

FOLLOWING JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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DAY 1 FIND YOUR CHAIR

Scripture: Mark 1:1; Acts 2:22-24

Introduction to Mark:

Mark's story of the good news of Jesus Christ is a fast-paced narrative. He skips the nativity and jumps right in with John the Baptist bursting on the scene, quickly followed by Jesus himself. Mark ends the story just as abruptly. From start to finish, Mark moves his readers along with phrases like "at once," "without delay," "immediately," and "as soon as." It's like Mark is in a hurry to highlight as much of the Jesus story as possible in as few words as possible. But that doesn't mean we cannot get the fullness of Christ and his ministry from Mark, for we surely can. Long overlooked by church scholars, Mark is a treasure trove of truth.

As you read Mark's story, the "*beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ*" (Mark 1:1), this reading plan will move you from merely observing the life, teachings, miracles, and events of Jesus to a deeper understanding of who Jesus was and is, and what his gospel means for all of us. If you are ready to investigate Jesus. If you are suspicious that there is more to life than what we see. If you are not a perfect Christian. If you would like to have more faith, then keep reading!

Look Closely: Peter's first speech in Acts 2:22-24 outlines the Story of Jesus found in Mark. What good news is Peter sharing?

Challenge: Use this simple "Find Your Chair" tool to set yourself up for success over the next 30 days-

- WHEN- Choose a consistent time to work through this reading plan every day.
- WHERE- Find your chair- a comfortable and easily accessible space.
- WHAT- Determine what you will need- journal, pen, coffee, etc.
- WHO- Is there someone you can invite to do this plan with you? Is there someone who will help hold you accountable for your reading?
- ASK- Reflect on these two questions every day:
 - What is God saying to me?
 - What am I going to do about it?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I believe you want to teach me more about yourself as I read Mark's gospel. Open my ears to hear your voice, my eyes to see your works, my mind to understand your teachings, and my heart to love you and love others as you do... Amen.*

DAY 2 IMPORTANT WORDS

Scripture: Mark 1:1; Mark 1:14-15; Mark 8:27-29; 1 John 5:11-12

Look Closely: There are three important terms in Mark's first verse that show up again and again throughout Mark's story.

The *beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.* (Mark 1:1 NIV)

Good News/ Gospel/ Euangelion

“Gospel” was an ordinary term used in Greek (*euangelion*). It meant “good news,” as in the proclamation of the good news of victory or of the birth of an heir to the Emperor. As Jesus’ followers adopted the word, “Gospel” came to mean the entirety of Jesus Christ’s life, work, teaching, miracles, death, and resurrection- all of that being God’s plan of salvation for humankind. And God’s plan for our salvation began long before Jesus came to be baptized by John. Which leads to the second term...

Messiah/ Christ/ Anointed One

If the good news is that Jesus is the Messiah, we must understand who the Messiah is. The Messiah or the Christ is the title (not the last name!) of the One anointed by God to save His people. The Jewish people were waiting for this anointed one to come and rescue them from Roman oppression. They expected a King, promised by God, to reign on David’s throne. No earthly mind could conceive of the Messiah coming as a Servant or sacrificing himself on the cross. Which leads to the third term...

Son of God

The Jewish people were waiting for God to fulfill the promise of a King. They never imagined that the coming King would be fully man AND fully God. But Jesus is the Son of Man and the Son of God. He comes to save God’s people, just not in the way they expected it.

In *The King Jesus Gospel*, Scot McKnight writes,

“The gospel story of Jesus Christ brings to completion the story of Israel as found in the Scriptures (our Old Testament)... The gospel story of Jesus Christ is a story about Jesus as Messiah, Jesus as Lord, Jesus as Savior, and Jesus as Son.”

As you read Mark, consider how good the news of Christ is for you and for the world.

Challenge: Before reading further, what questions do you have about the story of Jesus? Write those down in a journal and keep this journal handy throughout this plan. Use it to record observations, ask questions, and write prayers.

ASK- What is God saying to me?
What am I going to do about it?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I believe you are the good news, the promised King, the Son of God. Open my eyes, to see you, my mind to know you, and my heart to be transformed by you... Amen.*

DAY 3 HE’S HERE!

Scripture: Mark 1:1-15; Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3-11; Matthew 4:1-11

Look Closely: Remember what it was like to be sound asleep and have a parent walk in, flip on the light, and declare that it was time to get up? That’s what the first verses of Mark’s story feel like. And that’s what the announcement of John the Baptist would have felt like to the Jewish people. They were expecting the Messiah to deliver them from Roman rule, not a call to repent. God is breaking into history as He promised that He would, but no one expected it to start like this.

- What is John's role in this Gospel story?
- In Isaiah 40, how are the Messenger, the message, and God described?
- What further insight does Matthew's gospel story give you about the temptation of Jesus?

Spotlight: Wilderness

Throughout the Story of God's people, the wilderness represents times of testing and faith. Following their exodus from Egypt, the Israelites' journey to the promised land could have taken as little as two weeks. Instead, they wandered for forty years. During all of that time, God's presence was with them, He instructed them through Moses and the Law, and He provided opportunities for the people to trust and obey Him. Time and again, the people failed and suffered the consequences of sin and disobedience. Even Moses failed! No man or woman would ever get it all right. But Jesus wasn't just any man. He was the Son of God sent to embody and fulfill what no one else could. Jesus would not only trust God completely, and follow Him obediently, He would exchange his perfect life for every sin of every person who ever lived. His wilderness story is just the beginning.

Challenge: What is God saying to me? What am I going to do about it?

DAY 4 the BIG PICTURE

Scripture: Mark 1:14- 8:21

Look Closely: Don't get bogged down by today's long reading! Skim through the chapters quickly- read only the headings if that's what you have time for today. Over the next two weeks, you will read all of this much more carefully.

- What do you notice from the 30,000-foot view of today's flyover reading? Grab your journal and record your observations and questions.
- Where do you see Mark's key themes:

Son of God/Son of Man-	How does this picture of Jesus compel me to live differently?
Cosmic Conflict-	What circumstances do I need to see through spiritual eyes?
Discipleship/Failure-	What is holding me back from looking more like Jesus?
Ordinary Heroes-	What is my next small step of obedience today?

Spotlight: 1st Century Judaism

From the destruction of the first Temple in 587 BC until the time of Jesus, Jerusalem and the Promised Land had been controlled by Babylon (597-539 BC), the Persians and Greeks (538-323 BC), the Egyptian Ptolemaic dynasty (320-200 BC) and the Seleucids (200-142 BC). There was a brief moment of hope as the Seleucid kingdom declined and the Maccabeans established the Hasmonean dynasty. However, they didn't last and Rome soon established rule and reign over the region. The religious and political elite among the Jewish people found ways to assimilate or tolerate their new overseers. In Mark's gospel, we see three different groups:

- 1- Zealots- "For them, the rule was clear: say your prayers, sharpen your swords, makes yourselves holy to fight a holy war, and God will give you a military victory over the hordes of darkness." -N.T. Wright

- 2- Pharisees- These were the community activists. The stricter ones sympathized with the zealots. They had no political power; rather, their power was to move the opinion of the people and wield influence through observance of the law.
- 3- Sadducees- These were the Jewish aristocracy, and they were the ones who compromised the most. From their families came the High Priests whom Rome held responsible for the conduct of their people. Their power base was the Temple- it gave religious legitimation to the status they had been granted under the Romans.

The rest of the Jewish population, who didn't fit into one of these sects, were ordinary men and women and families struggling to survive day-to-day. They were farmers, fishermen, and traders, and most of them cared about their heritage as God's people. They respected the Pharisees as teachers, observed the laws, celebrated the feasts, and lived as faithfully as they could under Roman oppression.

As you read through Mark's gospel, remember that human nature brings division, but Jesus came to bring unity to the Jewish people and to the world.

Challenge: Consider the different perspectives as you read and ask yourself, What is God saying to me? What am I going to do about it?

Recommended Resource: Wright, N.T. *The New Testament in Its World*. Zondervan Academic. 2019.

DAY 5 the BIG IDEA

Scripture: Mark 1:14-15; Galatians 4:4; Ephesians 1:10; Romans 5:6; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; John 1:14

Look Closely: In Mark 1:15, Jesus packs a lot into one sentence! Look at his words in a few different translations:

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (NIV)

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (ESV)

"The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!" (NLT)

"The time is fulfilled! God's kingdom is arriving! Turn back, and believe the good news!" (N.T. Wright translation)

Four key phrases appear: time, kingdom, repent, gospel. Let's look closely at that first word: time. In Greek, there are two words for time: *chronos* and *Kairos*. We get the word "chronological" from *chronos*. That word is used to describe the passing of time, as on a clock or by the hours of the day. Mark records Jesus using the word *Kairos*. The time has come- not the predicted hour, but the right time, the opportune moment.

Look at the other New Testament passages that use the word *Kairos* and/or talk about the coming of God's Kingdom in Jesus. What does it mean that Jesus came at the right time? Why is it important that the Kingdom has come?

Challenge: What is God saying to me? What am I going to do about it?

DAY 6 SNAKE CRUSHER

Scripture: Mark 1:15-34; Genesis 3:15; Psalm 33:9

Look Closely: As early as Genesis 3:15, we see a foreshadowing of Jesus. It is called a *protoevangelium*, which means the “first gospel”. God’s story doesn’t end with sin in the garden. He has a plan to win back his creation. God predicts that someone will come and destroy the snake (Satan). The demons in this passage in Mark clearly know that Jesus is this person predicted. Jesus knows he is this person because, in Mark 1:15, he tells people to “repent and believe in the gospel.” Mark is trying to help his readers see Jesus in this way, too. Jesus’ casting out demons and healing with a word would have reminded the disciples and religious leaders of the power of God in Psalm 33:9. He is pushing back on the power the snake has on this world, starting to build his heavenly kingdom on earth. He is keeping his eyes forward to the moment he will crush the snake's head in Mark 15!

Why would it be hard to believe that Jesus is fulfilling this prophecy? How do Jesus’ actions point to him being the Son of God?

Challenge: What things about Jesus are you hesitant to believe? Write them down and then ask Jesus to show you the evidence through Mark that he is those things.

DAY 7 HEALING

Scripture: Mark 1:35-2:17; Micah 7:18; Daniel 7:13-14

Look Closely: In this passage and the section from yesterday, we see Jesus healing a lot of people. Each healing has some similarities, yet there are differences based on the needs of the situation. Notice that in the narrative of the paralyzed man, Jesus doesn’t immediately heal him, like he has done with other healings. Instead, he addresses the spiritual problem behind his physical issue, his sin. This doesn’t mean that every illness is related to sin (see the book of Job). But in this situation, with these people, Jesus is making a point to reveal who he is in a new way. Several times in the Old Testament, God is the one who says he will heal his people and forgive their sins (Micah 7:18). Jesus uses the term “son of man” from Daniel 7:13-14 to refer to himself and implies that he is fulfilling that prophecy. What hopes might this have stirred up in the people who heard him and saw these miracles?

Spotlight: Son of Man in Daniel 7

This prophecy was about a human ruler who would be partnered with God to come down and bring judgment upon the earthly rulers of the time. He would bring God’s kingdom and have the authority to right the wrongs of these rulers. Many people in Jesus’ time were waiting for the “son of man” to come and take out the Roman rulers who were oppressing them. It would have been a common passage talked about by the people that would bring them hope for relief from the Romans. Jesus refers to himself as “the son of man” around 80 times in the four gospels, leaving no doubt that he is fulfilling this prophecy in some way. Although, it isn’t the way that the people expected him to. They expected a

warrior king, not a servant king who laid down his life for them. Jesus is ushering in the beginning of his kingdom, and it will be fulfilled in the times referred to in Revelation when Jesus will come back as the warrior king and finally defeat sin and death forever.

Challenge: What does it look like to talk about Jesus in your circles in a way that helps them to better see who Jesus really is?

DAY 8 SABBATH

Scripture: Mark 2:18-3:12; 1 Samuel 21: 3-6; Exodus 20:8-11

Look Closely: All of these stories have implications for the new kingdom that Jesus is bringing to the world. The first part about fasting and the analogies about old and new things not mixing well imply that Jesus' new way is not going to fit with the old. Mark tells the stories about the two Sabbath interactions to further draw this point home. The Sabbath had a lot of extra rules associated with it established throughout the years by the priests and Pharisees. Jesus is pointing out that their old rules don't fit with what God intended with the Sabbath and they were actually preventing people from doing good.

- By referencing King David's eating of the bread, Jesus is associating himself with David as a king. What insight does this give into the Pharisees' reaction?
- Why were the Pharisees angry and upset by Jesus' teaching? What did they have to lose with the Jewish people?

Challenge: What is God saying to you about the Sabbath? What are you going to do about it?

DAY 9 FOLLOWERS & OPPONENTS

Scripture: Mark 3:13-35; Genesis 35:22-26; John 10:10

Look Closely: Jesus continues to gather a crowd, and the lines between followers and opponents are becoming more clear. Jesus chooses his 12 disciples to follow him closely and prepare to continue his mission. This is reminiscent of the twelve tribes of Israel from the Old Testament. Just as the Israelites came from one man and impacted the world through the 12 tribes, Jesus is one man who is beginning to multiply his effect through the 12 disciples. Mark is once again showing how Jesus is bringing in a new Kingdom.

The scribes recognize this connection that Jesus is making, and they don't want to accept it. They are opposing the things that Jesus is doing because they are not willing, or maybe not able, to see who Jesus is. So, they attribute it to Bezebul or Satan. Jesus points out the challenge of this statement and talks about the Strong Man (Satan) who needs to be overcome by a Stronger One. Who is Jesus implying is the Stronger One? Himself, of course! He has come to plunder Satan's kingdom and bring freedom to the captives (see John 10:10). We don't know how the scribes reacted to this story specifically, but based on how they continue to act, they are choosing to keep opposing Jesus.

Mark gives examples of people who make choices to believe in Jesus and follow him or to oppose him to help his readers understand that they, too, need to make a decision about who Jesus is and what they will do about it.

Pause to Pray: Ask Jesus to make it clear if you have truly chosen to follow him. If you are following him, ask for patience in dealing with those who oppose him, as it still isn't too late for them. For example, even though Jesus' brothers were opposing him here, eventually, they came to believe in him.

DAY 10 HE WHO HAS EARS

Scripture: Mark 4:1-34, Isaiah 6:9-10, Romans 11:7-12

Look Closely: Jesus opens this series of parables by telling the people to listen. At the end of the parable of the sower, He says, "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*" Then, in the parable of the lamp, He tells them the same thing. Compare this to God's words to Israel in Isaiah 6:9-10 and to Paul's teaching in Romans 11:7-12.

-What do these words teach you about human nature? What do they teach you about God?

-When Jesus explains the parable of the sower, can you identify your own spiritual journey in his description of the soils?

Challenge: What is God saying to you? What are you going to do about it?

Pause to Pray: *Holy Spirit, give me ears that hear and eyes to see truth and grace in your Word. I want to be a seed that grows and becomes fruitful. Lead me and teach me... Amen.*

DAY 11 THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

Scripture: Mark 4:35-5:43; Hebrews 11:1; Numbers 5:2

Look Closely: These four incredible miracles reveal the power of Jesus, Son of God. They also reveal the faith of those who come to him. Compare the four stories:

- 1- The disciples, many of whom were fishermen, took boats out on this sea regularly, and they had tried everything they knew to do to get through this storm. How did Jesus react when they woke him in fear for their lives? Why would the disciples fear Jesus after he calmed the storm?
- 2- When Jesus healed the demon-possessed man, how did the people of the region react? Why do you think they would fear Jesus?
- 3- Put yourself in the place of the bleeding woman. What might she have been thinking and feeling?
- 4- Jairus was a local leader who threw himself at Jesus' faith. What do you think that says about his state of mind and heart?

All four of these stories highlight the authority of Jesus. He commands the winds and seas. He has power over the spiritual forces. And He can heal with a touch and with a word. But these stories also reveal that Jesus has come to lead people from fear to faith. When the world seems to tip wildly out of control,

remember who Jesus is, the authority He commands, and that you can bring every fear to his feet. He will lead you to faith every time.

Spotlight: Purity

Old Testament purity laws required those with skin diseases and discharges to remain separated from others until they were healed. This meant the afflicted person could not live with family or engage in society for fear of passing their impurity on to someone else. Those with leprosy formed their own colonies. A woman like the one in this story would have led a lonely, isolated existence. The bleeding woman's presence in the crowd was shocking- she could have bumped into so many people. And then she gets caught by Jesus! But rather than shame her or shoo her away, Jesus heals her. Not only does her impurity not make him unclean, but his presence is enough to make her whole again. What a beautiful reminder of the all-encompassing grace of God.

Challenge: Read Hebrews 11:1-40. What is God saying to you? What are you going to do about it?

DAY 12 THE DISCIPLES ON MISSION

Scripture: Mark 6:1-13; Genesis 1:26-28; Matthew 28:18-20

Look Closely: Up to this point, Jesus has been doing the teaching and healing. Here, we see the disciples sent out for the first time on their own. Like God's command to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 that they would be fruitful and multiply- not just in numbers, but in taking His mission, His Kingdom, His good rule, and reign into all the world, the disciples have their first opportunity at fulfilling this mission. Notice what Jesus did and did not give them. Notice his instructions.

- Why did Jesus send them out to minister in pairs?
- How do you think it increased the disciple's faith when they followed Jesus' instructions and witnessed the results?
- How might this short-term assignment have been a step in preparing them for the Great Commission of Matthew 28?

N.T. Wright notes, "These are emergency instructions for a swift and dangerous mission, not a program for the continuing life of the church after Easter... Mark's breathless gospel focuses here on the disciples' breathless mission: and if people won't have it, there's no time to lose. On to the next place, and woe to those who have missed their chance."

Challenge: What is God saying to you? What are you going to do about it?

DAY 13 DEATH & LIFE

Scripture: Mark 6:14-56; John 6:1-71

Look Closely: At the beginning of chapter 6, Jesus sends the disciples on mission two-by-two. Mark interrupts their story to inform his readers of the fate of John the Baptist. He picks up the disciples again in 6:30 as they return from their mission. Imagine the stories they told! Imagine how sore their feet might have been! Imagine the good night's sleep they needed! Jesus listens and knows their needs, and he pulls them away to rest.

But the crowds find them. Always the crowds. Notice Jesus' response in verse 34. How might the disciples (or you!) have reacted differently?

Compare Mark's story with John's retelling of the story.

-How does John's teaching on the Bread of Life give further insight into the feeding of the crowds?

-Notice that at this point, many followers turn away from Jesus. Why do Peter and the other disciples choose to stay?

Challenge: What is God saying to you? What are you going to do about it?

Pause to Pray: *Lord Jesus, soften and areas of my heart that remain hard. Fill me with compassion for people and trust in you. I want to follow you with my heart, soul, mind, and strength so that I will love you and love others well... Amen.*

DAY 14 CLEAN VS. UNCLEAN

Scripture: Mark 7:1-23; Matthew 15:1-20; Isaiah 29:13

Look Closely: The word 'hypocrite' in Greek means "one who wears a mask" and refers to actors on a stage. In both Mark 7:6-7 and Matthew 15:8-9 Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13 in reference to the Pharisees and scribes and says they worship with their lips but not their hearts.

-What are the hypocritical actions that Jesus identifies in the Pharisees?

N.T. Wright observes, "By focusing on outward purity, they are avoiding the much deeper challenge of the gospel, the challenge to the human heart."

-What are some ways we worship with our lips but not our hearts today? (for example, telling someone, "I'll be praying for you," but failing to follow through.)

-How does hypocrisy damage the Christian mission to be image-bearers and good-news-witnesses of Christ?

Challenge: One of the themes we are discovering in the book of Mark is Discipleship Failure. Take some time to think of ways you have praised Jesus with your lips and not your heart or used religious traditions as an excuse for practicing sincere faith. Confess these things to Jesus and ask Him to show you how to be more like Him.

DAY 15 GENTILE FAITH

Scripture: Mark 7:24-30; Matthew 10:5-6; Romans 15:8-9; Acts 1:8

Look Closely: Jesus went to the Gentile region of Tyre, a city that was home to many wealthy people who oppressed Jews. A woman came to him with a request for healing for her daughter. Not only is she a woman, but she is a Gentile, and she is from a privileged group of enemies. Jesus doesn't immediately dismiss her request, but how does His answer highlight the boundaries being crossed?

-Read Mark 7:28. How does the woman's reply show her humility as well as her persistent faith?

-Why did Jesus ultimately grant her request for healing?

-How does this incident foreshadow the gospel reaching the Gentiles?

David Garland writes, "Prejudice against others is a form of egoism. The woman (in this passage) shows the greatest humility that expels her prejudice when she begs for a few crumbs from the bread sent to the Jews."

Think of a person or a group of people you might have prejudice toward.

-How do you feel when grace is extended to someone from that group?

-How can you turn from your prejudice to offer or accept help?

Challenge: What is God saying to you? What are you going to do about it?

DAY 16 JESUS IS ENOUGH

Scripture: Mark 7:31-8:10; Mark 6:37-44

Look Closely: Once again, the crowd is hungry, but this time, they've been without food while listening to Jesus for three days, and there are no villages nearby where they could even buy food. This time, Jesus voices the need to feed the crowd to the disciples, but they respond that there is no way to feed the people. How do they fail to see Jesus as the Son of God and the Son of Man? Jesus wanted to feed the people because He had compassion on them, but, as in the account of the feeding of 5,000 in Mark 6, He used the disciples to do this because their participation not only meets a need, but changes their hearts too. Remember, Jesus is interested in meeting not only the physical needs of people but also their spiritual needs. How does this physical feeding of a crowd that includes many Gentiles point to the meeting of their spiritual needs also?

N.T. Wright explains, "The closer we are to Jesus, the more likely it is that he will call us to share in his work of compassion, healing, and feeding, bringing his kingdom-work to an ever wider circle."

Pause to Pray: *Lord Jesus, where are you inviting me into Kingdom work and service? Open my eyes to see opportunities and give me courage to take the next small step of obedience today... Amen*

Challenge: What is God saying to you? What are you going to do about it?

DAY 17 STEPS TO HEALING AND SIGHT

Scripture: Mark 8:11-26; Mark 7:31-37

Look Closely: Compare the healings in Mark 8:22-26 and Mark 7:31-37, and you will see that in each case, Jesus did the healing privately and used physical touch. In Mark 7, he asked them not to tell anyone of the healing, and in Mark 8, he sent the man who regained his sight directly home. Why did Jesus use these methods?

-In Mark 8:22-26 we see the man's blindness is healed in two stages. At first, he regains blurred vision; then Jesus touches him again, and he sees clearly. How does this mirror the spiritual blindness of Jesus' disciples in 8:19-21?

-Our own discipleship failure can often result from our spiritual blindness. How is Jesus helping you see spiritual truth more clearly? How can you cooperate with Him in gaining a clearer kingdom vision so you can become more like Jesus?

Challenge: What is God saying to you? What are you going to do about it?

DAY 18 SEEING JESUS: JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Scripture: Mark 8:27-10:52

Look Closely: Jesus and His disciples are making the long trip from the villages of Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem, where Jesus is going to die. This trip may have covered 150 miles. This section is bookended with the healing of two blind men—one in 8:22-26, and one in 10:46-52 but in between, Jesus spends much time “on the way,” teaching His still-clueless followers what it means to be His disciple and trying to prepare them for his death.

-As you skim through this section, look for the things Jesus is teaching them about discipleship. What themes do you see repeated? Why did Jesus choose to focus on these things?

-What evidence do you see that His disciples still don't understand His role as Son of God/Son of Man and Savior or their role as His followers?

-Can you spot any of these key themes?

Son of God/ Son of Man

-Who is Jesus?

Cosmic Conflict

-Is there more to life than what I can see?

Discipleship & Failure

-How do followers of Jesus mess up?

Ordinary Heroes

-What is my next small step of obedience?

Challenge: You're more than halfway through this reading plan. Commit to pushing through to the end! On Day 1, you used this simple “Find Your Chair” tool to set you up for success- review and make any adjustments you need in order to finish strong:

WHEN-	Choose a consistent time to work through this reading plan every day.
WHERE-	Find your chair- a comfortable and easily accessible space.
WHAT-	Determine what you will need- journal, pen, coffee, etc.
WHO-	Is there someone you can invite to do this plan with you? Is there someone who will help hold you accountable for your reading?
ASK-	What is God saying to me? What am I going to do about it?

DAY 19 "WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?"

Scripture: Mark 8:27-33

Look Closely: Today's reading is a turning point in the gospel of Mark. All the teachings and miracles that the disciples have witnessed have raised the question, who is Jesus? With Peter's announcement that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the teachings of Jesus take an unexpected turn. The disciples are about to find out that proclaiming Jesus as the Christ is not the conclusion but only the beginning.

- What does Peter mean when he says that Jesus is the “Christ”? (Try to answer that without including what you now know about Jesus, as a Christian.)
- Why does Jesus follow up the announcement that he is the Christ with what he says in verse 31?
- How was Peter setting his mind on the things of man?
- Why does Jesus call Peter Satan?

Challenge:

- Who do you say that Jesus is? (Don’t skim past this!)
- Reflect on some ways that personal expectations of Jesus caused disappointment for you.
- In what ways do you need to realign your expectations of Jesus according to “the things of God?”
- Identify some actions that you can take to help see situations through the eyes of God.

Pause to Pray: *Dear Jesus, you are the Christ, the Savior of the world. I confess to you that I have been setting my mind on the things of man by... (Fill in with your words). Please forgive me. Help me to have the mind of God and to see every situation through your eyes. Help me to understand what your purposes are and help me to desire them more than my own. Amen.*

DAY 20 LIFE

Scripture: Mark 8:34-9:1

Look Closely: This short teaching is densely packed. Imagine the conversations among the crowd and the disciples as they tried to process all that Jesus is saying.

- What does it mean, and what does it look like to deny yourself and take up your cross?
- What does Jesus mean when He says, “whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”
- How can we gain our life by losing it?
- What do you think it means to be ashamed of Jesus?

It will require a lifetime of prayer and study to learn only some of what it means to follow Jesus like this. Does that sound discouraging? Hopefully not! Be encouraged that a lifetime of learning from Jesus and following him is the best kind of LIFE we could ever hope for.

Challenge: What is God saying to you? What are you going to do about it?

DAY 21 A GLIMPSE OF GLORY

Scripture: [Mark 9:2-29](#); [Mark 9:2 \(AMP\)](#); [Exodus 24:15-17](#); [Malachi 4:5-6](#); [Exodus 19:9](#); [2 Peter 1:16-18](#)

Look Closely: The details of the transfiguration scene are steeped in the history of God’s covenant relationship with His people. Compare this scene with the account of Moses meeting God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:15-17). What parallels do you see? How does this provide insight into Jesus’ transfiguration?

The Greek word *metamorphoo*, often translated as ‘transfigure,’ means to change into another form. On the mountaintop, Jesus’ appearance was momentarily transformed, giving the disciples an unexpected glimpse of His glory. It’s like a curtain was pulled back and they could see for a moment the reality of the spiritual realm. In that place, God’s continuous work of deliverance was fully represented by Moses, through whom God established the old covenant, by Elijah, who came to restore all things, and by Jesus, the Son of God, who would complete the work of salvation.

God’s presence among His people is often represented as a cloud. After freeing the Israelites from Egypt, He “went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them...” ([Exodus 13:21](#)), He came to Moses in the midst of a cloud so that the people would see and believe him ([Exodus 19:9](#); [Exodus 24:15-17](#)), and a cloud covered the tent of meeting to represent God’s presence in the tabernacle in the wilderness. ([Exodus 33:9-10](#)) So, when a cloud appeared on this mountaintop, its significance would have been undeniable to Peter, James and John. God was in that place, confirming Jesus as His Son.

It’s helpful to recognize that the transfiguration occurred only six days after Jesus acknowledged to his disciples that He was the Messiah and described the path of suffering that He would endure before His ultimate victory over death. ([Mark 8:29-31](#)) They naturally struggled to understand that revelation; this was not how they expected God’s Kingdom to come. How do you think the juxtaposition of that revelation of Jesus’ suffering with this glimpse of His glory helped the disciples?

Challenge: In [2 Corinthians 3:18](#), Paul uses the same word for transform as Mark did for transfiguration. Consider: what does this mean for you?

DAY 22 GREATNESS REDEFINED

Scripture: [Mark 9:30-50](#); [Numbers 11:26-29](#)

Look Closely: Although the disciples have been traveling with Jesus for a time now, they still have much to learn about the kind of kingdom He is establishing. They argue amongst themselves, debating who is greater, and then turn around and try to discourage ‘others’ not in their small group, who are ministering in Jesus’ name.

Re-read Mark 9:38. What does John’s statement reveal about the perspective and attitude of the disciples at this point of the story? Who or what were they trying to protect? Where else in today’s reading can you see similar motivations? How does the account of Moses and Joshua relate to this perspective?

Jesus responds to the disciples’ misplaced focus by bringing a child into the midst of the conversation. It is easy to misinterpret His point without some ancient cultural context. David Garland writes,

“Jesus does not set up the child as a model to be imitated, for his culture had no romanticized notions about children... The point of comparison is the insignificance of the child on the honor scale. The child had no power, no status, and few rights. A child was dependent, vulnerable, entirely subject to the authority of the father; yet Jesus chooses such a one to represent those who are needy and lowly. If one wants to be great, one should shower attention on those who are regarded as insignificant, as Jesus himself had done. Jesus requires his “great” disciples to

show humble service for the humble...When his followers serve those without any status, they receive Jesus and the One who sent him.” - The NIV Application Commentary - Mark, page 367

Jesus wasn't setting up an exclusive club. Unlike the religious leaders of the day, He challenged His disciples to become true servants and help others do the same. He redefines what it means to be great and instructs them to model life and relationships free from sin and strife.

Challenge: Ask yourself, 'How can I model true kingdom greatness to others this week?' and then take action!

DAY 23 WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?

Scripture: [Mark 10:1-52](#); [Isaiah 53:1-12](#); [2 Corinthians 5:18-21](#)

Look Closely: In Mark 10:45 we find the theological center of the Gospel of Mark: *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

Jesus makes it clear, there is purpose and intention behind all that He is doing and teaching; to serve, to suffer, and to redeem. How does this echo Isaiah 53?

Although Mark records three instances of Jesus predicting his suffering and death, this is the only passage that explains that he must “give His life as a ransom for many.” In general, a ransom is the price paid for redeeming someone or something. In Jewish law, ransoms were imposed in cases of certain crimes and personal injury, ([Exodus 21:30](#); [Numbers 35:31-32](#)) and the concept was applied to the annual half-shekel census tax, which eventually became the temple tax. ([Exodus 30:12](#)) However, in this context in Mark ‘ransom’ means even more specifically “to liberate many from misery and the penalty of their sins.” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, Electronic Database)

It is no accident that we find this declaration of Jesus’ purpose tucked between two requests; that of James and John and that of Bartimaeus. Compare and contrast the requests. Consider the circumstances and the intentions behind them. The disciples are still wrestling with questions of greatness and hierarchy. How does Bartimaeus illustrate true discipleship instead?

Challenge: How would I answer today if Jesus asked me, “What do you want me to do for you?” What motives of my heart are influencing this response?

DAY 24 SEEING JESUS IN JERUSALEM

Scripture: Mark 11:1-16:8

Look Closely: Today we enter the third geographical section of the book of Mark; Jesus’ traveling ministry is complete, and He arrives in Jerusalem for the last time. Skim through the chapters quickly – read only the headings if that’s what you have time for. Over the next week you will read this much more carefully.

- What passages stand out to you today? Are there any details or stories that grabbed your attention in particular? Make a note in your journal to dig deeper into these in the days ahead.

Although the Gospel of Mark is only sixteen chapters long, Mark spends six full chapters describing the week leading up to and including Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, sometimes known as Holy Week or Passion Week. What does this intense focus reveal about Mark's primary message and intention for writing a Gospel?

Challenge: Try to identify an example of each of Mark's key themes.

<i>Son of God/ Son of Man</i>	<i>How does this picture of Jesus compel me to live differently?</i>
<i>Cosmic Conflict</i>	<i>What circumstances do I need to see through spiritual eyes?</i>
<i>Discipleship & Failure</i>	<i>What is holding me back from looking more like Jesus?</i>
<i>Ordinary Heroes</i>	<i>What is my next small step of obedience today?</i>

DAY 25 SAVE US, WE PRAY

Scripture: [Mark 11:1-11](#); [Zechariah 9:9](#); [Psalm 118:1-29](#)

Look Closely: Up to this point, Jesus had avoided drawing attention to Himself, often telling those He healed to keep quiet and Himself withdrawing from the crowds. But in the way He entered Jerusalem this time, He publicly declared Himself to be the Messiah. Every Jew would have been familiar with Zechariah's prophecy.

As Jesus rode the colt into Jerusalem, the streets were crowded with pilgrims preparing to celebrate the Passover Festival, the annual remembrance of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery. ([Exodus 12:14](#)) They shouted "Hosanna!" which means "Save us!" and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" They were quoting Psalm 118:25-26, which is one of the Hallel, or praise, psalms typically sung at Passover. The psalm itself was composed as a hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance from enemies, and the use of it as Jesus entered Jerusalem indicated the Israelites' belief that Jesus had come to deliver them...from their current Roman oppression. How do you think the Jewish leaders would have felt or responded to Jesus' declaration and the crowd's reception of Him?

The crowds correctly identified Jesus as their coming king but had no real understanding of what that meant. The people of Israel were clearly familiar with the Scriptures, but their expectations blinded them to the truth about themselves and Jesus. What do you think the people's expectations tell us about their priorities, focus and faith?

Challenge: When have your expectations caused you to misinterpret or even miss something that God wanted to do in your life? What is one practical step you can take today to identify and release misplaced expectations?

DAY 26 APPEARANCES

Scripture: [Mark 11:12-33](#); [Mark 12:1-44](#); [Isaiah 56:7](#); [Deuteronomy 6:4-5](#); [Leviticus 19:18](#)

Look Closely: Today's passages cover a lot of ground. Jesus continues to act and teach with great authority and the religious leaders feel increasingly threatened. They try repeatedly to trap Him in His words, in hopes of discrediting Him or causing Him to lose favor with the crowds. They make a show of piety but are not at all interested in learning the truth or recognizing the Messiah – they want only to

maintain their power and positions. As a result, Jesus begins to pronounce the judgment that will soon come upon them. He does this in a variety of ways; through parables, physical illustrations and direct statements.

For example, Mark's account of Jesus clearing the temple is sandwiched within the story of the fig tree. By composing the passage this way, Mark invites us to use each story to interpret the other. Both address the hypocrisy of Israel and declare its coming judgment.

Fig trees typically begin to bear fruit about the same time the leaves come out. Since this tree had leaves but no fruit, David Guzik suggests that "the tree was cursed for its pretense of leaves, not for its lack of fruit." It had the *appearance* of fruit but was not actually productive.

In the Old Testament, the fig tree sometimes serves as a symbol for Israel. ([Hosea 9:10](#); [Joel 1:6-7](#)) Many commentators suggest that the cursing of the fig tree represented judgment on the leaders of Israel who had the appearance of righteousness but not the fruit of it.

- How else does Jesus address the leaders' hypocrisy in today's reading?
- What examples of true faith does Mark include along the way? How do these teach us to push past appearances in our own lives?

Challenge: Jesus reminded His followers of the greatest commandments, "*And you shall 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 is this: *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31) Spend some time in prayer today talking with God about any areas that you fall short of this all-encompassing devotion. Lean in to receive His guidance and forgiveness.

DAY 27 JESUS IS COMING!

Scripture: Mark 13:1-37

Look Closely: Today's reading mainly focuses on future events. As you read, it is likely that many questions will be raised? Questions like, "When will this take place?" or "Who will be on the Earth when this happens?" There are many scholars with varying opinions. But rather than focusing on the questions that may not have clear answers, as you read today, try to make note of what you can know for sure.

- Try to think about the disciples' perspective. What might they have been thinking as they heard these teachings for the first time?
- What words of comfort and encouragement can be taken from today's reading?
- What are the instructions that Jesus gives that are timeless?

Spotlight: Tribulation

In a general sense, "tribulation" means intense hardships and sufferings. Using that definition, there are many events in history that could be classified this way. What was Jesus speaking of in Mark 13? There are different views. Some believe He was referring to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem which happened in AD 70. Others believe Jesus was referring to an event that we are still waiting for. Another view holds that Jesus was speaking of both a near and distant future. As we are still waiting for the "Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" it seems clear that an even greater tribulation will

come before our King returns. This would be the great tribulation spoken of in Revelation 7:14. Who will be on earth when these things take place? Will it be us? This is a question that Jesus seems to leave unanswered. Even if we are not the ones who will have to face the great tribulation, it is possible that we could experience other intense hardships or persecution. Either way, the call of Jesus to be alert applies. “Stay Awake!”

Challenge: Take time to journal on these questions: “What qualities would I need to remain faithful in tribulation or persecution?” and “How do I know that I’m ready for the return of Christ?”

Pause to Pray: *Lord Jesus, as I read about the challenge to be bold, to trust your Holy Spirit to give the right words, and the challenges to endure and to be watchful, I cannot help but wonder if I would be able to stand strong. But God my desire is to be your faithful servant no matter what. I trust my life into your hands. I trust you to be strong in me, even when I am weak. Amen.*

DAY 28 PREPARATION & BETRAYAL

Scripture: Mark 14:1-52

Look Closely: Apart from the momentary extravagant expression of love and devotion by one woman, Jesus is alone. Yes, he is surrounded by people he loves deeply, and they love Him too. Yet, the one who is carrying the greatest burden is preparing, warning, and supporting the ones who should be supporting Him. It’s a sad picture. However, it’s an eye-opening picture to how loving and strong our Savior is and how weak and fickle we are. We need Him far more than He needs us.

- List 3 heavy things that Jesus says.
- Identify the words of hope in this passage (This would be a good thing to highlight)?
- What could be Jesus' purpose in identifying the failures that are happening or about to happen?

Challenge: Reflect on a way that you wanted to be strong for Jesus, but you did the opposite (The more recent the event the better). What does Jesus want you to learn from this experience? Take time to pray, confessing what you need to confess, and praying about similar future challenges you might face. Write down any steps God might be putting on your heart to prepare. Based on today’s reading, what is the hope that Jesus offers you?

DAY 29 WHEN GOD IS WORKING BUT SILENT

Scripture: Mark 14:53-15:20, Isaiah 53:7-8, 1 Peter 2:21-23

Look Closely: We have been reading Mark’s gospel hanging on every word of Jesus. Our primary focus has been to try to understand the many profound and powerful words of the Christ. But in today’s passage the words of Jesus will comprise two short sentences. Today we are compelled to interpret the meaning of His silence.

- Why so few words? Why was Jesus silent?
- The actions of Jesus were dictated by spiritual eyes? What did His spiritual eyes see?
- What was the goal of those who hated Jesus? What was the goal of Jesus?

Challenge: What is the example of Jesus compelling you to do? (Consider these possible words of action: change in outlook, emulation, or praise)

Pause to Pray: *My Jesus, you were silent and did not defend yourself. You held back your wisdom and self justification. You would not have been wrong to speak up, but you would not have fulfilled the will of your Father - the way of forgiveness that I have received. Thank you. Help me to see this world and my situations as you see them. Help me to seek your purposes and not my own benefit in every moment of every day. Amen.*

DAY 30 THE CURTAIN HAS BEEN TORN!

Scripture: Mark 15:21-16:8 (16:9-20)

Look Closely: Through his death and resurrection, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. Consider these passages from Psalm 22:1,7,8,16, 18, and Isaiah 53:9:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? (Psalm 22:1)

All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. "He trusts in the Lord," they say, "let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." (Psalm 22:7-8)

Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet... They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. (Psalm 22:16, 18)

He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. (Isaiah 53:9)

-Imagine the scene at the cross. What may have caused the centurion to conclude that Jesus was the Son of God?

-When the women discovered that the tomb was empty, what did the young man (angel) tell them to do? (16:6)

Spotlight: Temple Curtain

Why does Mark mention that "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom"? This curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the first part of the Temple. Only priests could enter the temple, but only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and even then, only once a year. He entered with blood for his own sins and the sins of the people. The curtain reminded all mankind that because of their sins they could not be in the presence of God. The curtain was torn from top to bottom because it was not ripped by a man who would have started at the bottom. This was a supernatural act! This moment signified that the way into the Holies of Holies, not just one earth, but in heaven was now open! And mankind can now enter boldly into the presence of God, through the blood of Jesus! (Hebrews 9:3-12,24 and 10:19-21)

Challenge: What is God saying to you? What will you do about it?

Pause to Pray: Let this hold hymn lead you into prayer- “My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art mine. For thee, all the follies of sin I resign. My gracious redeemer, my Savior art thou. If ever I loved thee, my Jesus tis now.” Amen

DAY 31 FINAL THOUGHTS

Scripture: Mark 1:1; 1:15

Look Closely: As you reflect again on Mark’s title (1:1) and Jesus’ mission statement (1:15), do you understand them differently after reading all sixteen chapters?

Pause to Pray: *Thank you, Jesus, for the book of Mark! What a treasure it is to have a Bible in my hands, your words in my heart. I have learned so much about You in the last 30 days and I want to praise you. Jesus, You are... Thank you for what you have done... I want to follow you with all my heart and mind and strength... Amen.*

Challenge: On Day 1, you used this simple “Find Your Chair” tool to set you up for success over the last 30 days. Today, use it to consider how you will meet with God in the next 30 days!

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|--------|---|
| WHEN- | Choose a consistent time to work through this reading plan every day. |
| WHERE- | Find your chair- a comfortable and easily accessible space. |
| WHAT- | Determine what you will need- journal, pen, coffee, etc. |
| WHO- | Is there someone you can invite to do this plan with you? Is there someone who will help hold you accountable for your reading? |
| ASK- | What is God saying to me? What am I going to do about it? |

Find more resources at <http://www.whoisgrace.com/MARK>.