

Week 1:

Intro and Overview

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 2:42 NASB

The life of the early church was shared by communal devotion. Such devotion played out in shared rhythms of spiritual discipline/practice. For us, continuing in the “apostle’s teachings” means devoting ourselves to the message that was passed down to us, and can now be found in the scriptures.

Walking in Spiritual Disciplines/Practices

Individual dimension:

Our pastoral invitation is that you would set aside one of your devotional/quiet time moments throughout the week to engage in **prayer** and **meditation** over the designated passages. That is, you, in solitude, with God and the text, in a time set aside where you can allow God to break the bread of His word to you in a one-on-one setting. Scriptures invite us not just to read, but to **meditate** on God’s revelation. Maybe add a journal, and/or writing utensils to mark up a Bible or write down thoughts, reflections, questions, revelations, petitions and conversations between you and God. If you desire guidance for the spiritual discipline/practice of meditation please let your community group facilitator know. Also, you may find yourself only being able to pray and meditate on a portion of the assigned reading for the week, and that’s fine. Sometimes the Spirit causes us to slow down and pause on a specific area. It would be ideal if the entire portion is at least read, or heard, for familiarity and engagement at the time of your group’s discussion.

If you are lead, or desire to go further, there are ways to grow in methods of **study** where you can “choose your own adventure/guide” by identifying other voices or resources in addition to your time of prayer and meditation. We have suggested resources, feel free to engage with one of those, but also, we welcome your discernment towards other resources beyond those suggested.

Potential Questions for Conversation:

- Meditation, what comes to mind when you think of meditation? Is it a spiritual discipline you practice?
- What does your weekly time with scripture look like? When and how do you fit time to engage God through scripture? Is there a particular phrase or title you use to

describe that time? What other spiritual disciplines do you find yourself engaging with during that time?

Communal dimension:

As you commune with God individually, we encourage you to identify something that you can bring to the table for each week's discussion. This can be as simple as bringing the Bible or journal that you've marked up during your personal devotional/quiet time. What you bring can be an encouragement, an observation, a question, or even something that interacted with what you read from your week (a song, a book, an art piece, a conversation you had etc...)

Worship throughout the scriptures meant mediating the Divine through an act of service and bringing an offering to God's temple. Our invitation is for you to see the fruits of your devotional life as part of the offering you can bring, and as an act of service you can provide by having something to contribute to the *temple* that is God's gathered people. God will break Himself to you and entrust you with measures and portions of Christ that are meant to be shared. Your bringing this to offer in our gathered times is an act of worship.

Potential Questions for Conversation:

- What do you think about this vision of worship? Worship as "having something to bring and offer at a communal gathering." Can your offerings to group discussion really be seen as giving something to God directly?

Intro and Overview

The aspect of study that we feature this week, is beginning one's engagement of a Biblical book through an introduction and overview. There is benefit to engaging the text without referring to other resources from the get go, but, referring to additional insight can have tremendous value, especially given the distance in time and culture we have with the original audience of the text. What follows are key insights from "introduction and overview" sections of various sources, followed by suggested forms of applying or extending one's experience of such.

Resource Insight

Experiencing the story: A story meant to be heard

"MANY MEMBERS OF the first- century churches could not read, and many more could not afford to possess a scroll of their own. So we should think of our New Testament books as intended to be read aloud, when the members of the church

IT IS WHEN you read Mark's Gospel in a single session that you see most clearly what a well-written story it is. Threads of continuity come to light, and there is a skillful buildup (and sometimes release) of tension comparable to that achieved by some of the best dramatists...

...The trouble is that for most Christian readers it is now all so familiar that it is almost impossible for us to feel the disconcerting and yet exhilarating impact the story must have had on those who first heard it. Let me urge you, therefore, if you possibly can, to arrange at best to hear Mark's story told in a single session, or, failing that, to set aside an hour and a half and read it through yourself (in a modern version) as if it were a novel, trying to put yourself in the position of those who first heard the story and for whom it was all so powerfully new. When you have done that, you will be in a better position to see the significance of the individual sections as we work through them in this book."

- R.T. France, **Mark: Doubleday Commentary**

Application Prompt: Experiencing the story

- There are insights and perspectives that may only come through when experiencing the story as a whole in one setting. Consider going through Mark in a single session either individually, or with a smaller group where it is read out loud in some manner. This doesn't have to be something done the first week, it can take place anytime throughout our time in Mark. For something like this, audio Bibles can be a great resource.
- Attend one of the church wide sessions where a full reading will be presented with mixed artistic modalities (Dates TBD). If attending an event like this is of interest to you, please let your group facilitator know.
- **Additional Resources:** Alec McCowen in his solo performance of St. Mark's gospel available at PTS Library

Application Prompt: The Art of Storytelling

- The Gospel called upon the early disciples to refine the art of storytelling. As you meditate through this weeks passages (or through out the entirety of our time in Mark) consider picking a story and rehearse telling it through your own style and mannerisms. Being able to do this can be valuable with sharing the Gospel with others, especially with children.
 - Additionally, at the beginning of each week's community group, a person or a couple of people can provide a summary through rehearsing their storytelling chops.
 - Practice telling parts of Mark's Gospel and see if the Spirit leads you to share that with someone in your sphere of influence throughout our journey in Mark.
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Resource Insight

Structure: A Drama in Three Acts

"AFTER A PROLOGUE that sets the scene, Mark's story unfolds in three main sections, each of which has a distinct geographical setting:

1: 1-13 Prologue (set in " the wilderness ")

1: 14-8:21 ACT 1: Galilee

8: 22-10:52 ACT 2: On the way to Jerusalem

11: 1-16: 8 ACT 3: Jerusalem

The different geographical locations of the three acts serve to show the movement of the story toward its conclusion in Jerusalem, but there is much more to the three- act division than that. The story moves through three distinct phases, in terms both of the nature of Jesus ' ministry and of the way people react to it, while the geographical movements serve to underline, and in a significant way even to symbolize, this movement of the plot toward its climax.

Galilee and Jerusalem

FEW MODERN READERS of the New Testament realize that first-century Palestine was not a simple unity. Galilee, where most of Jesus ' story takes place, was in almost every way separate from Judea (and its capital, Jerusalem). Between them stood the hostile territory of Samaria. Their histories had been separate for most of the 1,000 years since the days of a united Israel under David and Solomon, and they lived under different political systems (at the time of Jesus, Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor in Judea, Herod Antipas the Jewish " king " in Galilee). Galilee was for most of its history more subject to foreign control, and had been dubbed by Isaiah " Galilee of the Gentiles. " Its Jewish population were regarded by the Judean Jews as both racially suspect and religiously unorthodox. Galileans had their own dialect of Aramaic, and a Galilean Jew in Jerusalem would have been as obviously " foreign " as an Irishman in London or a Texan in New York.

The Plot

JESUS WAS A Galilean, and it is in Galilee that Mark tells of the warm popular response to his ministry. It is this period of " success " that dominates Act 1, set in Galilee; Jesus is among his own people. Of course there are doubters and outright opponents even in this part of the story, but it is significant that Mark twice makes the point that these opponents are not local, but have come " from Jerusalem " (3:22; 7:1).

Act 3 begins with Jesus ' arrival, for the first time in Mark's narrative, in Jerusalem, where he is a stranger. Here, by contrast with Act 1, apart from the Galilean disciples who have come with Jesus to Jerusalem and escort him triumphantly into the city, the overall picture is one of darkness and increasing confrontation, leading up to the death of Jesus at the hands of the authorities of the capital. The darkness is relieved by the prediction of resurrection, but it is not in Jerusalem but in Galilee that the risen Lord will again meet his disciples (14:28; 16: 7). Between these two sharply opposed scenes, Act 2 forms a bridge in two main ways (apart from the geographical movement from north to south). First, it is punctuated by Jesus ' explicit predictions of the fate that awaits him in Jerusalem (8:31; 9:31; 10: 33-34), so that the shadow of the cross now falls darkly across the story, and Jesus ' determined southward journey becomes a death march. Secondly, the focus of his ministry now moves from public preaching and miracles to the private instruction of his disciples, preparing them for what lies ahead, and patiently reeducating them away from facile hopes of glory to the acceptance of the way of the cross, and the whole new scale of values it entails. "

- R.T. France, Mark: Doubleday Commentary

Application Prompt: Meditative Memorization of the Shape of the Story

- Geography and place are important aspects of story and meaning. How does Mark's emphasis of geographical location inform what we might expect from the Gospel from the onset?
- Are there any geographic locations in your current context or in the world today that may serve as parallels to Galilee and Jerusalem as highlighted by this resource?
- Having a sense of the larger sections of a story is a great aid in being able to learn or tell as story. Consider committing R.T. France's Three Act structure to memory. Or, commit to memory the structure of your own identified resources.
- Additionally, you could give each act your own title. This can develop throughout the larger journey in Mark.
- Consider your own testimony, might it benefit you to identify "Acts" in through which your own story can be organized? How would this help your ability to share the Gospel through your testimony?

A Call for the Creative

Various Art Modalities for Meditation and Proclamation

Storytelling is an art form. Art serves our expressions of things we hold valuable. The early Christians used the art form of storytelling as the medium to share the Good News. How might various artistic mediums serve our expressions of the good news today? At the beginning of our read through Mark we want to make a call to creatives/artists (which can be everyone) to take on the challenge of developing various projects throughout our journey in Mark. These projects can benefit greatly by the birds eye view of insight provided by introductory and overview type material.

Application - Artistic Proclamation

- Consider ideas of creating an artistic piece that would represent the whole, or a certain element of the Gospel of Mark. This could be through any medium you desire (photography, illustration, music, poetry, art journal etc... sky's the limit.) If you're interested in participating in the church wide presentation of Mark, please let your group facilitator know.
- If creating an art piece is not your thing, perhaps collecting and finding art pieces resonate more with you. Consider curating, or finding artistic works of others that help you meditate or represent things that God reveals to you throughout our time in Mark. This would help us gather and identify resources: voices, apps, books, works of art etc... for the future.
- Our prayer is that this would birth works of art / artistic competencies, of various modalities, through which we can join Mark in the proclamation of the Gospel

Resource Insight

Intro and Overview: Bible Project, Mark

- Watch video: [link here](#)
- Discussion Questions:
 - Is having introductory insight like this helpful before reading the Gospel of Mark, or do you feel you prefer experiencing the text without this kind of introductory material? Does material of this sort "color" or "bias" your perspective too much?

- Did the video present any new insights about Mark that you didn't previously know? How do those new insights impact or expand your understanding of the Gospel of Mark
- Mark designed his Gospel in three acts. Describe the setting and themes that are present in each act.
- There were various ways people reacted to Jesus' identity in act two. Which reaction do you relate to most and why?
- Resource link to [Bible Project's Guide to the Gospel of Mark](#)

Supplemental Study Resources

Below are study resources that we recommend as *additional to*, not *instead of*, your devotional/quiet time of **meditation** and **prayer** through Mark.

- Mark for Everyone, by NT Wright (print, and kindle versions available. There is also a study guide that can be bought separately).
- Mark Double Day Commentary by R.T. France ([link](#)). Available at Princeton Seminary Library for on-site access in reference room or Alfredo can get find a way to get digital access.
- [Bible Recap](#) (A resource that can guide you chronologically through scriptures)
- [Bible Project](#)