
exploring Jesus

discovering where God's plans, my life, and Jesus intersect

This booklet is designed to help you interact with the events surrounding the life of Jesus as written by a person called Mark.

You could probably read Mark's book from start to finish in a couple of hours, but given that there is a bit of information to digest, I've divided this study into seven parts. Each section comes with four basic sets of questions. I would encourage you to use this booklet as a journal.

Most people read books by themselves but that's not how Mark intended people to read his. Mark's account is supposed to be read (even aloud) and then discussed. So that's the approach we've adopted for this booklet. After reading, thinking and responding to various questions, I would encourage you to make time to talk about what you are discovering with someone who is a follower of Jesus (or Christian).

a useful hint before you begin:

Have you heard of the children's movie "The never ending story"? The creative genius of this movie was how the reader became part of the story as he read. He found himself not only becoming involved with the characters, but became one of them! This is how I would encourage you to approach reading Mark's record of Jesus. Picture yourself as one of the people following Jesus along the way. He wants you to become part of his story just like the boy in the movie.

a bit of information:

There's a rumour going around that accounts of Jesus' life have been altered and revised over the years. This idea discredits the accuracy of these written accounts. Some people think that like the game 'Chinese whispers', over time the facts have been distorted therefore making the Bible unreliable. Please investigate this for yourself, but from my research I can tell you that the originals were written in ancient Greek, by people who either knew Jesus personally or (as in Mark's case) someone who did, and form some of the most reliable ancient documents on record. You can be confident that what you are reading is actually what was written by Mark.

What you personally make of it all is entirely up to you.

Week **1**

Tip: *Jesus was Jewish and was born about 2000 years ago in Bethlehem, a short journey from Jerusalem. At that time Israel was under Roman occupation and it was a volatile place to live.*

Read Mark chapter 1

What do you see Jesus doing?

How are people responding?

What are you asking along the way?

Questions for you:

What's the extent of Jesus' power and authority?

What did Jesus mean when he said, "The time is fulfilled! God's kingdom is arriving, turn back (repent) and believe the good news"? (verse 15)

Week **2**

Tip: *There were a couple of very influential religious groups who made life very difficult for the average person. They followed strict rules governing how they should live before God and looked down upon those who didn't (or couldn't) follow their lead. They believed they held a privileged position before God giving them special access to him.*

Read Mark chapter 2 and 3

What do you see Jesus doing?

How are people responding?

What are you asking along the way?

Questions for you:

What's the extent of Jesus' power and authority?

Why does Jesus seem to respond so positively to people who have a little faith?

What do you think Jesus might mean when he says, "I came to call the sick people, not the healthy"? (verse 17 chapter 2)

What do you think Jesus might mean when he says, "Everyone who does God's will is my brother, and sister and mother"? (verse 34 chapter 3)

Week **3**

Tips: *Jewish people longed for God to liberate them from Roman occupation. The phrase, 'kingdom of heaven/God' was a politically charged slogan meaning 'there's no king but God!' Jewish people longed for the promised Messiah to liberate them and for the time when God would bring his reign and rule to earth. Literally God's heaven here on earth.*

'The word' is also shorthand for the message Jesus was teaching about God's kingdom available to all right now.

Read Mark chapters 4 and 5

What do you see Jesus doing?

How are people responding?

What are you asking along the way?

Questions for you:

What's the extent of Jesus' power and authority?

How would you have responded if you had been in the boat with Jesus? (verse 41 chapter 4)

Why do you think Jesus said those particular words to the woman? (verse 34 chapter 5)

Week 4

Tip: *The Jewish nation called Israel came into being when Moses led them out of Egypt where they were slaves around 1500 BCE. To this day Jewish people annually celebrate this miraculous liberation in which God enabled them to walk through the sea. Whilst in the desert God directed and provided for them. One such provision was 'manna' a kind of bread they would gather each day from the ground.*

Read Mark chapters 6 - 8

What do you see Jesus doing?

How are people responding?

What are you asking along the way?

Questions for you:

Go ahead and make a complete list of all the things Jesus seems to have authority over:

What might a Jewish person, who knew their history, conclude about Jesus after seeing him walk on water and provide bread in the wilderness?

According to Jesus what makes someone unclean?

How would you respond to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?"

According to Jesus how important is his message and the way people choose to respond to it? (verses 34-38 chapter 8)

Week 5

Tip: *When people talk about 'heaven' they usually think about a 'nice place up in the sky' people go to when they die. Most people I talk to generally hold the idea that if there is a heaven that it's the 'good' people who get to go there. The problem with this is that you never know for sure if your good has outweighed your bad? Jesus was clear that earning your way to God was not the basis for getting into heaven. Also the 'heaven' Jesus spoke about had more to do with knowing God and his life in this present age than being with him in the age to come (although it included this too).*

Read Mark chapters 9 and 10

What do you see Jesus doing?

How are people responding?

What are you asking along the way?

Questions for you:

According to Jesus how is it possible for anyone to enter into the Kingdom of heaven – or ‘God’s family/life’?

What kind of attitudes to power and people will followers of Jesus have? (verse 43 chapter 10)

What do you think Jesus meant when he said, “The son of man didn’t come to be waited on. He came to serve and give his life as a ransom for many?”

According to Jesus on what basis are people rescued, healed or saved? (verse 52 chapter 10)

Week **6**

Tip: *You may be way ahead of the disciples when it comes to understanding Jesus, but they couldn't imagine that his life would end abruptly. If he was the Messiah, with so much visible power, then why would he die? Messiah's aren't supposed to die! However this one was on a mission far beyond their comprehension. Jesus should have come to Jerusalem for his coronation but he knew he was coming for his crucifixion.*

Read Mark chapters 11 - 14

What do you see Jesus doing?

How are people responding?

What are you asking along the way?

Questions for you:

What was the purpose or function of the Jewish Temple?

What is the connection between a withered fig tree and Jesus' outburst in the temple?

What did Jesus mean by the statement, "This is my blood...which is poured out for many"? (verse 24 chapter 14)

Week 7

Tip: *The Temple was the centre of Jewish life. It was where God was supposed to dwell. It was the place where you could pray and worship. It was the place where humans could come to be made right with God. It was the place where your sins could be forgiven after having placed your hands upon an animal and it being sacrificed in your place.*

Read Mark chapters 15 and 16

What do you see Jesus doing?

How are people responding?

What are you asking along the way?

Questions for you:

What might have the onlookers thought when the sky went dark?

What's the significance of the heavy curtain in the Holy of Holies being torn in two?

Seeing the crucifixion why do you think the Roman soldier concluded, "Surely this was God's son."

Now who do you say Jesus is?
(But be careful how you answer because according to him, your response has eternal significance)

We've come to the end of Mark's account about the life of Jesus.

I wonder if I could press you a little to find out where you sit with all the things you've read and discussed along the way?

The opening line of Mark's book says, "This is where the good news begins – the good news of Jesus the Messiah God's son." By the very end of the book we find a Roman centurion who, after witnessing the crucifixion, declares "This person truly was God's son!"

So who do you believe Jesus was and is?

I say 'is' because as you've followed him all the way to the cross, you will know that he kept predicting his death and resurrection. I think it's fair to say that if Jesus rose from the dead then that's proof enough that he is who he claimed to be and he has accomplished what he came to do (put the world right and lead people back to God by breaking the power of sin, selfishness and death over our lives).

So would you take a moment to do a faith check?

Go ahead and circle a response to the following questions:

- | | | |
|---|------------|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do you believe that Jesus was a real person who lived 2000 years ago? | YES | NO |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do you believe that Jesus claimed to be God's son who could bring people back to God? | YES | NO |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do you believe that Jesus was crucified on a cross? | YES | NO |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do you believe that Jesus thought his death had meaning for the entire world? | YES | NO |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do you believe that Jesus thought his death could break the power of sin and provide forgiveness and a new beginning with God for anyone who would place their trust in him? | YES | NO |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do you believe that Jesus rose to life from the dead? | YES | NO |

If you have answered YES to all of the above then there really is only one question left to ask:

Will you place your confidence in him as God's Son, the true and rightful king and leader of this world and your life?

You see Jesus came announcing that God is alive and moving in this world, demanding that everyone should change course (repent), turn and follow him—they should respond to the good news that God's kingdom and his rule and life are available to all. How? By placing your faith in Jesus as God's son sent for you. The result is new life with God. The Bible uses the word, 'saved' or 'salvation'. When someone is 'saved' it means that by asking Jesus into your life to forgive and lead you are rescued from the judgement to come, forgiven and given a fresh start with God and with your life, and that God marks you as one of his family by placing his Spirit in you. It's his presence in our lives which enables us to live how Jesus wants us to live.

I guess making a decision to follow Jesus is like deciding to stop your car, get out of the drivers seat, and hand over the keys to Jesus. You're making a choice to allow him to do the driving from now on. And the promise is that he will lead you to God his father, welcoming you into his eternal family right now.

How can a person become a Christian, a follower of Jesus?

Read **John 1:12** – this contains a promise about entering God's family.

Read **Romans 10:9** – this describes what someone needs to believe about Jesus.

Read **Revelation 3:20** – this expresses how Jesus knocks on the 'door of our heart' and how we need to invite him in.

Jesus said, "Follow me."

How will you respond?

Two stories which may help answer two common questions:

What does Jesus mean by faith?

There was once a famous tight rope walker named Blondin. He lived in the mid to late 1800s. Blondin was famous for his dare devil feats but especially for his death defying walks unassisted across Niagara River (and I suppose many other places).

Well the story goes that one day Blondin was entertaining a crowd of people gathered near Niagara Falls. Blondin teased the crowd, turning to them asking, "Who believes I can walk across Niagara river on this tight rope?" Well the crowd responded by clapping and cheering with enthusiasm. Blondin then proceeded to walk all the way across and back again. The crowd clapped and cheered. Then the story goes that Blondin turned to the crowd and asked a second time, "Who believes I can push a wheelbarrow across and back again?" Well the crowd clapped and cheered calling out, "We believe you can, we have seen you walk across and back already!" So Blondin did exactly what he had said. He walked all the way across and back again pushing a wheelbarrow.

The crowd clapped and cheered with enthusiasm. Then Blondin turned once again to the crowd and asked a third time, "Who believes I could put a heavy load into the wheel barrow and push it all the way across and back again?" Well the crowd erupted, "We believe you can, we have seen you push a wheelbarrow across!" So Blondin placed a heavy bag into the wheelbarrow and pushed it across the river and back again. Well the crowd were beside themselves. They clapped and cheered with enthusiasm. Then for the final time Blondin turned to the crowd and asked them, "Who believes I could push a person in this wheelbarrow all the way across and back again?" Well the crowd replied in unison, "We believe you can, we know you can, we have already seen you push a load across!"

So Blondin cried out, "Well then who will be the first to step in?"

There was utter silence.

From here the story gets a little confused. Some say it was his manager whilst others say it was his mother that he coaxed into the wheelbarrow that day on Niagara river. And yes, he pushed them all the way across and back again.

The faith Jesus responds to, is not just the intellectual kind that acknowledges something to be true ‘in our heads’, but the kind which acts upon it. Faith is that settled conviction that Jesus is who he says he is, and a willingness to respond with humility, surrendering your will, your self, to him. It involves the giving over of control to Jesus.

How can Jesus’ death deal with my sin and selfishness?

If you fly into New York city, the chances are that you will land at La Guardia airport. La Guardia airport is named after Fiorello La Guardia. He was mayor during the great depression. It was said that on occasion Mayor La Guardia would reside as judge of the night court. One evening a man was brought into the court room charged with theft. “How do you plead?”, asked La Guardia after learning about the mans theft of a loaf of bread to feed his starving family. “Well I suppose guilty” replied the man, “it’s true I stole the bread.” Upon that confession La Guardia struck his gavel and declared, “Then you are guilty and shall pay 20 dollars.” “What!”, cried the man, “If I had 20 dollars I wouldn’t have stolen the bread in the first place. There is no way I can pay that fine!” “You’re right”, La Guardia replied. It’s said that at this moment La Guardia stood, went over to the court clerk, reached into his back pocket and pulling out his wallet, took a 20 dollar bill and give it to him. “Your right”, said La Guardia, “You cannot pay this fine. That’s why I will pay it for you.”

The story then goes on to say that La Guardia, being so incensed that a decent New Yorker had been reduced to stealing, passed a hat around the court room ‘fining’ every citizen present for allowing such a thing to happen in his city! It was said that the man left with 50 dollars.

That’s just how it is with Jesus. There’s no amount of ‘good deeds’ we can do to win God’s approval or break the power of sin and selfishness in our lives. God loves us. He believes we are of infinite worth. That’s why he sent his son into the world. He sent him to fix it which includes ‘fixing us’ as well. The truth is that we all suffer from the same disease. We sin. It’s what comes out of our hearts which ‘makes us unclean’ Jesus said. His sacrificial death for us pays the penalty for our wrong. It breaks the power sin has upon us, thereby making it possible for us to become new — a new life now alive to God.

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