



Community Group Study Notes  
January 2017

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# OUR CHURCH VISION

TO SEE LIVES TRANSFORMED BY JESUS CHRIST IN THE OKANAGAN VALLEY

## READ THIS FIRST

Thank you for your help in leading our community groups. We don't know what we would do without you :)

PLEASE:

- Read through this entire document - it will be very helpful for you as you prepare.
- Refresh your memory as to what the vision of CG's are. It's vital we are all on the same page.
- Bring this with you on Sunday and make supplementary notes from the sermon - it will help!
- Make copies for anyone else who is leading.

## WHAT IS A COMMUNITY GROUP?

A Community Group is a group of (ideally) 8–15 people who live life together on mission. Every Community Group meets regularly throughout the week to unpack and apply God's Word to their lives, pray, and simply do ordinary life together with gospel intentionality.

A Community Group is the intentional organizing of the scattered church, the people of WPC. This means that we define what a Community Group is and does according to how God defines what His Church is and does. Therefore, the best way to understand a Community Group is to understand a biblical, gospel-centred definition of the Church.

# FOUR COMPONENTS OF A HEALTHY COMMUNITY GROUP

## 1. DEVOTED TO THE WORD AND PRAYER

Community Groups are more than Bible studies, but the Scriptures are central to our life together. What we study in Scripture leads us to worship Jesus, to love one another, and to live missionally. Prayer is a gift from God to us. It is an opportunity to communicate with the Creator of the universe. We have the ability to praise Him, confess our sin, ask for His provision and listen for His response. Our Community Groups should be marked by a praying culture.

## 2. DEVOTED TO MISSION

Mission among those who are yet to come to Jesus often looks like simple acts of engagement and service within our neighbourhoods for the glory of Jesus and the advancement of God's Kingdom. This is the outward focus of your group: to love people and share the truth of the gospel through the witness of your life together. This should be a consistent focus of your Community Group in both prayer and action.

## 3. DEVOTED TO COMMUNITY

Community Groups are places where we can know others and in turn allow ourselves to truly be known. In our devotion to pursuing community as a church family, we will grow more like Jesus.

## 4. DEVOTED TO REPLICATING

God has tasked His Church with the job of discipleship, which means multiplication. We believe that if the previous three components are put in place and faithfully followed out, our Community Groups will grow fruitfully. But we aren't merely talking about numerical growth; we are talking about growth in depth in the life of each disciple. When individual Community Groups grow in number, we have the need to start new ones - which we love to do!

# LEADERS GUIDE

In preparation for each study, take a few moments to read through the instructions below and LISTEN TO THE MESSAGE ONLINE AND TAKE SOME NOTES. The message can be found online at [willowparkchurch.com](http://willowparkchurch.com)

## Before the Group Meeting

- Take notes from the message connected to the CG session and work through how you might answer them. Make special note of any extra scriptures that you may want to refer to in your group.
- Spend time in prayer asking God to help you as you lead.
- Think through ways you can help your group apply what is being taught instead of simply knowing what's been taught. Write down two or three ideas that might be helpful.
- Encourage your attendees to read their bibles and the corresponding weekly chapters so they may come prepared and have insight to contribute to the conversation.
- Ask the Lord to move powerfully in the personal lives of each CG member and also in your time together.

## At the Group Meeting

- Begin with prayer.
- Summarize the week's sermon in a few quick thoughts for those who may have missed it.
- Encourage your group to contribute to the conversation and to see that participation is the key to growing, learning and staying engaged.
- Be sensitive to the flow of the conversation and keep it moving in a healthy direction.
- Encourage your group to read, study, meditate on the Scriptures and be sensitive to what the Holy Spirit might be trying to teach them.
- End in a time of prayer. Ask God to strengthen you to obedience, increasing your depth of life, experience and enjoyment of Him as you journey through the Gospel of Mark together.

# BACKGROUND TO THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Mark takes the church through a simple, yet clearly expressed account of Jesus' ministry, emphasizing more of what Jesus did than what he said. His entire ministry (miracles, fellowship with sinners, choice of disciples, teaching on the kingdom of God, etc.) is centered in and around servanthood and love, climaxed in the Cross and Resurrection.

Mark emphasizes the authority and the passion of Jesus so that it becomes the gauge by which the whole of Jesus' ministry and the ministry of His disciples may be measured. We too are invited into this lifestyle as we study the life of Jesus and desire to model our lives after Him.

Further, Mark shows us Jesus – moving, serving, sacrificing, and saving. And as we study the very pages of the Gospel of Mark, we prepare our hearts for action to go into our pockets of the world, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and serve those around us with the same selfless love as Jesus.

*Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?"* **Mark 8:34-37** (NLT)

*"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."* **Mark 10:45** (NLT).

## A SPECIAL NOTE TO LEADERS

Attendees are entering your community group from different seasons, circumstances, ages and stages of life. And they are most certainly at different points in their journeys with God.

Because of this, they will inevitably see Jesus differently, hear the Holy Spirit in uniquely different ways, underline different passages of scripture, and apply scripture to their lives in a vast array of ways. When these differences are embraced in an open and honest atmosphere, a wholistic approach to scripture dialogue can be shared and people remain engaged.

**This is an important part of your position - to encourage healthy dialogue and respectful conversation.**

With that said, we would like to approach the Gospel of Mark in a manner and style of collective conversation. Meaning, start with one or two specific passages of scripture that resonated with people throughout their week, and let the conversation flow. Use the questions below as a starting point, but base the flow of the gathering on the Holy Spirit and where He's leading the conversation.

- **How did the chapter speak to you?**
- **What insights did you learn?**
- **Did other scriptures come to mind as you read the chapter?**
- **How might you apply what you learned to your day-to-day life?**
- **Mostly, what is the Holy Spirit revealing to you as you read about the life of Jesus?**

We know this style is a little different from our traditional, "Here are five questions about the passage," but we want to make sure we give ample opportunity for open and honest conversation, scripture-sharing and prayer time, through the participation of these shared thoughts, experiences and questions.

**PLEASE NOTE** - We will be adding a new chapter for study into this document each week.

Thank you once again for stepping up to facilitate. We couldn't do this without you and we appreciate your willingness to serve in this capacity.

**In Him,**

**The CG Prep Team**

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - CHAPTER 1

## Story 1.

Her name is Sheila: a thinker, boundary pusher, loner and doer. Last week when asked, *“Sheila, can you remember anything in particular about Mark chapter 1?”* *“Most certainly,”* she said. *“Great! What stands out to you?”*

Sheila’s response went a little something like this.

*“I love the part when Jesus calls the disciples and they follow. I forget which verse it is, but every time I read that verse I ask myself this question: “Sheila, are you as eager to follow Jesus in the same way His disciples were, or do you hesitate to obey?””*

## Story 2.

Chris. A logician by nature, a guy admittedly on a deep faith journey, and someone wrestling with how the Bible is asking Him to live verses how He’s actually living. Do they align?

His response, equally interesting but different from Sheila’s, was as follows:

*“The part that sticks out to me is how Jesus was introverted. He slinked off alone, without telling anyone, so He could pray. When Simon came and said, ‘Everyone is looking for you,’ they immediately left for nearby villages. He didn’t go to Jerusalem, a.k.a. LA or New York, or some other high profile place, He laid low.*

*This sticks out to me because it tells me Jesus wasn’t interested in big crowds or numbers – which is so different than from what our culture is obsessed with. It challenges me to check my own heart to truthfully ask what I’m most concerned with.”*

## Story 3. The sermon.

Last Sunday our pastors talked about the authority of Jesus, John the Baptist, where Jesus found His identity, how He handled temptation, His involvement with people, and the





# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - CHAPTER 2

1. Did anything specific about the sermon stand out to you this past week?

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2. Did anything resonate specifically as you read through Mark two on your own time?

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3. Like the Pharisees, we all follow a particular philosophy that influences every area of our lives. We may be fully aware of this influence, or it may be subconsciously dictating every decision, thought, action, business approach, parenting method, etc, without us even realizing how deeply influencing it really is.

Our pastors posed a great question this past Sunday, and it's a question we should each ask the Holy Spirit to truthfully reveal to our own hearts: **which lens do you see life through?**

- Religion?
- Secularism?
- The Gospel?

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In seeing life through this lens, do you have true peace or do you constantly find yourself stressed out, hurried, and caught up with the fast pace of culture?

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How do the following passages of scripture inspire you to live? **Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:29; Galatians 5:22-23**

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**4.** When you read passages of scripture such as **Mark 2:6-7; 16-17; Matthew 5:20; 23:1-36; Luke 6:2;** and **7:36-47**, do you see your own behavior reflected in the behaviors of the Pharisees? How so?

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**5.** God created the Sabbath for our benefit; we are restored both physically and spiritually when we take time to rest and focus on God. For the Pharisees, Sabbath rules had become more important than Sabbath rest - much like the culture of our day.

Do you regularly take time to rest and reflect on God, or is every moment of your days, weeks and months filled up with activities, appointments and commitments? Do you feel this is the way Christ calls you to live when you take time to reflect on **Matthew 11:28-30**?

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**6. Psalm 55:6** says, *“Oh, that I had wings like a dove; then I would fly away and rest!”* How do you personally carve out time to rest, recharge and connect with God?

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - CHAPTER 3

Three b's were mentioned in the sermon that are extremely relevant to our culture today:

**busyness, betrayal and blaspheme.** The pastors spoke of how Jesus handled such things, but have you paused to consider how *you* handle such things? **Do your actions align with the way Jesus lived and the manner in which He confronted such challenges, or does your lifestyle resemble culture way more than you care to admit?**

Let's camp out here to discuss...

**1. Busyness** - the state of continual activity; to always be on the go.

Twenty-four-hours-in-a-day never feels like enough, am I right? Amid maintaining an active lifestyle, picking up kids from school, keeping the car insurance current, meetings, meetings and more meetings, we can easily lose touch with what is really important. We become like robots rapidly moving from one task to the next. We are overworked, overstressed, and spiritually undernourished. **But as Christians, we cannot allow ourselves to be swept up with the undercurrents of the cultural stopwatch.**

Consider **Romans 12:2; Mark 6:31; Luke 10:38-42; Philippians 4:6-7; Isaiah 55:6.** Regarding busyness, what truths do these passages speak?

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**2. Betrayal** - the action of disloyalty and unfaithfulness towards someone or something.

It's easy to follow Jesus when life is good. Who wouldn't say "amen" to that? Faith is comfortable when life is running smooth and everything is going according to plan. But when

we're *not* getting the things we want, or when the road is hard, confusing and bumpy, what does our faith look like *then*?

When reading **Mark 3:16-18**, it's far more comfortable to imagine ourselves as one of the disciples with a *good* recorded description. But let's be honest, who of us *hasn't* resembled **verse 19** from time-to-time? There's a little Judas in all of us.

Ponder this: **do you love God for Who He is, or do you love, serve and follow Him only for the things He does for you and for what you get out of Him?**

Read **Luke 9:23-24; Matthew 27:3-4; Mark 11:25; Matthew 7:12**. What does betrayal look like in these scriptures? Then read **Luke 22:54-62** and ask yourself, "*Do I see myself in Peter?*"

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**3. Blaspheme** - to speak irreverent about God and sacred things.

**Imagine this:** you are tired of the Holy Spirit convicting you of a particular sin. You know it would be far more comfortable to ignore these promptings just so you can move forward with your life in ease and comfort, so you slowly begin building a theoretical brick wall to block out these convictions. Each brick is represented by a singular time you reject His convictions. As you continue to reject Him, His "voice" gets quieter and quieter, and eventually you no longer hear Him at all. Once your back is turned, you effectively block out all repentance and the promptings of God in your life.

Blaspheme is a word that could easily make one think, "I've never spoken irreverently towards God, nor *will* I ever." But blaspheme is well disguised in our day-to-day lives.

Consider what our pastors spoke about on Sunday. *To sin against the Holy Spirit looks like this:*

- *Dismissing Jesus and His power*
- *Not submitting to Jesus*
- *Rejecting Jesus and His work*

Every time we dismiss His promptings and His power in our lives by our unwillingness to listen, repent and follow, we commit blasphemy. Every time we misrepresent our position as His followers and damage His reputation, we commit blasphemy. And every time we do or say something that gives others a false representation of His glory, holiness, authority, and character, we commit blasphemy. Ouch.

**Questions to consider:** do you have any brick walls in your life that need to be removed? Have you been pushing promptings away? Have you been unwittingly blaspheming the Holy Spirit? Consider these gracious passages of scripture: **1 John 1:9; Acts 3:19; Romans 2:4.**

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Last but not least...

**4.** Did anything specific resonate with you this week as you read through Mark three, or as you listened to the sermon?

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# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - CHAPTER 4

**Mark 4:9** - *Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."*

To truly "hear" Jesus' words is to believe them, apply them, and use them as guidance in your life as you actively live them out. To "hear" Him is to make Him the loudest voice in your life.

To begin this week's discussion, take a few minutes to ponder the three different levels of listening our pastors mentioned on Sunday that pertain to our relationship with God:

- **Level 1** - semi listening, distracted with other things
- **Level 2** - listening to speak, not listening to hear, learn and grow
- **Level 3** - leaning in to carefully and actively listen and engage

**1.** If you were holding a mirror up to your heart, what level of listening would your mirror honestly reflect? Discuss **Proverbs 4:23**, **Jeremiah 17:9-10** and **Proverbs 27:19**.

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**2.** As you spent time this week reading through **Mark 4**, was there anything in particular that stood out to you about *The Parable of the Four Soils* (Mark 4:1-9)? **Take time to share.**

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**The four soils represent four different ways people respond to God's message.** For example, you may be open to hearing God speak to you about your career, but closed to hearing Him speak to you about how you spend your money. You may respond like good soil to God's design for your family, but be completely unresponsive to hearing Him speak about your neighbors. **Consider the different soil types.**

- i. **A Hard Heart** - *The Word has no importance at all / you run away from it - vs. 15*
- ii. **A Rocky Heart** - *The Word can't take root in your shallow life / you deny it's power - vs. 16*
- iii. **A Choked Heart** - *The Word is overwhelmed by your life weeds / you are distracted with too many other things - vs's. 18-19*

**3. In what ways do we generally represent these three types of soil?**

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**Now take a few minutes to personally reflect.**

As He speaks to you specifically and you listen, consider which soil type/s is/are being reflected in your various positions and circumstances in life. Note: if people are ready and willing to share, feel free to discuss. But there is no pressure to share something you aren't ready to share.

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**Now consider the good soil...**

iv. **A Good Heart** - *The Word takes root and grows from a foundation of humility, teachability, surrender and repentance / you are soft towards learning and have a strong desire to grow in Godly ways* - **vs. 20**

**4.** What are some practices we can implement to ensure we are consistently maintaining good soil in our lives? **Discuss.** Then read: **1 Timothy 4:13; Psalm 119:18; Lamentations 3:40; James 5:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Psalm 95:6; Hebrews 10:25; John 10:14.**

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**5.** To close your time together, consider spending a few minutes in prayer as you ask God to reveal **what seeds you need to be more intentional about planting** in your life, and **what weeds you need to be more intentional about uprooting.**

Use the space below to write out areas He reveals to you this coming week.

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# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - CHAPTER 5

Jesus demonstrated supernatural power in **Mark 5** - from the healing of a man with evil spirits, to the restoration of both a sick woman and a fallen girl. **But He also displayed supernatural compassion.**

His love for the demon-possessed man (1-13), the unclean woman (24-34), and the family in their state of utter brokenness (21-23; 35-43), shows us the deep compassion He has for each of us in our times of need.

It's through this love, compassion and supernatural authority that we find the basis for our belief. **It's the foundation that compels our faith.**

**1.** First, did anything specific from the sermon stand out to you this past week?

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**2.** Did anything resonate as you read through **Mark 5** in your own time?

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**3.** Consider the **three types of faith** our pastors mentioned on Sunday.

- Faith that chases - *to pursue; to try and make contact with.*
- Faith that calls - *to cry out or act in a way that calls attention.*
- Faith that conquers - *to climb or successfully ascend.*

i. **Faith that chases** means your faith is not passive. Action is required.

Read through the following passages of scripture and ask yourself the questions listed below:

**Mark 5:21; James 1:23-25; 2 Kings 5:9-14.**

- Where do I want/need to see change happen?
- What is the miracle I desire?
- Is there something Christ is asking me to do/give up out of surrender or obedience so I can position myself to expect and receive a miracle?
- How might “faith that chases” look in my life?

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ii. **Faith that calls** means there’s a sense of urgency and desperation to your summons. You pray earnestly and with concentrated effort, not because God is a genie in a bottle or that faith is a game, but because focus and intentionality become the bedrock for a teachable spirit and an engaged heart.

Consider these scriptures: **Mark 5:23; 1 Samuel 1:10-18; Psalm 71; Jonah 2.** What can you learn? Can you truthfully say you are *earnestly* seeking His revelation in your life?

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iii. **Faith that conquers** means you refuse to give up. Even when there are delays, major setbacks, or continual obstacles in your way, “conquering” means you stay the course.

Consider the following passages of scripture: **Ephesians 6:10-18; Hebrews 12:1-3; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.** Discuss.

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----- **Faith that chases, calls and conquers sees change happen** -----

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - CHAPTER 6

In today's individualistic society, where feelings and independence are encouraged - *what works for me might not work for you, it's my right to live this way, I can get far more done if I go it alone, I need to do what's best for me, I deserve this, it feels right, etc.* - the enemy gains the upper hand by leading us to believe we are all alone is what we're feeling, experiencing, and in the struggles we're facing. His agenda is to isolate us in our sin, and his greatest joy is when he can get us to believe that no one else is dealing with something so ugly, and no one else could possibly understand what we're going through. **But these are lies.**

**Mark 6:7** speaks to this perfectly: **“Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.”**

1. Individually the disciples could have covered more ground and accomplished greater mission if they had split up to reach more areas of the country, **but this was not Christ's plan.** He knew there would be greater power in pairs... in doing life together... in partaking in accountability... in dwelling in community. This is how sin is exposed and light breaks through.

**Two by two gives us authority over that which is impure.**

**Consider “two by two” through the lens of scripture.**

- To strengthen and encourage one another - **Hebrews 10:24-25**
- To provide comfort when the road gets tough - **1 Corinthians 12:26**
- To offer discernment and accountability - **Galatians 6:1-6**
- To stir one another towards action rather than idleness - **1 Thessalonians 5:11-15**
- To align with Christ's plan for His followers - **Matthew 18:20; Acts 2:42-47**
- To show the world His love - **John 13:34-35**
- To know the Father's love for us through fellow Christians - **John 15:9-14**

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2. We heard a lot about Herod on Sunday from our pastors - the type of man he was, the ignorance he expressed, the excuses he made for his sin, his unwillingness to repent, and the slow drift his life exemplified towards destruction.

**Mark 6:26** draws our attention precisely to the type of pressure Herod faced and the way he handled himself in the face of it: **“The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her.”**

This verse challenges each of us to consider how we too handle ourselves under pressure. Whose opinion do we care most about? Do we make excuses for our sin or do we do what’s harder and confront it? What type of character do we really represent when hard situations present themselves? **Take time to ponder and share if you feel led to do so.**

**What passages of scripture have helped you through some of your greatest struggles?**

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**3.** What story, verse, thought, or revelation spoke to you this week from either the sermon or your own reading time in **Mark 6**?

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**4.** Has there been a time when God has brought incredible healing to your life by your willingness to confront a sinful situation? **Would you be willing to share it with your group as a way to encourage fellow group members who might be discouraged by areas of struggle?**

**5.** How could **Mark 6:31** help us deal with the sinful and unconforted areas of our souls?

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**6.** Can you truthfully say you have some form of “two by two” in your life, or does an impure spirit of individualism need to be broken? Are you willing, today, to confront the “Herod” of your own soul by asking your fellow group members to pray with you and for you?

**In closing, take time to pray and create space for the Holy Spirit to speak.**

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - CHAPTER 7

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, *“Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?”* He replied, *“Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites as it is written: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.’ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”* And he continued, *“You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!”* **Mark 7:5-9**

Before each meal, devout Jews performed a short ceremony, washing their hands and arms in a specific way. The disciples did not have dirty hands, but they were considered unclean because they didn’t carry out the accepted traditional practice. Pharisees thought this ceremony kept them clean from anything considered unclean, but Jesus said they were wrong in thinking they were acceptable to God just because they were clean on the outside.

**1.** How might we as Christians act as Pharisees when it comes to our unsaved friends and family, or anything else we judge and deem as worldly or “unclean?” **Discuss.**

**2.** How can we live *in* the world, while not giving off a manner of Pharisaical pretension, but not *of* the world, and model the way Christ calls us to live? **Read The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12).**

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**3.** Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites because they worshiped God for the wrong reasons. Their worship was not motivated by love, but by a desire to attain profit, to appear holy, and to increase their status. We too become hypocrites when we **(a)** pay more attention to reputation than to character, **(b)** carefully follow certain religious practices while allowing our hearts to remain distant from God, and **(c)** emphasize our own virtues but call out other people's sins.

- What does the Bible say about character? *What key phrases, themes or passages of scripture pop to your mind?* **Look them up together.**
- What does the Bible say about the state of our hearts? *Repentance is key.* **Look up Acts 3:19; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Matthew 6:21; Proverbs 23:26.**
- What does the Bible say about judgment? *Read the story of the women caught in adultery (John 8:1-11).* **What can it teach you?**

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**4.** What story, verse, thought, or revelation spoke to you this week from either the sermon or your own reading time in **Mark 7**?

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**5.** End your time together reading **Mark 7:14-15;20-23.**

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - CHAPTER 8

1. Did anything specific from the sermon speak to you this week, or did anything from **Mark 8** resonate with you in your own quiet time? **Feel free to share and discuss.**

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2. On Sunday our Pastors spoke about spiritual blindness - how deep our spiritual blindness runs, the need to be aware of what we're blind to, and the importance of understanding the root of it.

But instead of discussing spiritual blindness, spend a few minutes discussing the various signs of spiritual awakening. **Through this discussion, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to your heart what you might be blind to.**

- You see others through a lens of grace rather than judgement.
- You have a hunger to read The Word.
- You recognize your need for God's help, and you know you can't do anything on your own.
- You live with a strong desire to stay teachable and humble.
- You no longer need everything to be about you and for you. You see your life as an opportunity to serve God and give Him all the glory.
- You want to tell people about Jesus.
- You recognize your constant need for repentance.

**What other things come to mind?** Discuss as a group.

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**3.** Jesus asked the disciples who other people thought he was; then he asked them the same question: *“But what about you?”* he asked. *“Who do you say I am?”* Peter answered, *“You are the Messiah.”* **Mark 8:29**

It is not enough to know what other people say about Jesus: you must know, understand, and accept for yourself that He is the Messiah. **Take a few minutes to really think about who Jesus is to you.** Share if you feel comfortable to do so.

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**4.** Three things were shared on Sunday about how we can be healed of our spiritual blindness:

**i. We’re healed by desire:** unless you have a holy dissatisfaction with where you’re at, you’re not going to keep growing.

*“He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?” (23)*

**What does this verse say about the man’s desire?**

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**ii. We're healed in stages:** it's a process to become more like Him. It takes time and it's done in *His* timing.

*"Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly." (25)*

**What does this verse say about timing?**

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**iii. We're healed in community:** rarely does someone seek church by themselves. They are usually invited, encouraged and walked beside.

*"They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him." (22)*

**What does this verse say about community?**

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***Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.***

***I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see.***

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - CHAPTER 9

*"Everything is possible for one who believes."* **Mark 9:23.**

Jesus' words do not mean that we can automatically obtain anything we want if we just think positively. Jesus meant that anything is *possible* if we believe, because nothing is too difficult for Him. We cannot have everything we pray for as if by magic; but with faith, we can have everything we need to serve Him.

**1.** Take time to reflect on what this might mean for your life and your current circumstances.

**Discuss as a group if you feel comfortable to do so.**

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**2.** Did anything specific from the sermon stand out to you this week?

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**3.** Did anything resonate specifically as you read through **Mark 9** on your own time?

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**4.** *“If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.”* **Mark 9:44.**

This verse is not meant to promote self-mutilation, but instead stresses the importance of cutting sin out of our lives. **Does this verse make you think about the severity of your sin?**

Take time to reflect.

Painful discipline is required for those desiring to be true followers. Giving up a relationship, job, or habit that is against God’s will may seem just as painful as cutting off a hand, but Christ is worth any possible loss or discomfort.

**As you read this paragraph, is the Holy Spirit revealing an area of your life that He’s asking you to confront?** Perhaps it’s time to cut it off for good, and what better place to confront this sin than in the company of fellow believers.

**5.** He replied, *“This kind can come out only by prayer.”* **Mark 9:29.**

The disciples would often face difficult situations that could be resolved only through prayer. **Prayer is the key that unlocks faith in our lives.** Effective prayer needs both the attitude of complete dependence and the action of asking. Prayer demonstrates our reliance on God as we humbly invite Him to fill us with faith and power. There is no substitute for prayer, especially in circumstances that seem impossible.

Close your time together reciting the **Lord’s Prayer - Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV):**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - CHAPTER 10

1. Did anything specific from the sermon speak to you this week, or did anything from **Mark 10** resonate with you in your own quiet time? **Take a few minutes to share and discuss.**

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2. Our pastors spoke a lot about the story of the rich young man found in **Mark 10:17**. This young man wanted to be sure he would get eternal life, so he asked Jesus what he could *do*. But Jesus lovingly broke through his motives with this challenge: *“Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor.”*

This story not only exposed the motive of the rich young man, but it also exposes a lot of hidden motives found in today’s culture: a love of money, an attachment to accomplishment and self-effort, and a need to do, fix, achieve and attain as means of getting what we want.

**Spend a few minutes in honesty asking yourself these personal questions:**

- What barriers are keeping me from fully turning my life over to Christ?
- In the same way Jesus challenged the rich young man to confront and surrender his possessions, what area/s is Christ asking *me* to confront and surrender?

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3. *“But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”* **Mark 10:31.**

Jesus explained that in the world to come, the values of this world will be reversed. Those who seek status and importance here will have none in heaven. Those who are humble here will be great in heaven. The corrupt condition of our society encourages confusion in values. We are bombarded by messages that tell us how to be important and how to feel good, and Jesus' teaching about service to others seems alien. But indeed, *it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).*

What does the Bible have to say about significance? Read **Matthew 18:12; John 12:26; Matthew 25:34-36; James 1:27; Matthew 10:32.** Are there other passages that come to mind that you would like to share? **Take a few moments to discuss.**

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**4.** *“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”* **Mark 10:15.**

Us adults have life experiences that take us well past the ability to be as innocent as children. But Jesus does not ask us to put aside our experiences, He requires a simple change of our attitude and dependency: that all self-sufficiency would recognize our need of a Savior, that all moral defensiveness would humble itself before His Holiness, and that all skeptical toughness would soften under His loving mercy.

Discuss what you think it means to, **“receive the kingdom of God like a little child?”**

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# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - CHAPTER 11

A donkey, a fig tree and a crowd, oh my!

**1. The donkey:** *“When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it.”* **Mark 11:7.**

Jesus didn't come like a stallion leader charging for battle, nor like a prince in a gold emblazoned chariot, He came as a shepherd; a gentle and peaceable servant riding on a donkey's colt. **This was His M.O - to live and act counter to that of the culture around Him.**

Consider the following passages to read more about Jesus' heart for the unpredictable: **1 Kings 19:11-13; 1 Samuel 16:8-11; Exodus 4:10-16; Luke 2:16.** What other examples from the Bible come to mind?

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**2. The fig tree:** *As they left Bethany the next day, he was hungry. Off in the distance he saw a fig tree in full leaf. He came up to it expecting to find something for breakfast, but found nothing but fig leaves. (It wasn't yet the season for figs.) He addressed the tree: “No one is going to eat fruit from you again—ever!” And his disciples overheard him.* **Mark 11:13-14**

The incident of this parable occurred early in the spring when the leaves of fig trees were beginning to bud. Figs normally grow as leaves fill out, but this tree, though full of leaves, displayed no figs. **The tree looked promising but offered no fruit.**

The cursing of the fig tree represents an acted-out parable related to the clearing of the temple. The temple was supposed to be a place of worship, but true worship had disappeared. In the same way the fig tree showed promise of fruit, but produced none, Jesus was showing his anger at religious life that displayed no substance.

If you claim to have faith without putting it to work in your life, you are like a barren fig tree which boasts leaves, but offers no figs to those who are hungry.

**In what ways and areas of your life could you perhaps admit you boast a tree full of leaves, but are failing to produce fruit?** Harsh to ask? Perhaps. But I think it's the same reason Jesus shocked people by condemning a perfectly beautiful tree. It was presentable in appearance, sure, but it's deception of fruit *did not equate to actually producing fruit*. **Discuss.**

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**3. The crowd:** *“Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”* **Mark 11:8-9.**

The people recognized that Jesus was fulfilling a prophecy (see Zechariah 9:9) and that's why they were celebrating Him with such joyful exuberance. But they did not understand the type of kingship Jesus was called to live. **This same crowd, days later, turned from celebration into retribution and became the rally cry for His crucifixion.**

Like those who witnessed Jesus' parade into Jerusalem, we too have expectations for how God should be and what we think He should do to make our lives better, safer, and more enjoyable. We're eager to celebrate Him when it involves fun, celebration and ease...

but what happens when, days later, He beckons us to a life that's uncomfortable to live? Do we turn our backs on Him and follow the crowd, or do we remain faithful at all costs? **Camp out here for a while in prayerful conversation.**

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**4.** As our pastors mentioned on Sunday, *Jesus deliberately juxtaposed majesty and meekness, power and weakness.* **How do you understand Jesus to exemplify this using the examples above, or in other verses found in Mark 11?**

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**5.** What from the sermon and your own quiet time in **Mark 11** spoke to *you* this week? **Take a few minutes to share.**

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# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - CHAPTER 12

*“The most important one,”* answered Jesus, *“is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second one is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandments greater than these.”* **Mark 12:29-31**

By Jesus’ time, the Jews had accumulated hundreds of laws (historians say 612). Some religious leaders tried to distinguish between major and minor laws, and some taught that all laws were equally binding and that it was dangerous to make any distinctions. But Jesus summarized all of God’s laws down to two simple principles:

## **Love God and love others.**

As our pastors mentioned on Sunday, when you love God completely and care for others as you care for yourself, it resonates through every aspect of your life:

- in your thoughts
- through your decisions
- through your everyday actions

**1.** Why do you think Jesus said love is so important?

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**2.** What else did Jesus say, and what can scripture teach us about love? **John 3:16; John 17:23; Luke 6:35; John 14:21; John 5:41-44; Matthew 5:40-42; John 12:43; Luke 16:13:**

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**3.** So much of what was preached on Sunday was about wanting and expecting more from your faith than a mere distant experience. The following quote explains it best:

**“The greatest tragedy that our culture faces is not the current political or cultural issue but that Christians living like they are near the Kingdom rather than living like they are in.”**

What might this quote mean and look for your group and for yourself personally? Take a few minutes to pray about this and discuss.

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**4.** Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, *“Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to live on.”* **Mark 12:41-44**

Jesus was admiring the widow’s generous and sacrificial giving. This story can teach us a lot about what a generous spirit looks like. But perhaps in our comfortable North American culture, where money is easier to give than time, **what does giving beyond convenience look like?**

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**5.** Did anything specific from the sermon speak to you this week?

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**6.** Did anything from **Mark 12** resonate with you in your own quiet time?

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**“One love, one blood, one life, you’ve got to do what you should.  
One life, with each other, sisters, brothers.  
One life, but we’re not the same, we get to carry each other, carry each other.  
One life. One.”**

| *Bono, U2* |

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - CHAPTER 13

*“You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”* **Mark 13:9-11**

As the early church began to grow, most of the disciples experienced the kind of persecution Jesus was talking about. Since the time of Christ, Christians have been facing persecution. Though you may be safe from physical persecution now, your vision of God’s kingdom must not be limited by what happens only to you.

As our pastors mentioned on Sunday, many of our fellow Christians in other parts of the world face daily hardships and persecution often.

**1.** How can we be the body of Christ and carry the burden of persecution through prayer when, **a.** it feels overwhelming and discouraging to constantly think about? **b.** we live such distracted lives. Making time to pray for others, especially those in other parts of the world who are far removed, is easy to forget about in the midst of our busy and overcommitted schedules.

**Discuss.**

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**2.** What about emotional and spiritual persecution? **In what ways does the church of North America encounter these kinds of mistreatment, or do they really?**

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**3.** Has there ever been a time you've experienced **Mark 13:11b** in the midst of a difficult circumstance? - *Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.*

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**4.** *“At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.”* **Mark 13:21-23**

So convincing will be the arguments and proofs from deceivers in the end times that it will be difficult *not* to fall away from Christ. If we are prepared, Jesus says, we can remain faithful. But if we are not prepared, we will turn away.

As our pastors mentions on Sunday, it's important that we don't pick and choose particular teachings of Jesus we like:



- A life of social justice
- Loving one another
- Not being judgemental
- Being generous

We must recognize the message of Christ in its entirety, not just what's resonating with culture or what's easier and more comfortable to live and speak.

**How can we decipher the difference between true messengers and false teachers?**

- a. Ask if their predictions come true, or do they have to revise them to fit what's happening?
- b. Does any teaching utilize a small section of the Bible to the neglect of the whole?
- c. Does the teaching contradict what the Bible says about God?
- d. Are the practices meant to glorify the teacher or Christ?
- e. Do the teachings promote hostility toward other Christians?

**Are their present-day cultural messages you hear often or know of that contradict the above questions?**

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**5.** Did anything specific from the sermon speak to you this week? What from **Mark 13** stood out to you in your own personal quiet time?

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6. Mark 13 tells us how to live while we wait for Christ's return:

- a. We are not to be misled by confusing claims or speculative interpretations of what will happen - **Mark 13:5-6.**
- b. We should not be afraid to tell people about Christ, despite what they might say or do to us - **Mark 13:9-11.**
- c. We must stand firm by faith and not be surprised by persecutions - **Mark 13:13.**
- d. We must be morally alert, obedient to the commands for living found in God's Word - **Psalm 119:11**

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**Food for thought to end today's gathering:**

Months of planning go into a wedding, the birth of a baby, a career change, a speaking engagement, a vacation choice, or the purchase of a home. **But do we place the same importance on preparing for Christ's return?**

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# THE GOSPEL OF MARK - CHAPTER 14

The Passover commemorated the night the Israelites were freed from Egypt (Exodus 12), when God “passed over” homes marked by the blood of a lamb. This event was quickly followed by a seven-day festival called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This, too, recalled the Israelites’ quick escape from Egypt when they didn’t have time to let their bread rise, so they baked it without yeast (leaven). This holiday today is a time when Jewish families gather for a time of remembrance. **The Passover serves as a reminder to us all.**

**1.** Is there a specific event in your life when God did a remarkable thing? Do you regularly celebrate it? Do you take time to remember the journey, the lessons learned, and the person you’ve become because of that time? **Take a few moments to share your conversion story and how you became a Christian.**

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**2.** *“Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.”* **Mark 14:10-11**

Judas expected Jesus to start a political rebellion and overthrow Rome. As treasurer for Jesus’ ministry, Judas assumed (as did the other disciples, see Mark 10:35-37) that he would be given an important position in Jesus’ new government. But when Jesus praised Mary for pouring out the perfume (thought to be worth a year’s salary), Judas finally realized Jesus’ kingdom would not be about what he was expecting. His greedy desire for money and status, therefore, could not be fulfilled if he followed Jesus, so he betrayed him in exchange for money and favor from the religious leaders.

**In what ways do we also face Judas type conflicts in the living out of our day-to-day faith?  
And in what ways do we also betray our faith when we realize our desires won't be  
rewarded?**

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**3.** “*Abba, Father,*” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” **Mark 14:36**

While praying, Jesus was aware of what doing the Father’s will would cost him. He understood the suffering he was about to encounter, and he did not want to have to endure the horrible experience. But Jesus prayed, “*Not what I will, but what you will.*” Anything worth having costs something.

What does the Bible say our commitment to God will cost us? **Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:59-60; Matthew 19:16-21; Matthew 10:37; John 12:25.**

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4. We may not face execution or extreme physical persecution for our faith, but there are many ways that daily problems and frustrations wear us down. It's in these times of annoyance and great stress when we are most vulnerable to temptation. **What can Mark 14 teach us about overcoming temptation?** See verses 33, 34 & 35.

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5. Did anything specific from the sermon speak to you this week, or did anything from **Mark 14** resonate with you in your own quiet time? **Take a few minutes to share and discuss.**

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Closing food for thought:

Human feelings about Judas have always been mixed. Some have fervently hated him for his betrayal. Others have pitied him for not realizing what he was doing. But if we were willing to lay aside personal thoughts, opinions and feelings, there *is* one thing we ought to be thankful for. Judas presents each of us with an opportunity to take a hard look in the mirror and think about our own commitment to God. Ask yourself this:

**Am I a true follower of Christ, or am I an uncommitted pretender?**