
THE GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE FOR STUDENTS

HOW JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING

MARK

STUDY GUIDE
WITH
LEADER'S NOTES

•

JOHN PERRITT

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Study Guide with Leader's Notes



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This is dedicated to the youth group of Pear Orchard Presbyterian Church in Ridgeland, Mississippi. God used every student—from the leaders to those on the fringes—to help me grasp his glorious gospel more deeply. Thank you for ministering to me as I, by grace, sought to minister to you.



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INTRODUCTION

Why Mark? Let's start by addressing the elephant in the room: the title of this series.

I'll admit that studying the gospel of Mark in a series about "the gospel-centered life" might sound a bit redundant to some. Not only is Mark one of the four *gospels* in the New Testament, it receives that label because it details the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—who the gospel is all about. So, if the gospel is at the center of the gospel of Mark, why do we need a study helping us see what seems to be glaringly obvious?

Finding the gospel in other books of the Bible may seem a bit like uncovering a mystery, but the four gospels seem to be a straightforward account that is anything but mysterious. Jesus's life and earthly ministry are clearly laid out for all to see.

And yet, it isn't always that clear, is it?

You see, we are a people who forget. If one theme remains constant throughout the Bible, it is the fact that God's people forget the God who loves them. The God who constantly provides and constantly pursues is constantly forgotten and betrayed by the people of God.

As others have stated, we suffer from gospel amnesia. That is, we wake up every day, forgetting that we are loved and accepted by the God of all creation through the finished work of his beautiful Son, Jesus Christ. Then we look to anything and everything else to give us a secure identity, even though we have the unshakable truth of the gospel.

Therefore, it is very possible for you to read Mark's gospel and miss the gospel! So maybe a title that sounds a bit redundant isn't the worst thing.

HOW THIS STUDY IS ORGANIZED

Mark: How Jesus Changes Everything is organized into twelve lessons. Since there are sixteen chapters in the gospel of Mark, these lessons will not be able to cover each passage in detail. That said, you hold in your hands a study that seeks to be faithful to God's Word and contain his truth for you.

If you were to zoom out from the book of Mark, you would notice that the first ten chapters cover approximately three years. The remaining chapters focus on just one week! A seminary professor of mine said, "I think Mark was trying to tell us something." Mark rushes through the earthly ministry of Jesus and then slows the reader down to focus on the week leading up to Christ's crucifixion. Mark is not saying that the rest of Christ's earthly ministry is unimportant—far from it—but he does place emphasis on that final week. Therefore, this study will give more attention to those chapters as well. The first five lessons each cover two chapters in Mark, while the remaining lessons slow down and cover less material.

NOTE: Because lessons 1 through 5 each cover two chapters, you will not be able to read through all the Bible text during those lessons. For this reason, you should read the chapters in Mark *before you arrive* for the lesson. These reading assignments are given at the end of the previous lesson.

If you are the group leader, part of your communication with participants should include instructions to read chapters 1 and 2 of Mark before meeting for the first lesson. Some participants might not do it. But if they do, it will help that first lesson go well. Assigning some simple preparation will also add a note of seriousness to your study of Mark.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Like the other small group resources in this series, *Mark: How Jesus Changes Everything* has a distinct focus. Your goal will be bigger than merely to study the book of Mark. You will also be learning to keep your eyes on Jesus and the good news of God’s love and power to save you. And you will consider how that power takes you beyond yourself to love others—especially those who don’t yet know Jesus.

Growing as a believer means you must grow in awareness of your sin and in confidence that Jesus saves you in every way from that sin. As you grow in this confidence, God will also work to reshape the desires of your heart to match his desires, which include mercy and compassion for those who are still far from him. The message of grace and hope that not-yet believers need is the same gospel message believers need to hear over and over.

Mark: How Jesus Changes Everything will help you do this in a group study. Studying with others lets you benefit from what God is also teaching them, and it gives you encouragement as you apply what you learn.

The group will be a place to share not only successes but also sins and weaknesses, so expect differences in how people participate. It’s okay if some in the group are cheery while others are weary, if some “get it” quickly while others want to look more deeply, or if some are eager to share while others take it slowly. But because you’ll be studying the Bible and praying together, also expect God’s Spirit to work and change people—starting with you!

Each participant should have one of these study guides in order to join in reading and be able to work through the exercises during that part of the study. The leader should read through both the lesson and the leader’s notes in the back of this book before the lesson begins, and and everyone should read two chapters in Mark before each of the first five lessons. Otherwise, no preparation or homework is required. Each

lesson will take about an hour to complete, perhaps a bit more if your group is large, and will include these elements:

BIG IDEA. This is a summary of the main point of the lesson.

BIBLE CONVERSATION. You will read a passage from the Bible and discuss it. As the heading suggests, the Bible conversation questions are intended to spark a conversation rather than generate correct answers. In most cases, the questions will have several possible good answers and a few best answers. The leader's notes at the back of this book provide observations from the author and the study questions editor, but don't just turn there for the "right answer." At times you may want to see what the notes say, but always try to answer for yourself first by thinking about the Bible passage.

ARTICLE. This is the main teaching section of the lesson, written by the book's author.

DISCUSSION. The discussion questions following the article will help you apply the teaching to your life. Again, there will be several good ways to answer each question.

EXERCISE. The exercise will be a section of the lesson you complete on your own. You can write in the book if that helps you, or you can just think about your responses. You will then share some of what you learned with the group. If the group is large, it may help to split up to share the results of the exercise and to pray, so that everyone has a better opportunity to participate. Or you may be more comfortable sharing among just your own gender, which could be another reason to split into smaller groups.

WRAP-UP & PRAYER. Prayer is a critical part of the lesson because your spiritual growth will happen through God's work in you, not by your self-effort. You will be asking him to do that good work.



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The gospel of Mark shows us Jesus. You will see his compassion for sinners and hear his determination to save you by his death and resurrection. And you will feel God's tug on the heart, which calls all who believe to come nearer still to their loving Savior.

Lesson

1

HERO OF HEROES

BIG IDEA

There is no greater authority in the world than God's Son, Jesus Christ—and there is none better.

BIBLE CONVERSATION *20 minutes*

Like an action movie, the opening chapters of the gospel of Mark are fast-paced. Mark's book tells about the life of Jesus, the Son of God who became a man. But it skips over Jesus's birth completely and moves quickly through the first years of his ministry. Mark is in a hurry to show many examples of Jesus's growing fame and his power and authority.

This lesson covers the first two chapters of Mark, so it will help for you to have read those in advance. We will read parts of the passage together now, so we can discuss them. Begin by having someone read **Mark 1:9–15** aloud, and then discuss the questions below.

When Jesus said to repent and believe the gospel, he was

- telling people what to believe
- telling people what to do, and
- telling people how to think about what's right and what's wrong.

Which of these, as people today, are you most likely to resent?

Where does Jesus seem to get the right to say such things, and how is it different from the ways other powerful people get their authority?

Pick up the story after Jesus called some fishermen to be his disciples. Someone please read **Mark 1:21–34**.

Briefly describe the kind of authority Jesus showed. Is he the sort of authority you might like to have in your life, or is he the kind you might resent? Why?

Jesus's authority eventually got challenged by the scribes and Pharisees, who were religious leaders known for their devotion to God's law. Have someone read aloud what happened, from **Mark 2:1–17**.

What do you think are some ways Jesus was planning to use his authority? Consider both his actions and things he said.

Gospel means “good news”—the good news of what Jesus does for us. So, as we talk about a gospel-centered life, we must notice how Jesus is the Son of God and what his purpose was in coming to earth as a man. To begin, read the following article aloud, taking turns at the paragraph breaks.

Lesson

1

ARTICLE

THE AUTHORITY OF THE SON OF GOD

5 minutes

What do you think when you hear the word *authority*? Maybe you would disagree with this, but I think there are negative connotations associated with that word. Whether it's in a movie or television show, we often see authority being portrayed in a bad light.

Think of how teachers and parents are portrayed in movies. We frequently see these characters depicted as out of touch or naïve. They seem foolish and lack the wisdom of the teenagers they interact with. To be sure, there are other movies that give positive portrayals of authority, but that word seems to rub us the wrong way at times.

We must also consider the fact that there are plenty of people who abuse their authority. They wield whatever authority they possess with little love and concern toward those who are under them. As Christians, we would agree this is an abuse of authority. A person with authority should not just possess power but ought to use that power for the good of others.

We clearly see in these first two chapters of Mark that Jesus is God's Son. And as we would expect, being God's Son grants a certain level of authority. But how do we see Jesus using this authority?

This authority was seen in Christ's teaching and in his ability to rebuke demons. But what I want you to see is that Jesus says he has the authority to forgive sins. The authority to forgive sins is unlike any earthly authority.

This is a power that should be staggering to us, because we are all sinners. If there is one truth the Bible clearly teaches, it is this: humanity is poisoned with sin. From Genesis 3 onward, we read of mankind's sin and depravity. Paul reiterated this in Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We all need someone with the authority to forgive us.

This is why Jesus's fame spread not only through Galilee but to the whole world. Think about it: we are here, still talking about Jesus today. Mark leaves no question that Jesus is the Son of God, and Jesus left no doubt about why he came into our world: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17).

What good news it is that Jesus came not to call the righteous but to love even those who were known as the worst in society! Think about your own sinful heart and the sins you are embarrassed about, the ones only you and God know. In spite of those sins, Jesus still came to call you to himself and to offer the good news of forgiveness to you.

Being God's Son and possessing the power to forgive sins places Jesus in direct authority over us. How should that make us feel? It should humble us, for sure. It should remind us that Jesus has an authority that is unlike any authority of a parent or teacher. But let us also remember that Jesus is one who does not abuse his authority like humans do. The Son of God who has all authority came to save sinners. For a group of sinners like you and me, that's an authority we can submit to.

DISCUSSION *10 minutes*

When you think of authority, do you tend to think of people who use authority well or do you think of people who abuse authority? What

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examples of authority come to mind, either from your life or from popular culture?

Where do you need the authority of Jesus in your life? What do you need him to use his authority to do? Try to give a specific example.

Lesson

1

EXERCISE

WHO'S YOUR AUTHORITY?

15 minutes

(NOTE: All of the exercises in this book will challenge you to consider how you still need to grow as a Christian. Don't let your shortcomings discourage you. We all start small. Much of God's work in your life may still be ahead of you, especially if you are young—though often it is older believers who are quickest to see and admit how much they still need to grow.)

Each of us has many authorities in life. Some are God-given authorities due to their position over us—like parents, pastors, teachers, or employers. But other people or things also have great influence over us, for good or for bad. For example, your friends might influence how you think, or you may find it hard to say no to them. Social media, a sports team, or the entertainment you consume may also dominate your thoughts, moods, and choices.

What are the authorities in your life? Pick one or two from the following list. Also think about why they are your authorities. What do they offer you? Or what do they threaten if you don't submit to them? Pick a reason or two from those lists as well. When you're done, discuss the questions at the end of the exercise with the rest of the group.

An authority in my life is _____,

because it dominates my thoughts, moods, or decisions.

- Friends
- Shows or movies
- Music
- Social media interactions
- School success
- My talent at _____
- Sport or activity I do: _____
- Sports team I root for _____
- Person I admire: _____
- Treasured possession: _____
- Money
- Boyfriend/girlfriend
- Other: _____

Submitting to this authority seems to offer me _____

- Acceptance
- A good reputation
- Escape from boredom
- A way to fit in
- Good feelings about myself
- A way to be a winner
- Comfort in life
- Security
- Excitement
- Affirmation that people like me
- Purpose and meaning
- A basic need: _____
- Admiration from others
- Love
- Freedom from _____
- Control of my life
- Other: _____

I feel threatened by _____

if I don't submit to this authority.

- Embarrassment
- Loneliness
- Being left out
- Looking like a loser
- Disapproval from _____
- Failure
- Uncertainty in life
- A difficult life
- Harassment
- Unhappiness
- Rejection
- Heartbreak
- Other: _____

Share some of your results with the group, and discuss them.

How is Jesus a better authority than your worldly authorities? (If you aren't sure, ask others in the group for insight.)

If you always treated Jesus as your chief authority, how would it change the way you interact with these worldly authorities?

WRAP-UP AND PRAYER *5 minutes*

The authority of Jesus brings freedom from worldly authorities. First Peter 2:16 tells us, "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God." Jesus welcomes you into this new life with him as he promises to forgive your sin.

Now that you've seen who the true authority is—Jesus Christ—and that his authority is loving and gracious, it would be wise to pray that this

true authority would take deeper root in your life. Begin by praying for this together now:

- Thank God that Jesus came to forgive and that he loves you, a sinner.
- Ask him to help you see how good Jesus is so that serving him does not feel oppressive.
- Ask him to free you from sinful desires so that you obey Jesus instead.

Before the next time you meet: Read through chapters 3 and 4 of Mark.

Lesson

2

THE GREAT TEACHER

BIG IDEA

Jesus came to teach those who would hear. Are you one of them?

BIBLE CONVERSATION *20 minutes*

Whether you enjoy school or don't like it much may depend on your teachers. Much of Mark 3 and 4 is about Jesus being a hugely popular teacher and miracle worker. To get a sense of what Jesus felt, have someone read **Mark 3:7–12** aloud. Then discuss the questions.

Do you think all the people who flocked to Jesus did so because, in their hearts, they were deeply interested in serving God? What other reasons might they have had for wanting to see and hear Jesus?

Jesus responded by teaching the crowd through a parable they couldn't understand—though it was actually about them! Take turns reading sections of **Mark 4:1–20** aloud. Then read the summary and discuss the remaining questions.

To summarize, Jesus was comparing his teaching to seed scattered everywhere: many people hear it, but only some are like good soil where it sinks in and grows. Other people who hear Jesus's teaching have their interest in him snatched away before it ever takes root. Still

others seem devoted at first, but give up when living for Jesus becomes hard or unpopular. And others start well but get distracted by worldly lures and worries.

When people today hear about Jesus or study his teaching, how sincere are they? Are the results similar to what Jesus taught in his parable?

Think of people you know who have heard about Jesus but don't seem interested in living for him. What keeps them from embracing his word? What kind of "soil" is most common among people you know?

* * * *

Continue to think about Jesus our teacher by reading the article aloud, taking turns at the paragraph breaks.