



## **Theme: Jesus and the Earliest Gospel... Mark**

### **“Identity and Calling”**

**Weekly Memory Verse:** *“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me.”*—Mark 8:34b

**Family Activity for the Week:** Jesus devoted His life to learning about God and showing others the extent of God’s love for them. In essence, His life was a gift to so many – by His physical presence and by His death and resurrection! Jesus now lives within us by the Holy Spirit, so shouldn’t we all be gifts to one another? With your family this week, choose 1 person to wrap up like a present. (If you have many family members, divide into 2 teams and wrap 2 people. You can make this into a competition!) Use wrapping paper, bows, string, and whatever else you would like, to make a present worthy of our King! How does this visual of us, offering ourselves as presents, manifest in our faith walk and in our community?

**During this season of Lent, the 40 days and 7 Sundays before Easter, we will be reading the entire Gospel of Mark, which is the earliest gospel. The reading plan will give you about a half a chapter a day and then some questions to reflect upon. We pray the Holy Spirit will touch your heart as you make this journey with us!**

**Monday, March 8** – Read Mark 6:30-44 When Jesus met people with problems (illness, hunger, or many other human challenges) he did not lecture them about what they had done wrong, or say God was teaching them a lesson, or try to duck responsibility for helping. When his disciples said, “Send these people away,” Mark said Jesus’ reply was, “You give them something to eat.” Jesus regularly showed compassion, and a desire to make things better.

- ▲ Any gardener or farmer expects to harvest multiple ears of corn, bearing a few hundred kernels each, from planting one corn kernel. God built many miracles of multiplication like that into the natural world at creation. Jesus multiplied, “seven loaves and a few fish,” to feed 5,000 people— the same power at work, but in a more unusual, immediate way. How has God used miracles (usual, everyday ones or unusual ones) to sustain and fill your life?
- ▲ Note the contrast between how Jesus responded to the crowd and how the disciples did. Jesus’ words, “You give them something to eat,” seemed to alarm the disciples. When you see people hurting, are you more inclined to respond like the disciples or like Jesus? What concerns or fears do you have, if any, about what might happen if you more often responded to suffering with active compassion?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, remind me that the good things that come into my life are not there just for me to hoard. Make me more responsive to your commands to bless others. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 9** – Read Mark 6:45-56. After Jesus fed 5,000 people (Mark 6:33-44), he sought solitude for prayer. Prayer seemed to be the most renewing “break” activity in Jesus’ life. But the disciples’ little boat got into trouble in a strong wind on the lake. Jesus walked out to them to help. At first terrified, the disciples were glad then the wind settled down. But they, “were so baffled they were beside themselves.... because they hadn’t understood about the loaves.”

- ▲ What had the disciples not understood? In verse 50, Jesus seems to identify himself with the divine name I Am (see Exodus 3:13-15; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10-11). But even after watching Jesus feed 5,000 people, they didn’t fully see that, in Jesus, God was here inaugurating God’s kingdom. What helps you to trust Jesus to be with you during life’s worst storms, in all his divine compassion and power?
- ▲ Seeing Jesus walking on the lake, the disciples were terrified. It wasn’t the lack of power that frightened them, but the idea of a power beyond their imagining. In C. S. Lewis’s, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Mr. Beaver said of Aslan the Lion (the book’s Christ figure), “‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good.” Do you ever find the idea of God actually “showing up” a bit scary? In what ways is Jesus “not safe”? What gives you confidence that God is good?

**Prayer:** *Loving God, at times I’m comfortable with this world’s broken ways. Then your power to change the world can frighten me. Make me secure in trusting that you are always good. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 10** – Read Mark 7:1-23. Ancient Jewish culture was extremely strict about purity laws, especially food laws. Jesus said it's not what goes into a person's body that is bad; it is what comes from within a person. He went further to show that many people’s keepings of the Hebrew religious rituals had become empty and destructive. The most hurtful, defiling stuff, he said, comes from inside, from the human heart apart from God’s guidance.

- ▲ To people devoted to carefully following the Old Testament food laws, Jesus’ statement was shocking: “Nothing outside of a person can enter and contaminate a person in God’s sight; rather, the things that come out of a person contaminate the person.” God’s main concern is your heart’s motives and your relationship with God. What helps you to focus your primary energy and concern on the state of your heart, rather than on trying to make your outward behaviors look good?
- ▲ In verse 21, Jesus said, “It’s from the inside, from the human heart, that evil thoughts come.” God covers us with grace, and the Holy Spirit bears fruit in our lives. But God doesn't change our hearts without our collaboration, working with him to shape our thoughts and actions. How can you keep religious rituals from becoming empty forms, just done for the sake of doing them? Which faith rituals truly draw you closer to God?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, continue changing and renewing me from the inside out. Teach me each day how to make my heart one from which your qualities of life flow out. Amen.*

**Thursday, March 11** – Read Mark 7:24-37. Hard on the heels of teaching about what was truly unclean in God’s sight, as opposed to what outer ceremonial rules deemed unclean, Mark showed Jesus acting on that principle with a non-Israelite woman many would have thought unclean. (Matthew wrote an expanded version of Jesus’ dialogue with the desperate mother—see Matthew 15:21-28). Then Jesus healed a man’s hearing and speech, a miracle that evoked memories of Isaiah 35:5-6, a passage that anticipated God’s love bringing renewal and deliverance.

- ▲ Look up Tyre on a map of ancient Israel. Jesus went well outside Israel’s boundaries, into modern Lebanon, when he met this Canaanite woman and healed her daughter. Ephesians 2:14-16 said one outcome of Jesus’ ministry was to break down barriers between people. When has Jesus brought healing to strained and broken relationships in your life?
  - ▲ After seeing Jesus restore a man’s power of hearing and speech, Mark said, “people were overcome with wonder.” Scholar N. T. Wright said that in urging people to follow Jesus, Mark, “envisages, not a boring life of conventional religion, but things happening that would make people astonished. If we’re
- (*Message Notes and Meditation Moments for March 6-7, 2021* – For more, go to [www.summitdurango.org](http://www.summitdurango.org))

still too deaf to hear what he's saying, the problem is perhaps with us rather than with the message." However long you've followed Jesus, what things help keep alive a vital sense of wonder and astonishment in you?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, preserve (or deliver) me from any sense of boredom or tedium as I follow in your footsteps. Keep my heart alive to the awe your presence inspired when you walked this earth. Amen.*

**Friday, March 12** – Read Mark 8:1-21. Mark's purpose, in telling this story (not long after Mark 6:30-44), was not merely to say, "Jesus did it again!" This event likely took place in the region of the Ten Cities, the Decapolis (see Mark 7:31), and if so, most of the 4,000 would have been Gentiles. Jesus fed them as bountifully and as caringly as he did the Jewish crowd in chapter 6. Yet when he tried to use the image of yeast to warn his disciples against teachings different from his, they took him with an almost silly literalism.

- ▲ Acts 11:1-3 and 15:1-6 show that some early Christians, trained in the Jewish faith, found it hard to accept Gentiles as full citizens in God's Kingdom. How would Mark's stories of Jesus miraculously feeding two crowds, one Jewish and one Gentile, point toward God's view of that issue? Are there any people who, for whatever reasons, you aren't sure "fit" in God's family today?
- ▲ What was "the yeast of the Pharisees," and "the yeast of Herod"? The Pharisees wanted a Messianic kingdom set up just for law-keeping Jews; Herod and company wanted a political kingdom that treated them as legitimate kings. Jesus' vision was different from both, higher and more expansive, and he wanted his disciples to "get it." How do you see Jesus' kingdom (for which we pray each week in worship)? Have there been times when Jesus' actions and teachings expanded your sense of the kingdom's reach and impact?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, it seems all your disciples could see in your feedings of large crowds was fish and bread. Help me focus my attention on your life-changing power and compassion, on your kingdom that is higher and greater than anything I could imagine. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 13** – Read Mark 8:22-33. This story is unique in the New Testament in that the healing happens in two stages. Mark's account, however, has an important, symbolic significance as well: Clarity about Jesus' mission comes only after confusion. Right after the story of the blind man's healing, Mark showed Peter's great confession of Jesus as, "the Christ" (the anointed one in Greek, equivalent to the Hebrew "Messiah"), followed immediately by Peter's confused effort to "correct" Jesus' explanation about what it meant to be the Christ. Glimpsing the truth, but only in a fuzzy image, like trees... walking around, Peter couldn't yet grasp that Jesus truly meant that his mission involved rejection, suffering and execution.

- ▲ The gospels said Jesus faced temptation right at the start of his ministry (see Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13). Those temptations involved becoming the kind of "Christ" who would fit people's expectations and wishes. So, when Peter "took hold" of Jesus to correct him, Jesus recognized the voice. By calling out Satan, Jesus exposes an evil force behind Peter's response. The problem is that Peter denies that Jesus' mission as the Christ includes suffering. He isn't thinking from God's point of view. In what ways has your understanding of Jesus and his mission become clearer over time? Are you willing to follow a king whose path to God's eternal kingdom went straight through suffering and crucifixion, not around them?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, open my heart to think God's thoughts, not human thoughts, about what it means for me to follow you and serve your kingdom. When that takes courage, give me that courage. Amen.*