God had spoken audibly to His people in at least 400 years, and He left no doubt that Jesus was co-equal to Him. The presence of the Father, Son, and Spirit means each member of the Trinity participated in this event.

(v. 12) *Drove him:* The same **Spirit** who had just descended on Jesus now **drove** Him into the wilderness. The wording is strong here, indicating that the Spirit was insistent that Jesus go. Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, obeyed.

(v. 13) *Forty days:* The number appears throughout Scripture, including the accounts of Noah (Gen. 7:11-12), Israel (Num. 32:13), Moses (Ex. 24:18), and Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-8). For more details about Jesus’s temptation, see Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13.

(v. 13) *With the wild animals:* Mark is the only Gospel writer to mention the **wild animals**. While animals would have been common in the desert, the Greek wording suggests Jesus was not afraid of them, but that He was exerting authority over them.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers find joy in acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Mark 1:9-13, as the rest of the group listens for details Mark shared about Jesus. (*Possible answers: Came from Nazareth in Galilee, baptized in the Jordan by John, and so forth*)

ASK:

What was different about Jesus's baptism than John's other baptisms? Why is that important for us to understand?

EXPLAIN:

Draw attention to the fact that Mark said Jesus came up out of the water, which describes a baptism by immersion. Emphasize that baptism is not required for salvation, but it serves as an act of obedience, an outward symbol of inward devotion to Christ. Encourage a few volunteers to share what they remember about their baptisms. Share that you are available to talk with any adult who has questions about being baptized.

DISCUSS:

Read verses 10-11 again aloud. Point out that this is a time when all three members of the Trinity were revealed in Scripture. Ask: **What was God the Father's response to Jesus's baptism?** Affirm that the Father took pleasure in the Son's baptism. Note that this was another way Mark validated Jesus's claim as Messiah and Savior.

DESCRIBE:

Use information from page 17 of the PSG to explain the nature of Jesus's temptation. Point out that we are often most vulnerable to temptation after a close experience with God. Emphasize that Jesus withstood Satan's temptations perfectly.

Group Activity Option

Pray

Invite a volunteer to read Mark 1:11. Highlight God's declaration of approval for Jesus. Encourage the group to silently contemplate God's approval of us through the finished work of Jesus Christ. Remind them that through Jesus we are adopted into God's family as His beloved children. Ask: **Do you believe that God delights in you?** Allow the group to meditate for a few moments on the truth that God delights in His children. Affirm that God delights in each person in the group specifically.

CHALLENGE

- SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from Apply the Text on page 18 of the Personal Study Guide:
- *Believers can know with confidence that Jesus is the Messiah.*
 - *Believers can point others to Jesus as the Son of God.*
 - *Believers find joy in acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God.*
- ASK:** **In what ways does believing in Jesus as the Son of God bring joy to your life?**
- DISCUSS:** Lead the group to discuss the last reflection question related to identifying the characteristics of John on page 18 of the PSG. Give every adult an index card and direct them to write down one way they could incorporate one of these characteristics into their lives this week.
- PRAY:** Close in prayer, asking God to help you keep your focus on Jesus this week.

After the Session

Reinforce the session by reflecting on how knowing Jesus as Messiah brings joy to your life. Contact the group by email or text, encouraging them to express their joy in Jesus this week.

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