

Week 2:

Mark 1-2

Open with prayer.

- However your group may start your gathering, whether it be with a meal, or informal fellowship time, or weekly check-ins of general life-event check-ins, using prayer as an element to transition into the discussion of the text can be helpful.
- Asking others to open in prayer can add to the diversity of voices involved, and might be a way others present can grow as well.

Check in:

- Were people able to meditate and pray over the passage? Is the general prompt of setting aside one moment of devotion/quiet time to pray and meditate over a part of the assigned reading accessible enough? *(Take note if additional meditation guides for the devotional/quiet times would be helpful. Also a reminder that sometimes we may be lead to pray and meditate over a smaller portion of the assigned passage, and that's ok. Of course, having at least read the entirety of the assigned passage is ideal and recommended.)*
- What did engaging the text look like for you this week? (This can be a great way to take in relational/pastoral knowledge of how people walk with God. Unique features, strengths or challenges may be identified through questions like this).
- Was the resource guide helpful? What could be improved? Feedback will help refinement.
- Did anyone add or do they plan on adding an additional resource to their time through Mark?

Asking the Basic Questions

This week we want to highlight some basic questions that are essential for studying the Bible. To some these questions may seem obvious and to others these may be unfamiliar. Regardless, taking time to bring these to the fore, especially at the beginning of a new study, is beneficial. The first set of questions can sound more academically stiff at times and can be a bit rigid for more communal/relational discussions of the text, but these questions should serve the group's needs rather than be something that takes away from the flow of genuine and fruitful conversation.

Formal Study Questions:

Two basic questions that can summarize much of what studying the Bible is all about:

1. What might or did the authors intend to say to their first readers? (This helps recognize the the historical nature and more objective sides of biblical revelation. The Bible was written *for us*, but not *to us*.)
2. What does that have to do with us and our world? (This helps move us towards application, and not just mere study for academics sake.)

Furthermore these two basic questions can play out in three moves, or more specific questions:

Observe (What does the text say?)

- focus on the content, the structure, and the relationships at play.

Interpret (What does it mean?)

Apply (How should I respond?)

Sometimes, the input of congregants may include all three of these moves all in one single comment. Inviting people to parse out which part of their input is observation, or interpretation, or application, may or may not be helpful, so apply these areas at your discretion. These questions may be great to have for reference during one's devotional/ quiet time.

General Informal Questions:

(These questions can be shorthand more organic and informal ways of prompting conversation for general discussion. Sometimes having questions that are more academic in nature may not stir or activate as much engagement as other questions that are stated differently. This list may be modified as time goes on.)

- What stood out to you?
 - What did you take note of?
 - What impacted you and why?
 - Did you find anything significant?
 - Was there anything that you found hard to understand?
 - Do you have any lingering questions?
 - Was there a particular section you felt drawn to meditate on deeper than others?
 - Is there anyway in which the text is intersecting with other areas of your life?
 - What did you find the Spirit leading you to focus on?
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Note Taking:

(Having someone take notes of what was brought up in conversation. This can be something that facilitator or co-facilitator does, or congregants can take turns doing or volunteer for. It doesn't have to be lengthy, just summative.)

Taking notes of what others say in group discussion may help:

- as a reference point for things that can be followed up on

- develop a bullet point list to send to a group chat to update those that missed that week's gathering
- discern if there's any theme that God may be speaking to the group

Closing with Praise and Prayer

- Closing your time by praising God for the discussion as a whole, or for particular insights that were edifying can be a great way to end. By praise we don't mean music, just spoken declarations out loud and directed at God. ("God, we praise You for _____")
- Also, praying that God would help us to apply and live out any of what the Spirit has revealed in the discussion.

What follows are selected observations, potential interpretations, and application prompts or questions based on specific passages corresponding to the assigned readings for the week. More of these can be found in the actual recommended resources which are listed at the end of Week 1's Facilitator Guide. These are a few selected segments in the event they are helpful.

Resource Insight: **From Mark for Everyone Study Guide**

The Good News of Jesus **Mark 1:1-45**

[Opening prompt from study guide] You are sound asleep and dreaming, when suddenly the door bursts open and a bright light shines full in your face. A voice, breaking in on your dream-world, shouts, "Wake up! Get up! You'll be late!" And without more ado, the speaker splashes your face with cold water to make the point. Time to stop dreaming and face the most important day of your life. That's what the opening of Mark's Gospel is like. Mark begins with John the Baptist's ministry, which was like throwing cold water on the surprised Jewish world. Many had been looking for a sign from God, but they hadn't expected it to look like this. Many had wanted a Messiah to lead them against the Romans, but they weren't anticipating a prophet telling them to repent.

If someone woke you up and told you that the president or the prime minister or a prince was on his or her way to visit you, how would you respond?

[Question 1 from study guide] Read Mark 1:1–13. John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin on his mother's side, born a few months before Jesus. His ministry was to get people ready for the greatest moment in Jewish history, in world history: Jesus' ministry and then death and resurrection.

How does John seek to prepare the people for Jesus' coming (vv. 1–8)?

[Question 2 from study guide] The main thing Mark gets us to do in this opening passage is to sense the shock of the new thing God was doing. If you're sick and unable to sleep much, sometimes the night seems to go on forever. But then, just when you're dozing a bit, suddenly the alarm clock goes off; it really is morning. That's the mood here.

In what ways are we asleep today in our churches, our communities and our personal lives?

[Question 5 from study guide] When Jesus is sent out into the desert, he is acting out the great drama of Israel's exodus from Egypt, spending forty days in the wilderness instead of forty years.

Jesus receives affirmation through God's voice from heaven, and understands the ultimate reality that God reveals. How would this prepare him for being "in the desert forty days" where "the satan tested him" and he "was with the wild beasts"?

[Question 6 from study guide] Read Mark 1:14–45. Jesus begins his ministry by announcing good news. What is that news (vv. 14–15)?

[If we were to be asked what the Gospel is, in what ways would it be the same or different as what Mark introduces here?]

[Question 13 from study guide] Looking over this first chapter of Mark, how does Jesus model for us different aspects of announcing the kingdom of God?

Resource Insight:
From Mark: Doubleday Commentary

The Forerunner
Mark 1:4-8

JOHN THE BAPTIST was a more important figure than many Christians today realize. Indeed, in Josephus ' history of the Jews in the first century, there is more about John than about Jesus. He made a big impact with his " revivalist " movement down in the Jordan valley, and Jesus several times referred to him with appreciation. In a sense, Jesus carried on where John left off, and people naturally saw Jesus as John's successor, despite the difference in their styles of ministry.

The Prophet of Restoration

JUST AS OLD Testament prophets had often called on Israel to return from their backsliding and to live again as the people of God, so now John calls for repentance and for a new start. His rough clothes are modeled on those of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), and like Elijah he preaches an uncompromising message and calls people to decision. Those who knew the prophecy of Malachi 4: 5-6 that Elijah must return to prepare for the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord would not have been slow to see the connection. Here in the wilderness something of decisive significance is beginning.

As a symbol of their repentance, John baptizes those who respond to his message. This was a novel and rather shocking idea, since baptism was the means by which Gentiles who wished to adopt the Jewish religion were admitted to the community of Israel, as " proselytes. " But these people John is preaching to are Jews! In asking them to be baptized he is in effect declaring that their Jewishness is in itself no guarantee that they are right with God; they, too, need a new start. As they join him in the water of the Jordan, they are enrolling in a new community of the forgiven and restored people of God, a true " remnant " in whom God's purposes for Israel can be carried forward. Israel is being reborn.

Looking Forward

BUT JOHN DOES not think that he is himself the one who will effectively restore Israel. He is only the herald, the " voice in the wilderness. " So he points forward to someone still to come, someone " more powerful. " John's baptism in Jordan water is merely a symbol of renewal, but the " more powerful one " will bring the true baptism not with physical water but with the Holy Spirit. Those upon whom the Spirit of God comes will know true inward renewal. That will be the real thing.

So who is the " more powerful one "? Christians, who know the story already, will answer without hesitation that it is Jesus-and in verse 9, sure enough, Jesus will " come, " as John has predicted. But wait a minute. In Old Testament prophecy the one who will pour out the Spirit in the last days is God himself. And the verses Mark has quoted from Malachi and Isaiah speak of a herald of the coming of God. So John's language would naturally have been understood by those who heard him (and by John himself?) as referring not to any human figure but to the imminent coming of God to judge and save his people, as the prophets had so often foretold. The fact that it was in the coming of Jesus that his prediction of the " more powerful one " was fulfilled suggests something amazingly far-reaching about who Jesus is: more than a prophet like John, more even than only a human Messiah. In the coming of Jesus, God comes, for, as Mark has already reminded us, Jesus is himself the " Son of God. "

FOR MEDITATION

Who are the true people of God today?

If John were to preach among us now, who would respond?

Are there ways in which we focus our attention on the outward and symbolic (like John's baptism with water) rather than on the inward and real?

- R.T. France, Mark: Doubleday Commentary