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# THE LOOKOUT

APRIL 2023

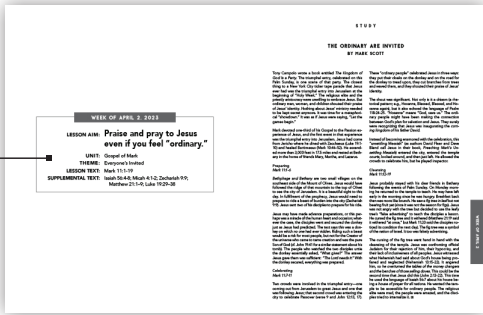
## Unit: Gospel of Mark

### Theme: Everyone's Invited

**Overview:** Reading the Gospel of Mark is like preparing for the arrival of company. The fast-moving Messiah of Mark's Gospel was getting his house (kingdom) ready for a wide assortment of guests. Jesus wanted everyone in his kingdom—the ordinary, the nations, sinners, the hurting, and even you. Students will want to give Jesus their RSVP.

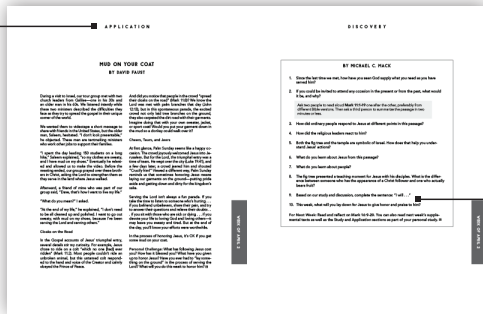
## HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF APRIL 16, 2023

**LESSON AIM:** **Respond to the call  
for repentance and  
forgiveness.**

**UNIT:** Gospel of Mark

**THEME:** Everyone's Invited

**LESSON TEXT:** Mark 2:1-17

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Psalm 51; Mark 1:1-8; Romans 5:8

## STUDY

### SINNERS ARE INVITED

BY MARK SCOTT

Years ago, an evangelist was preparing to hold a revival in a relatively small town. He wrote the ministers in the town and asked if they would send him the names of people they knew who needed to accept Christ. The ministers sent the evangelist a copy of their town's phone book. The bad news is that everyone is a sinner (Romans 3:23). The good news is that all sinners are invited to the kingdom of God.

The lesson text contains the miracle of Jesus healing a paralytic and the call of Levi (aka Matthew) to be a disciple. Maybe John Mark viewed Levi's call from tax collector to disciple to be a miracle of sorts. Mark placed several miracles side by side. The first is the cleansing of the leper (1:40-45). The second is the cleansing from sin and healing of the paralytic (2:1-12).

#### Removing Barriers for Sinners

Mark 2:1-4

During one of his first tours around Galilee, *Jesus again entered Capernaum*. Word traveled quickly that Jesus had come to town. The *large numbers* of people packed the house (Peter's house?). Jesus spoke the "logos"—or gospel—to them (see Mark 1:14-15).

Four men brought a paralyzed man to Jesus. These men were willing to tear up a roof to get their friend to Jesus, and *their faith* was strong—which Jesus observed. The word on the street was that Jesus was a worker of wonders (see Mark 1:32-34, 39). The men dug through the tiles (Luke 5:19) and removed any barrier for their friend.

#### Forgiving Sinners

Mark 2:5-12

Jesus was taken by the four friends' faith. Then he made a stunning declaration, "*Son, your sins are forgiven* [sent away or canceled]." This declaration was announced with no regard for what had occurred earlier (sacrifices) or what would occur later (the cross). These things do not matter to Jesus, for he is the embodiment of the New Covenant. So, by the power of his person, he declared the man forgiven.

This declaration immediately became a huge theological problem for the *teachers of the law*. To forgive sins was a privilege possessed only by God. So, by thinking, "*Who*

*can forgive sins but God alone?*" they were making Jesus' point. Jesus is God—in flesh. Jesus *knew* (the word for *epistemology*) what they were thinking. He anticipated their objection.

The Master Teacher asked them, "*Which is easier?*" It was not a question of word count or pronunciation. Neither performing a miracle nor declaring forgiveness is easy, but God can do both. While not every miracle of Jesus has an apologetic purpose, this miracle did. Jesus, as God's Son, had the ability to forgive sins, and he proved it by raising the paralyzed man—a messianic sign to be sure (Isaiah 35:6). Everyone was *amazed* and *praised* God when the paralyzed man *took his mat and walked out in full view of them all*. Jesus had begun to save the world even prior to the cross. The miracle was a brief preview into full future redemption for the entire universe.

#### Eating with Sinners

Mark 2:13-17

The Synoptic Gospels all place the call of Matthew following the healing of the paralytic. So, perhaps it was not too long after Jesus raised the paralytic that he walked by Matthew's tax booth in Capernaum and said, "*Follow me.*" *Levi son of Alphaeus* is almost certainly Matthew (although David Garland builds a case for it being someone else in *The NIV Application Commentary*). Matthew did leave his tax booth, but, as one person put it, he remembered to take his pen.

Matthew had sold out to Rome; now he sold out to Jesus. And he did the only thing he knew to do—celebrate. He threw a party to introduce his friends to Jesus (Luke says that it was a "great banquet," Luke 5:29). The criticism about whom Jesus ate with did not take long to surface. The Pharisees accused Jesus of eating with traitors (that is, *tax collectors*) and *sinners*. They knew, and Jesus knew, that to eat with someone meant several things—not the least of which was acceptance. Tax collectors and sinners are mentioned three times in the text, and Mark recorded, "*There were many who followed him.*"

Jesus justified himself by taking the role of a doctor. Only the sick need a doctor (a common secular proverb of Jesus' day). The sad reality is that the supposed righteous were sinners just like the tax collectors and sinners—and all are invited. ■

## APPLICATION

### THE MESSINESS OF MINISTRY

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you ever shake your head and sigh, “Why is this world such a mess?” Do you wish everyone would just get their act together and do what they’re supposed to do?

Moses complained about leading the rebellious Hebrews through the wilderness. Elijah wallowed in self-pity and wondered if he was the only one left who cared about God. Paul expressed frustration with the Corinthians’ immaturity, immorality, and divisiveness. Jesus’ adversaries made him angry and “deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts” (Mark 3:5).

Life would be easier if everyone was mature, wise, and gracious. But people aren’t that way, and serving God isn’t easy.

It’s no surprise when firefighters smell like smoke. Emergency room doctors get blood on their scrubs. Shepherds get manure on their sandals. Parents of newborn babies change a lot of diapers. If you expect to stay neat and tidy while serving God, you are in for a big surprise. Ministry is messy.

#### The Messiah Amid the Mess

Jesus didn’t shy away from messy situations. He got his hands muddy to help a blind man. His feet got wet from a tearful woman who used her long hair as a towel; and another woman messily anointed his feet with expensive perfume. Most people avoided tax collectors, but Jesus went out of his way to socialize with them. He touched “untouchable” lepers and fed hungry listeners who walked away when they found his message hard to accept.

Jesus faced criticism, skepticism, and false accusations. His disciples engaged in petty squabbles, and enthusiastic but misguided fans wanted to make him king but didn’t realize what it meant to make him Lord. His teaching was interrupted by sick people demanding

miracles, eager children seeking attention, curious questioners looking for answers, and hateful enemies trying to discredit or destroy him. He took time to help a scary, ghoulish fellow who was possessed by demons and lived in a cemetery—and restored him to health and freedom.

One day when Jesus was teaching in a crowded house, things got messy when four men tore a hole in the roof. The men used ropes to lower their paralyzed friend on a mat down into the room. Jesus’ teaching was disrupted, the crowd got dirt on their heads, and the homeowner suddenly had an unplanned skylight in his roof. But Jesus used this messy situation to demonstrate his divine authority to heal and forgive.

#### Our Messes

I pray for opportunities to interact with seekers and unbelievers, and the Lord answers by bringing me into messy situations. I visit a grumpy non-Christian in his 80s who swears a lot and complains about living in rehab. I meet with a 21-year-old man whose body, mind, and relationships have been damaged by poor choices and drug abuse. A middle-aged divorcee claims he’s not a believer, but he asks good questions and attends a small group that meets in my house.

I wish the world weren’t such a mess, but I’m glad the Messiah is willing to make himself at home in unpleasant situations, no matter who made the messes. Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick” (Mark 2:17). In this world of sin and sorrow, we get to be spiritual EMTs, bringing fellow sufferers to the Great Physician).

**Personal Challenge:** Pray for opportunities to interact with seekers and unbelievers. Ask the Lord for wisdom and strength to deal with messy situations so you can be an ambassador of his grace and truth. **L**

## DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Did you “preach the gospel” or talk to someone about Jesus and his resurrection over the past week? If so, how did that go?
2. What would you expect to happen today if you held a party, invited both Christian and non-Christian friends, and Jesus showed up?

Ask two people to read aloud **Mark 2:1-17** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to summarize the passage briefly.

3. Discuss each group of people, below, separately. How would you describe the people in each group and what they did?
  - Jesus and his disciples
  - The four men and the paralytic man
  - Teachers of the law
  - Levi and his friends
4. The teachers asked, “Why does this fellow talk like that? . . . Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Using Jesus’ response as a guide, how would you answer that same question if someone asked the question about Jesus today?
5. If someone asked you, “Why did Jesus hang out and eat with traitors and sinners?” how would you answer in your own words?
6. What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?
  - What do you learn about forgiveness for sins and repentance?
7. What do you learn about yourself?
8. In what specific way will you make it a point this week to hang out with (and perhaps eat with) one or more people who are still far away from God?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: “I will . . .”
10. What do you need most from God to love people who are far from God? *More compassion or empathy? Boldness? More margin in your time? Something else?*

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Mark 7:24-37**. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■