

WEEK ONE

MARK 1-3

DAY ONE

*Nothing less than life in the steps of Christ is adequate
to the human soul or the needs of our world.*

— Dallas Willard

As we grow in this world, we are consistently taught that being a leader is far superior than being a follower. We want to be the influencers, the innovators, and the out-shiners. We often associate the concept of being a follower with passivity. We “follow” social media feeds, tapping thumbs up and heart-shaped icons from behind the distant safety of our screens.

As we begin this journey through the gospel of Mark, we see Jesus providing the perfect example of what it means to be a true follower in the way that he models what an authentic relationship with God looks like. The entire course of Jesus’ life was shaped by his relationship with God. He committed himself to do whatever God asked, no matter the cost. He maintained such a deep connection to and firm trust in God that his every thought, word, and action was an exact representation of the heart of God.

A small letter in the New Testament describes Jesus this way: “[Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Philippians 2:6-7).

Jesus was both fully human and fully God. He leads in uncharacteristic and unexpected ways. In the chapters that follow, we will see him take time to look into the eyes of the marginalized and forgotten, avoid fame and the spotlight, and demonstrate a life lived in selfless, sacrificial service to those around him. Jesus is unlike anyone the world has ever known.

READ

Read Mark 1

Mark 1

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

¹ The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way”—

³ “a voice of one calling in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”

⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

The Baptism and Testing of Jesus

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Jesus Announces the Good News

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Jesus Drives Out an Impure Spirit

²¹ They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are — the Holy One of God!”

²⁵ “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” ²⁶ The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching — and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Jesus Heals Many

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Jesus Prays in a Solitary Place

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”

³⁸ Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy

⁴⁰ A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”

⁴¹ Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

⁴³ Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ⁴⁴ “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” ⁴⁵ Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

REFLECT

1 In this short chapter, we see Jesus doing a lot — he endures a time of temptation, he invites people to follow him, and he heals people with various illnesses and conditions. Which of these three actions of Jesus stands out most to me today? Why?

PRAY

This chapter shows us that Jesus has authority over the trials that we face and the future that we can't see because he is the author/creator of everything. As Christians, we have access to the supernatural power of Jesus to face whatever lies ahead. Spend some time in prayer today, asking God to give you the strength to endure difficulty, to move forward into uncertainty, or for physical/emotional/spiritual healing in your life.

DAY TWO

The gospel says the humble are in and the proud are out.

— Timothy Keller

In Mark 2, we are introduced to the scribes and Pharisees, the most devoted religious group of Jesus' day. They were deeply devoted to ensuring that the Jewish people followed God's laws, but instead of using their position to reveal God's grace and show his love, they used their traditions to draw lines and make judgments. They were doing all the right things, but with the wrong motives.

Of all the groups of people with which Jesus interacts during his life, he is the most bold and confrontational with these religious leaders. Time and again, Jesus will be shockingly direct with them in an attempt to shake them out of their flawed beliefs. These encounters illustrate a very powerful reality — that the seemingly super religious rule followers were just as lost as the irreligious sinners. And they couldn't see it.

Jesus came to earth not to establish a new religion but to engage in a rescue mission. Many of the Jewish religious leaders were so caught up in criticizing the actions of others that they couldn't acknowledge their need for a Rescuer. We can only enter a relationship with Jesus by acknowledging the truth that we need him. Jesus says, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17).

READ

Read Mark 2

Mark 2

Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man

2 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ² They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³ Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴ Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷ "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

⁸ Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? ⁹ Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk?' ¹⁰ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, ¹¹ "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ¹² He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Jesus Calls Levi and Eats With Sinners

¹³ Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. ¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

¹⁵ While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Many of us live with this nagging, persistent sense that no matter how hard we try, we'll never be good enough. This leaves us feeling burdened with the need to work hard to prove to ourselves and others that we are competent, intelligent, worthy, and valuable. And yet, Jesus doesn't seem to approach his life this way. Instead, he easily hands off opportunities for teaching and leadership to his disciples.

In Jesus, we see what it looks like to live a life free from the pressure to strive for significance. He came to put an end to our need to perform in order to earn acceptance and love. Jesus died not only to save us from our sin, but to secure our permanent acceptance in God's sight. While we still work hard, we no longer allow our accomplishments to have the final say about who we are. This in turn releases us to cheer on the successes of others as we do our own.

READ

Read Mark 3

Mark 3

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

3 Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. ² Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. ³ Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

⁴ Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

⁵ He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. ⁶ Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

Crowds Follow Jesus

⁷ Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. ⁸ When they heard about all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. ⁹ Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. ¹⁰ For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. ¹¹ Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." ¹² But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

Jesus Appoints the Twelve

¹³ Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴ He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and to have authority to drive out demons. ¹⁶ These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), ¹⁷ James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder"), ¹⁸ Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Jesus Accused by His Family and by Teachers of the Law

²⁰ Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

²² And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

²³ So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. ²⁷ In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin."

³⁰ He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit."

³¹ Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

**A DEEPER LOOK
BLASPHEMY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

“Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.”
— Mark 3:28-29

These are some of the most confusing words ever spoken by Jesus, and perhaps by anyone in the entire Bible. Even the words themselves — blasphemy of the Holy Spirit — make no sense to the majority of people who read them. And yet, Jesus says that whoever commits this sin will never be forgiven. These are some pretty harsh words. If we don’t really know what it means to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, how can we be sure that we’re not doing it? It can be scary to think that we could be committing some kind of mystery sin that will keep us out of heaven someday.

The term blasphemy means to speak disrespectfully about God. Most Bible scholars agree that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit means to see the work of God and attribute it to something evil. And when we look at the conversation between Jesus and the scribes in Mark 3, this is exactly what is happening. When they look at the miraculous things Jesus has accomplished, they claim that his power to heal and cast out demons is the result of him being possessed by an evil spirit himself.

In his commentary on the book of Mark, Donald English explains that “their sin is that, in the presence of God’s grace in action, they have not only rejected it but ascribed it to the devil.”

What about the idea that this sin is unforgivable? Most of us have heard that there is absolutely nothing that we could do that could ever be beyond the reach of God’s forgiveness. And yet, Jesus pronounces that those who commit this particular sin will never be forgiven.

Again, it is important to look at the context surrounding this conversation. Jesus is speaking with trained religious leaders, not the general public. They were seen in the community as professionals who understood the work of God and were charged with the task of teaching it to others. And yet, they looked at the light of Jesus and were fully convinced it was darkness. For people in this position, their hatred of and opposition toward God is so strong, that they would never even ask for forgiveness. Donald English writes, “there is no forgiveness here because such an attitude is incapable of seeking it.”

The whole of Scripture points to the truth that anyone who genuinely expresses a desire to turn away from their sin will receive forgiveness. But, those whose hearts are so hard and firmly set against the things of God that they wouldn’t be able to see God at work even if he appeared right before their eyes and they are very unlikely to approach God for forgiveness — especially when they also claim to be God’s representatives.

MESSAGE NOTES (OCTOBER 14/15):

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