

SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE GOSPEL OF
MARK

17 Day Devotional



foundations
daily devotional

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Versions of scripture quotations are noted.

DAY 1**INTRODUCTION**

The Gospel of Mark is one of four biblical accounts of Jesus' life as a man on earth. Each account provides students of Scripture with a unique perspective of who Jesus is and what He has done. Matthew, a former tax collector, followed Jesus daily for His three years on earth. John was also a personal disciple of Jesus: he referred to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:24). Luke was a physician. Luke did not know Jesus personally, but rather investigated Him after the crucifixion. Mark also was not one of Jesus' twelve disciples. However, he had a close relationship with early church leaders, including Peter (Acts 12:12) and Paul (2 Timothy 4:11). Historical sources tell us that Mark was likely a scribe for Peter. Mark's gospel, therefore, can be viewed as a memoir of Peter's experience with Jesus.

Mark's gospel is often described as a quick play-by-play of Jesus' earthly ministry. This is a true statement, however, it is not a complete one. Mark did not approach his gospel simply to record events. Rather, his storytelling is structured to progressively unveil the identity of Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus' actions on earth were intended to prepare people to grasp the significance of His death and resurrection. Mark collects events that foreshadow the full revelation of Jesus as God. In his collection, Mark focuses on three groups of people: the disciples, the crowds and the religious leaders. A key theme in Mark is how the state of our hearts determines the revelation of Jesus we receive. If our hearts are hard, He will remain an offensive mystery. If our hearts are soft, we will grow in to understand Him as our Saviour. Like the people in Mark's gospel, we cannot understand or respond to Jesus until we encounter Him as the crucified and resurrected Lord.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Is your heart hungry to grow in understanding of Jesus? Ask God to prepare your heart to encounter Him through the pages of Mark.
2. Your time studying Mark is a love offering to Jesus. Write a prayer of dedication in your journal. Commit to meditating on the stories you read and asking Jesus to help you apply them to your life.

DAY 2

READ: Mark 1, Isaiah 40:1-5

Mark opens his gospel with a declaration of Jesus' identity. Jesus is "the Son of God" (v 1). This idea was preposterous to most of Mark's contemporaries. Mark's gospel records what Jesus did to provide evidence of His divine identity. The defence begins with John the Baptist. John "appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (v 4). God created people with consciences. We long for forgiveness for all that we do wrong. Thus, many people respond to John's ministry (v 5). Mark explains that John's impact of people's hearts is the direct fulfillment of prophecy (v 2-3, Isaiah 40:3-4). Isaiah prophesied that, once this messenger has gone forth, "the glory of the Lord will be revealed." As people begin to see the need for repentance, they become ready to meet Jesus, the living revelation of God's glory.

Jesus enters the story on the day of His baptism. When He is baptized, a voice comes out of heaven, saying, “You are my Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” Many today refute Jesus’ status as the Son of God. However, we cannot understand Him apart from His divine nature. In his book *Mere Christianity*, CS Lewis writes that Jesus’ actions leave us with three possible interpretations of His identity. Jesus may be a lunatic, a liar, or the Son of God.

After a time of temptation in the wilderness, Jesus enters Galilee to begin His public ministry. First, He calls Simon and Andrew to be His disciples. These two fishermen provide us with an excellent example of obedience. They immediately leave what they are doing to obey Jesus’ call on their lives. Next, Jesus goes to Capernaum. On the Sabbath, He teaches in the synagogue and casts an unclean spirit out of a man. The onlookers are amazed (v 22, 27). Both Jesus’ teaching and His miraculous deliverance of the afflicted man suggest that He is something more than a talented passerby. Jesus continues by healing Simon’s mother-in-law and a leper.

There is an interesting tension in Jesus’ early ministry. The news about His miraculous actions spreads rapidly, yet Jesus continually shuns the spotlight (v 28-29, 33-38, 45). Jesus knows that people are not yet ready to receive Him as Messiah. They still expect the Messiah to be primarily a political figure. Their mental framework for the Messiah is still too small to contain the truth about Jesus. As we read Mark, we will see Jesus progressively revealing His identity. He reveals Himself piece by piece to give people time to align their expectations with His reality. He will not reveal Himself fully until the time was right.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Do you truly believe that Jesus is the Son of God – wholly God *and* wholly human? Ask God to reveal this truth to you through Mark’s gospel account.
2. Do you quickly follow Jesus’ commands, just as Simon and Andrew did? Confess as necessary.
3. If Jesus needed to pray to fuel His ministry (v 35), we certainly do as well! Spend time praying for the people you will interact with today. Pray that God would use you to give these people a greater revelation of Jesus. Pray that you would be sensitive to the Spirit’s guiding throughout the day and that your priorities would be in line with Jesus’ objectives for you today.

DAY 3

 **READ:** Mark 2

In Mark 2, Jesus begins to come against the religious leaders of His day. First, we see the religious leaders contrasted to a simple man of faith. A paralytic desperately wants to receive healing from Jesus. However, the crowds are too dense to move through. The paralytic and his attendants are not dismayed. There is still one way to reach Jesus: through the roof! Jesus commends this man. He was willing to go to any length, because he knew Jesus was waiting for Him at the end. Jesus goes beyond offering the paralytic healing, He offers forgiveness of sin. At this, the scribes scoff. Jesus rebukes them and heals the paralytic. This healing was a visible demonstration of Jesus’ divine power. Jesus challenges the scribes: If He has the authority to heal, might He also have the authority to forgive sins?

Jesus continues to challenge the religious leaders' expectations. First, He calls a new disciple: Levi, the tax collector. Tax collectors were known for greed and wickedness. Yet Jesus saw into Levi's heart. He knew this man would repent in response to meeting the Son of God. After calling Levi, Jesus dines with a group of sinners. He offers this explanation to the offended Pharisees: "It is not those who are healthy that need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but the sinners" (v 17). We know that Jesus is not actually calling the Pharisees righteous. Rather, they were self-righteous. The Pharisees found false security in their rules and positions of authority. They refused to acknowledge that their hearts might be just as sinful as the tax collectors' and prostitutes'. Often people who appear more "sinful" or "unhealthy" on the outside receive Jesus more quickly. Often they are more ready to admit that there are sinners in need of a Saviour. As Christians, we must identify as sinners in need of our Saviour, lest we fall into the false comfort provided by our religious activities.

Jesus then addresses questions about fasting and observing the Sabbath. Jesus is training His disciples in a new way of approaching God. Jesus teaches that the state of one's hearts before God is more important than obeying man-made laws. This new way of thinking could not exist in tandem with the old way of legalism (v 21-22). Practicing spiritual disciplines is good and fruitful – Jesus said His disciples would fast again one day! However, we must not believe that our works are the source of our salvation. The confidence of our salvation must be firmly rooted in Christ's work alone. Then we can practice fasting, taking Sabbath rests, study, meditation, and so on as a love offering to Him. When we know our works do not save us, we can be freed to practice good works to bring delight to our Heavenly Father!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

Re-read verses 1-12. Ask God to show you who you are in this story (the paralytic, his attendant, a member of the crowds, a scribe, etc.).

1. Do you feel the need to "earn" salvation? Ask God to show you any areas of legalism in your life and repent. Ask Him to show you how you can walk in freedom in these areas.
2. What is the biggest prayer request in your life right now? Commit to fasting one day this week (from after dinner one evening to before dinner the next day) for this area. Use the time you would have spent eating to pray, worship and read God's Word.

DAY 4



READ: Mark 3

Mark 3 continues recounting incidents where Jesus came face-to-face with religious leaders. This chapter contains a passage that, when misinterpreted, can cause much grief to believers:

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons."²³ And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan?²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's

house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.²⁸ *“Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter,²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”* (Mark 3:22-29 ESV, Emphasis Added)

It is important to note that Jesus gave this diatribe to a group of scribes who were directly denying Jesus’ divinity. This was not a one-time event. These religious leaders consistently and unashamedly hardened their hearts. When they heard Jesus speak and saw Him perform miracles and healings, they refused to even consider the possibility that He might be sent from God. It is their *consistent, unrepentant* sin that is labelled here as unforgivable. It can be said that there are two signs that one is living in a state of unforgivable sin. First, they deny that Jesus is the Saviour and Son of God. Second, they are not repentant or do not feel guilt about it. Surely, every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven if the sinner is repentant (v 28). What good news! We cannot go too far, if we choose to repent! If, upon reading this passage, you searched your heart or worried that you might be guilty of the unforgivable sin it is likely that you do not fall into that category.

Note: For a more in-depth exposition, you can read Southland’s position paper “The Unforgivable Sin & The Sin that Leads to Death.” It can be found at <http://www.mysouthland.com/resources> under the heading “Theological Papers.”



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Thank Jesus for the gift of forgiveness. Thank Him for giving you a conscience to continually point you back to Him.
2. Meditate on verses 33-35. What does it mean to be part of Jesus’ family? Thank Him for this privilege.
3. Pray for somebody in your life who does not know Jesus’ salvation. Pray that God would use their conscience to reveal that there is something not right about their life. Pray that they would be open to exploring who Jesus is and what He has done. Pray that they would repent of their ways and receive Jesus’ wonderful gift of forgiveness.

DAY 5



READ: Mark 4, Psalm 89:1-9

Art is powerful. A painting will have a slightly different interpretation for every viewer. Thus is the beauty of parables. A parable beckons to be explored. Even if we try to move on and forget the teaching, a parable leaves an etching in our memory. One may read the parable of the sower and the seed and turn away, not wanting to face the worldliness in their heart (v 7, 18-19). However, the notion that something is not right will remain. The image of a fruitful garden implants a desire in the reader to bear such fruit. Jesus often spoke in images, or parables, so that every listener might relate to His teaching. He wants us to evaluate ourselves in light of the potential riches and common pitfalls described in His stories.

As we’ve already begun to see in Mark, Jesus reveals truth in a very specific way. He freely reveals truth to those with hearts that long to hear it (v 9-13, 34). However, without His help, Jesus’ teachings remain riddles and mysteries. We desperately need the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth. Those who refuse to accept His help cannot understand Jesus’ identity

or His teachings. It is no wonder, in this age of individualism, pride, and communication, that we are daily bombarded with false accusations about Jesus.

Another example of how Jesus reveals truth is found in Mark 4:35-41. Jesus and His disciples are crossing the Sea of Galilee. While Jesus is asleep, a strong storm arises. The disciples are terrified and awake Jesus. He gets up, rebukes the wind and says to the sea, "Hush, be still" (v 39). The next thing Jesus does seems odd. He rebukes His disciples for lack of faith. Why would fearing a major storm reveal a lack of faith? Unless, of course, they already have knowledge that should have protected them from fear. Several times, Jesus has already begun to reveal His identity as the Son of God (1:11). Psalm 89:9 states that God "rules the raging sea" and calms the swelling waves. To understand, we must return to Mark's unifying theme of the progressive unveiling of Christ's identity. At this point in history, the disciples likely thought that Jesus was an incredible man sent by God. They possibly even thought He was the long-promised Messiah. However, they did not yet comprehend that Jesus, the Messiah, *is* Yahweh. Jesus used this event to clearly point out His identity to His inner circle. The weight of the moment is almost tangible as we watch the disciples begin to form the connections: "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (v 41). Perhaps, Jesus is not merely a man sent by God. Perhaps, He is something far greater than that.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Jesus wants us to evaluate ourselves in light of the potential riches and common pitfalls described in His stories.
 - a) In this season of life, what type of soil is found in your heart? Ask God to show you how the soil of your heart can become more fruitful.
 - b) Meditate on Mark 4:26-32. What does God want to speak into your life through these words?
2. Praise Jesus for being both fully God and fully man. Thank Him for the continued revelation of this truth in your heart.
3. Using the truths you read about in Mark 4, pray for the Church in Canada today. Intercede against the spread of bad soil in the Church and ask God to give us good, fruitful soil. Pray that we would become harvesters who delight in seeing God's kingdom grow. Pray that we would trust Jesus completely and that we would know Him as the Son of God.

DAY 6



READ: Mark 5

Mark 5 highlights how Jesus' authority points us to His divinity. First, we see Jesus' authority over spirits. Jesus enters Gerasenes and encounters a demon-possessed man. This man is so afflicted that chains are not strong enough to bind him. He lives in constant torment and isolation from human society. The demons that control the man's body recognize Jesus' presence and call out to Him. They recognize Him as the Son of the Most High God and know that their fate is imminent. Jesus commands the demons to identify themselves and leave the man's body. He allows the demons to enter a nearby herd of pigs. In so doing, Jesus displays both the goodness of His power (freeing the tortured man) and the evil of the devil's influence. Only Satan's influence would desire so much

havoc and destruction. Again, the local people miss the real message behind this event. They refuse to ask questions and learn more about what happened and who this man who has authority over demons is. In their fear, the locals beg Jesus to leave. They are more concerned with their economic loss than the possibility of knowing the Son of God. On the contrary, the healed demoniac begs to follow Jesus. He has caught a glimpse of Jesus' power and compassion and longs to remain with his Saviour. Jesus refuses the man's request and gives him this command: "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had great mercy on you" (v 19).

Next we see two healings, demonstrating Jesus' authority over physical conditions. The daughter of Jairus, a synagogue official is ill. Jairus entreats Jesus to heal his daughter and Jesus agrees. As Jesus is travelling to Jairus' home, a great crowd forms. In the crowd there is one woman who has reached a point of desperation. She has had a bleeding problem for twelve years. She has spent all of her time and resources trying to get better and nothing has worked. When she hears that Jesus is passing by, she knows that this is her only chance. She comes behind him and touches his cloak. She is immediately healed. Jesus is aware of what happened and addresses her. He sees her trembling, fearful, and completely humble before Him. And He says to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction" (v 34). Jesus is moved with great compassion when we abandon our worldly efforts and lay our unbearable problems at His feet.

While this is happening, Jairus' daughter dies. Along with James and Peter, Jesus enters Jairus' home. He sees the mourning of Jairus' family and gives them calming reassurances. The people mock Him, but Jesus is not dismayed. He takes Jairus, Jairus' wife, Peter and James into the child's room and commands the girl to get up. Jesus is not only powerful over demons and physical ailments, He has authority over death itself.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. What does your faith look like? Are you the desperate woman with the issue of blood, the synagogue ruler who had faith until things got really bad, or are you one of the people with so little faith that they stayed at home when Jesus was in town?
 - a) Ask God for one step you can take to grow in faith.
2. Pray for the Church in Canada today. Pray that we would take the truth of Jesus' authority from our heads to our hearts. Pray that we would learn to walk in victory over sin and evil through Jesus' name.

DAY 7



READ: Mark 6

Mark 6 begins in Jesus' hometown. Here he is preaching in the synagogue, sharing astonishing wisdom, and performing miracles. However, He is rejected. The listeners had seen Jesus grow up. They refuse to believe that He is anything more than a normal person. They are unwilling to alter their pre-conceived notions about the Messiah in light of the evidence that faced them. We must learn from these people. Sometimes Scripture challenges our thoughts and ideals. In these times, we must humbly lay our beliefs before God, admitting that we are not always right, but His Word is infallible. We must ask God to use Scripture to shape our thought processes until they look like His.

Next, Jesus sends His twelve disciples out in pairs to do ministry. He forbids them from bringing supplies, challenging them to trust God to provide. They preach repentance. Where their message is accepted they stay and minister to people. Where their message falls upon hard hearts, they move on in search of soft hearts. Mark specifically notes King Herod's reaction to the disciples' ministry. Herod had lived a life of sin, which culminated in murdering John the Baptist (v 17-28). Herod's conscience weighs him down for killing John the Baptist (v 26). Plagued with a guilty conscience, Herod confuses the disciples' ministry for a return of John the Baptist. Herod's sin and guilt prevent Him from recognizing that both John the Baptist and the disciples ministered out of the same power source: the Holy Spirit.

When the disciples return to Jesus, He encourages them to find solitude and take a time of rest. Seeking peace in God's presence is vital to continued service. Word of their travel spreads, and crowds beat Jesus and His disciples to their destination. Even though He knows His team desperately needs rest, Jesus is moved with compassion for the crowds. Sometimes we have to put our own needs aside for a short time and trust God to provide supernaturally. He begins to teach them many things. Time passes and people become hungry. Jesus' disciples urge Him to let the people leave to get food, as there is only five loaves and two fish in their supplies. Surely this is not enough food to feed five thousand men, plus women and children. Jesus again reveals His compassion and His miraculous power. He blesses the food, multiplying it to feed all those present and leave leftovers!

The crowds and the disciples are now well-fed. Jesus knows the disciples still need space to mentally, emotionally and spiritually recharge. He send them on a boat to Bethsaida. Jesus stays behind and watches the boat from shore. He waits for a storm to arise and then moves. The disciples look out of the boat and there is Jesus, walking on the water beside them! He tells them to take courage and calms the storm. The disciples were "greatly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves" (v 51b-52). There is great value in reflecting on our experiences with Jesus and asking Him to give us greater insight. The disciples did not fully trust Jesus because they did not fully understand the miracles they had witnessed.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

One of the most well-known miracles in history occurred because Jesus and His disciples were willing to change their plans. How flexible are you? If an opportunity arises to build God's kingdom, are you willing to obey even if it conflicts with your plans? Ask God for a specific opportunity to grow in this over the next couple of days.

1. Ask God to remind you of a time He met you or revealed Himself to you. What did you learn about Him? Ask God to reveal something about this time that you did not know. Thank Him for what He shows you.
2. Pray for your family today. What is something that God has been teaching you or growing you in? Pray that your family would grow in this area today. Also, pray for any specific needs you know of in your family.

DAY 8**READ:** Mark 7

Mark 7 is divided into two sections. In the first section, Jesus interacts with Jewish people. It begins when a group of Pharisees challenge the disciples for eating without first performing ritual washings. Jesus rebukes the Pharisees (v 6-7, Isaiah 29:13). They place high priority on visible behaviour. They focus so much on being seen as righteous, that they forget to keep watch over their hearts. They follow rules about washings and make ritual offerings, but forget about mercy and compassion. We can learn from the Pharisees' example, we must avoid overspiritualizing. We may focus so much on activities that make us look good that we forget to care for our own families. We must note that Jesus does not say that obeying the law is bad. He does not rebuke the Pharisees for making offerings. He rebukes them for desiring self-glorification. If they had truly desired God to be glorified, their lives would have been marked with compassion and justice *in addition to* obedience to God's commands. Jesus then shares this message with the multitudes. It is not eating certain foods or neglecting man-made laws that make people unclean. Uncleanliness comes from the sinful nature of our own hearts. If our effort is aimed at battling sin and tending righteousness in our own hearts, the outward acts of righteousness will follow naturally. Jesus would eventually make this possible by His work on the cross, His resurrection, and the giving of the Holy Spirit to believers.

After establishing that we are justified by what is inside, rather than what is outside, Jesus immediately goes to minister to Gentiles. At the time, Jews did not associate with Gentiles. Jesus is foreshadowing the unity between Jew and Gentile that will come in His kingdom. First, a Syrophenician woman asks Jesus to heal her daughter. He does not immediately comply, but first tests her. The woman passes the test by saying that, even though the meal goes to the household first, dogs still get scraps. "Dogs" was a common insult for Gentiles. This woman understood that Jesus' ministry was first for the Jewish people. However, she recognized that it would overflow and be available to Gentiles as well. Second, Jesus heals a person with hearing and speech problems (see Isaiah 35:5-6). As this person lives in the Decapolis region, he is likely a Gentile as well. Jesus does not want us to come to Him simply because it is easy. The manner in which He heals this man is clear evidence of that. Jesus touches the man's ears and places His own saliva on the man's tongue. At any point the sick man could stop Jesus. Instead, he perseveres, trusting that what Jesus is doing is good.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Do you ever focus more on your outward appearance of righteousness than on the condition of your heart? Confess this to God.
2. Ask God for one way you can show somebody practical love and compassion today. Follow through on what He shows you!
3. Spend time praying for the Jewish nation today. As Gentiles, we are blessed to be grafted into Jesus' covenant. Our calling is to partner with Jesus in bringing the Jews to Him (Romans 11:11). In particular, pray for the spread of the Gospel, strengthened Messianic Jewish congregations, and peace in Jerusalem.

DAY 9**READ:** Mark 8

This chapter begins with Jesus' second miraculous multiplication of food. Like before (6:37-44), Jesus is teaching and the crowd becomes hungry. Like before, the disciples think in purely physical terms. We can be encouraged by the fact that the disciples were sometimes slow learners – just like us! If we are sincerely trying to learn Jesus' ways, He will mercifully continue to teach us until we understand. He gives earnest seekers everything they need to find Him. Conversely, if we ask Jesus for signs out of a doubtful heart, He will not be held hostage by our demands. The Pharisees had seen and heard about Jesus' ministry. Yet, they still asked for a sign "to test him" (v 11). In essence, their question was a declaration that His previous signs were untrustworthy. Later on, the disciples forget to bring bread for a journey. Jesus uses this as a teaching moment to drive His lesson home. He warns them to stay away from "the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (v 15). They must take to heart what they have already experienced of Jesus. If they willfully forget what He has done, He will not continue to give them signs. He wants them to walk in confidence and faith.

On this journey, Jesus encounters a blind man in Bethsaida. Before healing him, Jesus leads the man out of the village. Jesus' miracles are always performed with the intention of increasing faith in onlookers. It is likely that Jesus wanted the miracle to primarily benefit the blind man and his disciples, not the town of Bethsaida.

After all of this discussion about trust, Jesus approaches His disciples with two questions: Who do people say I am? Who do *you* say I am? Peter responds with his famous affirmation, "You are the Christ" (v 29). Jesus warns the disciples not to tell anyone. Popular concepts of the Messiah are still too different from God's intended plan for it to be received well. Jesus proceeds to unveil a shocking plan to His disciples. As the Messiah, He will suffer greatly, be killed, and rise three days late. Ever zealous, Peter challenges this. Peter loves Jesus and does not want to see Him suffer. Surely the Messiah could prevent such suffering! Unknowingly, Peter becomes an accomplice in Satan's strategy to keep Jesus away from the cross. Jesus responds with a firm rebuke. He will not let His beloved disciple fall prey to the devil's schemes. Peter's desire to help his friend, while seemingly noble, is birthed from a focus on man's interests. Jesus wants Peter to focus on God's interests: the fulfillment of His plan for Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection.

The shocking news is still settling in the disciples' minds when Jesus relays another message. His followers, too, must suffer. They will have to lose their ambitions, hopes, finances, reputation, yes, their entire lives, to follow Him. They will have to walk an incredibly difficult journey, marked with rejection by the world, knowing that great reward lies at the end. If Jesus had to suffer much, how can we follow in His footsteps without expecting the same?

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Peter knew Jesus as the Christ. Who do you know Jesus as? Write a list of as many of Jesus' names and character traits that you can think of. Reflect on this list, thinking of how you have met Jesus in each of these ways and worshipping Him for who He is.
2. Meditate on verses 34-39. Record what God is speaking to you through these verses in your journal. Write a prayer of dedication in response to what He shows you.

3. Pray for our post-secondary school system. The culture of post-secondary institutions in the West reflects the Pharisees' hearts. People demand proof of Jesus with no willingness to be convinced of Him. Pray for intellectual integrity in professors, administrators and students. Pray that they would approach questions about Jesus with a heart willing to accept the answer best indicated by evidence. Pray that, as people in post-secondary institutions come to know Jesus, they will transform their culture to glorify Him.

DAY 10



READ: Mark 9

Mark 8:31-10:52 is a turning point in Jesus' public ministry. Previously, He had been building faith in His disciples and progressively revealing His divine nature. Now, Jesus unfolds a different aspect of His identity. He reveals that part of His divine nature involves a calling to suffer, die and be resurrected (8:29, 9:31, 10:33-34). Jesus tells His disciples that some of them will see God's kingdom come "with power" in their own lives. This is partially fulfilled in the Transfiguration, which happens six days later, and even more fully in Jesus' resurrection. Jesus has already warned His disciples of the difficulties that will come because they have chosen to follow Him (8:34-38). He knows that a picture of heaven is the most powerful way to persevere through suffering. It is no coincidence that Jesus chose this season in His teaching ministry to reveal Himself in all His heavenly splendour to the disciples. Again, He tells His disciples to keep this event secret for a time. Mankind will not be able to believe in the glorified Jesus until they see the resurrected Jesus.

When Jesus returns, He is greeted with a crowd. A man from steps forward. He had brought His demon-possessed son to one of Jesus' disciples for healing, but the disciple was powerless against the demon. At Jesus' command, the demon flees the boy's body. Jesus later reveals to His disciples that certain strongholds can only be broken through prayer and fasting.

The rest of Mark 9 consists of private interactions between Jesus and His disciples. First we see Jesus repeating His previous statements about His impending death (v 30-32). Next, Jesus teaches His disciples about the importance of humility in His kingdom. A person that seeks the position of greatest honour for purely selfish motives is worthy of the least honour in God's sight. Jesus also teaches His disciples about the value of children and how we must treat them with special care. Children are very dear to Jesus' heart. When we love and help the littlest, most helpless members of our society, we bless Jesus dearly. However, great judgment awaits those who harm these little ones. In light of coming judgment, we are advised to purify ourselves. If anything tempts us to sin, we must get rid of it. Jesus uses the illustration of cutting off a hand that causes you to sin. Jesus does not condone literal self-mutilation. Rather, He is saying nothing should be so dear to us that we will choose to cling to it and face eternal punishment instead of forsaking it and entering heaven.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask God to give you a word, thought, picture, or Scripture that gives you a glimpse into heaven. Engage with your heart in whatever He shows you. How can this revelation help you persevere through trials?

2. Sin is a serious matter. What is an area of sin or stronghold in your life that you cannot seem to get over, no matter how hard you try? Ask Jesus how you can fast for freedom in this area. Share this with a godly, mature believer and get them to pray for you while you are fasting.
3. Pray for parents you know today (including yourself, if you have children!). Pray that they would see the incredible worth of raising godly children (v 37). Pray that God would empower them to raise their children well. Pray that they would become intercessors and warriors on behalf of their families.

DAY 11



READ: Mark 10:1-31

In this passage, Jesus re-interprets the Law for His followers. He does not expect us to merely abide by the letter of the Law. The standards for His followers are much higher. A disciple of Jesus must search out the intended spirit of the Law and abide by this standard. A contemporary example may help us understand this concept. Take two drivers. One follows the specific, written guidelines of the criminal code. They obey the speed limit, avoid talking on the phone while driving, etc. However, they may engage in other unsafe driving behaviours which do not *technically* break the law, such as focussing too much attention on their passengers. A second driver understands the purpose behind traffic laws: to keep drivers, passengers and bystanders safe. This driver's understanding motivates him or her to drive safely, even beyond the level expressed by the law. One person seeks to do the bare minimum and looks for loopholes. The other seeks to uphold the intended purpose of the law, even if it means limiting their own behaviour.

Jesus has two conversations that illustrate this fact. In one He forbids divorce. Divorce had previously been allowed in Mosaic Law because of human sin. God has always hated divorce (Malachi 2:16). However, the sinfulness of humans meant that if people weren't allowed divorce, men would simply abandon their wives when things became difficult. In ancient biblical times, this would leave a woman utterly defenceless. Divorce was allowed, because it gave the woman an opportunity to re-marry. Jesus now tells His followers they must conquer the sin in their hearts that leads to divorce. Instead of divorcing, couples must work through the trials they face in marriage. Jesus also talks with a man who has obeyed the Law since childhood. However, this man is wealthy and unwilling to part with his worldly treasure. The letter of the Law does not require this man to give everything He has to the poor. However, the spirit of the Law demands extravagant generosity and a willingness to part with anything that hinders our intimacy with Jesus (9:42-47). Following the spirit of the Law may have temporary costs attached (v 28-29). However, it will lead to incredible eternal rewards (v 30).



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask Jesus to show you somebody who is a leader or authority figure in your life. How can you grow in having a truly obedient heart (following the spirit of the law), beyond merely obeying specific directions they give you (following the letter of the law). Ask Jesus to give you grace to grow in submission in this area of your life.

2. What is one thing in your life that you cling to tighter than you cling to Jesus? This may be a relationship, a job, ministry, your reputation, your time, physical possessions/wealth, etc. Surrender this to Jesus today. Ask Him if there is a practical step you need to take in this surrender.
3. Pray for our local, provincial, and national governments today. Pray that they would have wisdom in creating laws for our country. Pray that God would grant them discernment and efficiency in their roles. Pray that their families would grow in unity under Jesus and that they would be willing to lead under His authority.

DAY 12



READ: Mark 10:31-11:26

This passage tells of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. His crucifixion is soon and He must stay near the city until that time. Jesus uses every moment He has to prepare His disciples for ministry without Him. He reminds them that it is service, not status, that will make them powerful ministers (10:38-45). Crowds gather in Jericho as Jesus and His disciples pass through. Among the crowds is a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. Twice Bartimaeus cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (10:47-48). The crowds try to calm him down, but Bartimaeus will not be silenced. Moved by compassion, Jesus beckons for Bartimaeus. Jesus listens to him and says, "Go your way; your faith has made you well" (10:52).

Chapter 11 begins with Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Zechariah 9:9 prophesied that the Messianic King would enter Jerusalem on a donkey. Jesus, a man of no position in society, is given a king's reception. The people come to greet Him. They lay coats and palm branches down so even the feet of Jesus' donkey will not touch the ground. The crowds cry, "Hosanna!" and declare that Jesus is the Messiah in the line of David (11:9-10). They have waited for this day for generations.

Jesus and His disciples leave Jerusalem every evening (11:19). On their trips in and out of Jerusalem, they encounter a fig tree. Jesus curses the fig tree for having leaves, but no fruit. The fig tree is a symbol for Israel (Jeremiah 24). Similarly, Jesus will soon judge the Temple for having the appearance of holiness, but bearing no eternal fruit (11:15-17). Later, Jesus uses the withered fig tree as an opportunity to remind His disciples about prayer and faith. Surely, the prayer offered in faith will be heard. This lesson echoes Jesus' statement, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations" (11:17). Jesus is both training His disciples and prophesying about the importance of prayer in His coming Church.

Jesus' final clash with the religious leaders is impending. They are already looking for ways to destroy Jesus (11:18). Now they seek to test Jesus by asking in what authority He ministers. Jesus, ever wise, responds in a manner that leaves the religious leaders speechless (11:29-33).



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Meditate on the story of the Triumphal Entry, remembering that Jesus is our coming King. How would you receive Jesus if He were entering your community?

2. Re-read 11:25-26. Is there anyone you need to forgive? If so, work through these steps with God:
 - a) Confess harbouring unforgiveness and ask God to cleanse you of this (1 John 1:9)
 - b) Choose to forgive the person/people involved. Forgiveness often begins as a choice, not an emotion.
 - c) Pray blessings over the person/people involved. Commit to praying for them regularly until you feel released by God to stop.
3. Ask God to show you a mountain in your life that needs to be moved.
 - a) Ask Him to give you a promise of what He wants to do in this situation.
 - b) Ask Him to a specific prayer strategy you can use.
 - c) Pray as He shows you. Commit to praying for this area until you see fruit or feel released by God to stop.

DAY 13



READ: Mark 11:27-12:44

This passage relates a series of interactions between Jesus and the religious authorities. It begins when the Pharisees question the source of Jesus' authority to teach (11:27-33). Jesus refuses to give a direct answer, recognizing that the Pharisees' question is a trap. Rather, Jesus responds with a parable about a vineyard. Through this parable, Jesus reveals that Israel has been honoured as God's stewards. They have the revelation of Yahweh and they bear His covenant. However, Israel became mired in sin. God repeatedly sent His servants, the prophets, to turn Israel back. They mistreated and sometimes killed these messengers from God. This is exactly what happened to John the Baptist. Soon it will happen to Jesus as well. Those who kill God's Son will face judgment. The honour of representing Yahweh on earth will be taken from those with hard, sinful hearts and given to those with soft, repentant hearts. The religious leaders understand the condemnation Jesus is speaking and are furious. However, they do not act, for fear of the crowds. Instead, they give Jesus a series of three tests.

First, they question Jesus about taxation. The Roman emperors honoured themselves as semi-divine. Thus taxation could imply an acceptance of emperor worship, which would violate the Law (Exodus 20:3). Jesus' response leaves room for His disciples to obey authority, while challenging Roman emperor worship. They must give to Caesar what is due to Caesar (taxes) and to God what is due to God (worship). Next the Sadducees test Jesus regarding the resurrection. Sadducees did not believe in resurrection because they believe it is not explicitly mentioned in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible). First, Jesus points to the issue underlying the Sadducees' question. They are prideful in their interpretation of Scripture and do not trust that God is powerful enough to resurrect. Jesus also cites Exodus 3:6. It would be absurd for Yahweh to announce Himself as currently having a relationship with a dead person. If Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not receive a resurrection, Yahweh would said, I am the God who *was* worshipped by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For God to put forth an incorrect identity would invalidate the entire covenant – like signing a contract in a false name. Finally, the Pharisees test Jesus interpretation of Scripture. Jesus correctly describes the most important law. In so doing, Jesus affirms the importance of the Old Testament. He did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it.

Having faced the religious leaders' tests, Jesus now challenges the religious leaders. He quotes Psalm 110. The Jewish people awaited a Messiah who was the Son of David. A man who would come from David's lineage and sit on David's throne. This cannot be a complete picture of the Messiah's identity. If it were, why would David refer to his descendent as, "My Lord"? Indeed, the Messiah is the Son, not just of David, but of God. Jesus has already claimed the title "Son of God." He is now tying the pieces of His identity together for the religious leaders. In clear terms He is saying, "I am God and I am the Messiah."



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Search yourself in light of Mark 12:38-40. Do you sin in the manner of the Pharisees? Confess as necessary.
2. The widow in the temple gave everything she owned to God. Is everything you have, including your whole heart, laid on the table before Jesus? Ask Jesus to speak to you about how He desires your everything.
3. Pray that you would become wholly devoted to Jesus. Ask God to show you one or two other people you can pray this for today.

DAY 14



READ: Mark 13

Jesus' time with His disciples is growing short. He knows there is one more thing He must do: prepare them to face persecution. In Mark 13 we see Jesus operating as a prophet. Jesus knew what was to come in the end of the age before the world was even formed (Isaiah 46:10). . First, Jesus prophesies the destruction of the Temple (v 1-2). This happened in 70 A.D., when the Roman general Titus sacked Jerusalem. As we have already seen the fulfillment of one of Jesus' prophecies, we can trust the remaining prophecy in Mark 13. Studying Jesus' prophecies in this chapter can bear great fruit in our lives. Two specific types of fruit are of note. First, studying these prophecies prepares those who will walk through the end of this age. If we know what signs and events to expect, we can recognize them when they happen. This recognition will encourage believers that Jesus' return is drawing near. Second, studying these prophecies can transform our hearts. They can lead us to confront our fears. They can encourage us to root out why we do not fully trust Jesus. They can lead us to a greater love of prayer and Scripture. Facing the reality of the End Times forces us to boldly confront the condition of our hearts.

While we do not know the day or hour of His return, we must stand on guard. We must set our resolve on following Jesus regardless of the cost. This resolve will radically transform our walks, whether or not we live to see the final days before Jesus' return.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Confess any fear you have regarding the times leading up the Jesus' return. Ask God to replace your fears with courage and perseverance.
2. Make two columns in your journal. In one, write all of the things in this chapter that Jesus commands His followers to do. In the other, write all of the things in this chapter that Jesus warns His followers against doing. Reflect on these lists and ask Jesus to sink them into your heart.

3. In your journal, list the signs Jesus gives of His coming return, based on the Mark 13. Reflecting on these will help us be alert and prepared as His arrival draws nearer.
4. Thank Jesus for not leaving us. He is present in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, He works in our world and He is coming back for His Church, His beloved bride.

DAY 15



READ: Mark 14:1-52

One evening, shortly before the Passover, Jesus and His disciples are in Bethany. A woman comes with an alabaster jar of fine, costly perfume. She breaks the jar and pours the perfume over Jesus' head. While some of the onlookers scoff, Jesus commends the woman. This perfume was worth almost an entire year's wages. Likely, this was her entire inheritance – all that she had to live on. This woman knew that exalting Jesus was worth far more than maintaining her own physical comfort. Jesus honours the woman for her act of extravagant love. Wherever His story is told, hers will be told also. It is crucial that we take note when Jesus labels something as valuable. We must shape our lives around these examples, in honour of Him. Immediately after being encouraged by this woman's devotion, we are discouraged by Judas Iscariot's betrayal (v 10-11).

Next, we have a final glimpse into Jesus' fellowship with His disciples. They celebrate the first day of the festival of Unleavened Bread by sharing dinner together. During their meal, Jesus reveals that one of the twelve will soon betray Him. The disciples are grieved. How could any of them betray Jesus after all they'd been through? Next, Jesus shares bread and wine with His disciples. He uses these dishes to symbolize how His body will be broken and His blood poured out for our benefit. In this, He institutes the ritual of communion. We can celebrate Jesus at any time, in any place. However, there is something powerful about gathering with our brothers and sisters to commemorate what Jesus did on the cross. Before leaving the table, Jesus and His disciples sing a hymn together. Like communion, worship can be practiced individually. Like communion, worship takes on a deeper significance, a greater power, when we practice it in unity with the Church.

As they approach the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus predicts Peter's betrayal. The fervent Peter refuses to think He could ever betray Jesus. At this time, Jesus needs solitude. He retreats to spend time in prayer. Nothing on earth can fuel Jesus for what He is about to do. He is deeply grieved. He does not want to experience slander, torture, and ultimately, anguish on a cross, even though He knows it is necessary. Jesus pours His heart out before the Father. He is honest in a way that many people would criticize. We regularly tell God, "Thy will be done," without also being honest about our feelings about God's will. God is omniscient – He knows all things. Our honesty is not primarily for His benefit, but for our own. Honesty allows God to gently shape and mold our hearts until they are aligned with His. The kind of over-spiritualization that prevents honesty with God puts us at risk of breeding resentment toward Him.

Jesus eventually gets up. He knows His time is at hand. He stirs His disciples. Just then, Judas Iscariot approaches, "accompanied by a multitude with swords and clubs" (v 43). Judas approaches Jesus, saying, "Rabbi" (v 45). With a kiss, Judas turns Jesus in to the mob.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Reflect on the stories you have read in Mark. What are some things that are valuable to Jesus? List as many things as you can in your journal. Ask Him to give you a practical step you can take to grow in one of these things.
2. Ask Jesus for one practical step you can take to grow in fellowship with His Church this week.
3. Pray for the Church. Pray that we would be moved by the things that move Jesus' heart. Pray that we would be one, just as Jesus and the Father are one. Pray that we would stand behind our Lord and Saviour to the very end.

DAY 16



READ: Mark 14:53-15:47

Jesus has been betrayed and is now in the hands of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a council of seventy-one priests, elders and scribes. These men acted as both a political-judicial court and a body of religious governance. They tried criminals, with the minimum requirement of two witnesses (14:55-59). Without reliable testimony from witnesses, the Sanhedrin was powerless. None of the criminal accusations brought before Jesus could be proven because He was innocent.

In addition to trying criminals, the Sanhedrin was responsible for identifying the Messiah. Even prior to Jesus' time, people had falsely claimed to be the Messiah. The Sanhedrin was charged with protecting people from deception. Because of Jesus' former claims that He was the Messiah, the Sanhedrin questioned Him along these lines as well (11:61). Jesus had remained silent to false accusations that He was a criminal. He knew He was blameless and trusted God with His reputation. However, Jesus answered the question of His identity with a resounding yes: "I am [the Christ]" (11:62). The Sanhedrin refused to believe the evidence in favour of Jesus being the Messiah and they label Him a blasphemer. They knew that as long as Jesus was alive, people would believe He was the Messiah. However, the Sanhedrin did not have the power to enact capital punishment. They could only say that Jesus was "deserving of death" and hand Him over to Pilate, the Roman prefect of Judea (15:1).

As Jesus' trials intensify, Peter loses his resolve. He had previously vowed to never abandon Jesus (14:29). We cannot live on passion alone. We must pray for God's grace to stand firm in times of trial.

The Sanhedrin charged Jesus with being a criminal and a blasphemer. Pilate is now trying Him with starting a political insurrection. In the first century there was a political movement called Zealotry. Zealotry aimed to remove Rome from Judea (Israel) by force. Thus, Pilate was hyper-vigilant about Jews who might pose a threat to his position of power. Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "It is as you say" (15:2). Jesus is the King in the line of David. He is the supreme ruler over the Jews, and indeed all mankind. Jesus did not seek to steal Pilate's political position, because He knew He was King in a far greater sense of the word. Pilate does not understand the man before him. When the crowds demand Jesus be crucified, Pilate agrees. Jesus is mocked, scorned, beaten and crucified. The only blameless person to ever walk the earth is hanging on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins. The Messiah is choosing not to save Himself

from temporary suffering, in order that we might avoid eternal suffering in hell. The King of the universe is letting His subjects condemn Him, so that He will not have to condemn His subjects.

“And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. And the veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (15:37-38). It is finished. Jesus has made a way for mankind to enter intimate relationship with God. The moment after Jesus’ death, men already begin to realize the enormity of what has just happened (15:39). Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, takes Jesus’ body and gives it a respectful burial. Jesus’ body will not be discarded as a criminal’s. We do not know where Joseph or Arimathea was during Jesus’ trial. However, we know that Joseph of Arimathea was a man “waiting for the kingdom of God.” When we long first and foremost for God’s kingdom to come on earth, He will give us the opportunity to help in His cause.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Jesus is Innocent. Thank Him for forgiving your sins and justifying you before God.
2. Jesus is Messiah. Thank Him for saving you from an eternity in hell and giving you the opportunity to know Him in heaven.
3. Jesus is King. Thank Him for being your ruler and functional Lord. Ask Jesus how you can bring your life in alignment with His reign.
4. Are you “waiting for the kingdom of God”? Ask God to grow your desire to see His kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

DAY 17



READ: Mark 16

When the Sabbath is over, Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of James and Salome, go to Jesus’ tomb to anoint Him. When they arrive, they see that the stone blocking the entrance has been rolled away. Instead of finding Jesus’ body in the tomb, the two women find a young man. He tells them that Jesus has risen. He is alive! This is the greatest miracle of all! Because He personally bore our sins and conquered death, we may walk in freedom and eternal life with Him!

Before going any further, a brief explanatory note is needed. Many Bible translations have a footnote here, saying that some of the oldest manuscripts do not contain verses 9-20. This fact does not mean that these verses are unreliable or are not the Word of God! First, while a small minority of early copies of Mark’s Gospel do not contain these verses, the vast majority do. Second, these verses were referenced by several trusted early Church leaders, including Irenaeus. Third, these verses are corroborated, or backed up, by the other Biblical Gospels. The events we read about in Mark 16:9-20 are also found in Matthew, Luke and John. We can trust these words as truth because they come into alignment with the rest of Scripture. The best way to build doctrines is not by citing one passage, but by building a body of evidence from throughout God’s Word. Finally, we must trust that God is powerful enough and loving enough to give us an accurate copy of His Words.

After His resurrection, Jesus visits Mary Magdalene. She approaches Jesus' mourners with good news. They do not have to mourn any longer, for Jesus is alive! They refuse to believe her. Jesus also appears to two travellers. His mourners also refuse to believe these men. It is not until Jesus actually appears to His inner circle that they believe He is alive. Sometimes we have difficulty believing things that we do not personally experience. We need humility to trust that what God says is real and true is, indeed, real and true. Jesus then gives His disciples the Great Commission. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (v 15). The Holy Spirit will provide us with all the power we need to faithfully preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. Mark ends with an affirmation of the disciples. For all of the times that they doubted, disobeyed, disowned Jesus or did not understand His teaching, they finish the race with faithful obedience.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Thank God for Bible translators. They do difficult, but vital work. Pray that God would bless the men and women who do this work for His kingdom and give them a continually growing love for Him.
2. Jesus commands His disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (v 15). Ask God for one practical way you can obey this command in the next week.
3. We often evaluate ourselves in terms of our previous actions. For example, "I am not a good evangelist because in the past I have been too afraid to say anything." Jesus wants us to confess our sin and be cleansed from it! He wants us to let go of anything that hinders us (including our past) and the sin that so easily entangles and run with perseverance the race set before us (Hebrews 12:1). Ask God to show you how, like the disciples, you can let go of your past mistakes and begin a fresh journey of advancing His kingdom.
4. Pray for the spread of the Gospel. Pray for labourers, that many genuine disciples might be made.

The Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark centers on the revelation of Jesus' identity as the Messiah. Mark's rapid-fire retelling of Jesus' ministry on earth emphasizes how people perceived Jesus. Some people chose to open their hearts and minds to Him. These people grew in their comprehension of who Jesus was each time they interacted with Him. Others chose to close their hearts, writing Jesus off as a fool or a criminal. These people missed the joy of discovering the single most important man to walk the earth. Like the people of Jesus' day, we must choose how to respond to His actions. We can reject or ignore Him or we can love and worship Him for all He has done.

Mark 8:29 (NIV)

"And Jesus asked them, 'Who do you say that I am?'

Peter answered him, 'You are the Christ.'"