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THE LOOKOUT

APRIL 2023

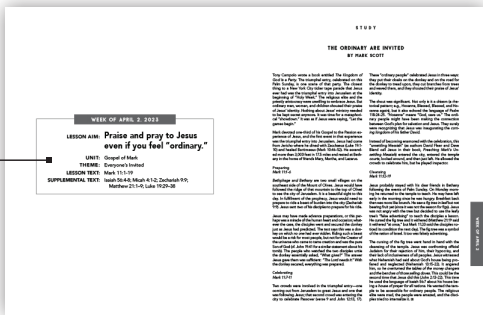
Unit: Gospel of Mark

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.

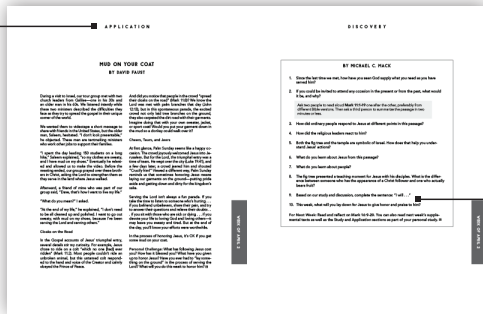
HOW TO USE

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 23, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Follow Jesus' example
by helping those who
are hurting.**

UNIT: Gospel of Mark

THEME: Everyone's Invited

LESSON TEXT: Mark 7:24-37

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Isaiah 55:1-5; 58:6-7; Matthew 9:35-38; 25:31-40

STUDY

THE HURTING ARE INVITED

BY MARK SCOTT

John Baker wrote a book entitled *Life's Healing Choices* (2007). He asserted that all people struggle with hurts, hang-ups, and habits. Baker worked on staff with Rick Warren at Saddleback Church in California. Warren, the now-retired senior pastor of Saddleback, said that 70 percent of people who came to Christ at Saddleback did so through the Celebrate Recovery program run by John Baker. Spoiler alert—there are scores of hurting people in this world.

Chapters 6–7 make the transition between the “boat” stories and “bread” stories in Mark’s Gospel. Jesus fed the 5,000 in the wilderness with a very simple meal of fish and “bread” (in contrast to Herod’s lush birthday bash). The Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating “bread” with unwashed hands. So, Jesus retreated to the far northern country to gain some margin in his life. While there, he encountered a desperate mother, and “bread” was the metaphor that carried the conversation along.

Hurt By Demons

Mark 7:24-30

The people of Tyre were old enemies of the Israelites. For Jesus to go to that area and encounter people was risky. He was trying to get away and have some “R and R” with the disciples. He did not want anyone to know his comings and goings. But “he could not be hid” (v. 24, *King James Version*). A driven mother learned that Jesus had come to the area. She came, *fell at his feet*, and asked for help for her *little daughter* who was demonized (Mark’s rather consistent way of writing about this was to say someone had an “unclean” or “impure spirit”). The woman went unnamed, but her ethnicity (Greek) and nationality (Syrian Phoenicia) were mentioned—probably to highlight the difference between her and Jesus. She begged Jesus for help.

Jesus spoke to her (although he was silent with her at first—Matthew 15:23) in highly figurative language. This might have ensured a private conversation even though the disciples overheard it. The figures of speech used in their dialogue: *children* = Israelites; *bread* = the gospel or spiritual nourishment from God; *dogs* = pagans, Gentiles, unbelievers. Calling someone a *dog* is hardly a compliment (even if Jesus did use a diminutive form of the word; e.g., puppy). But I imagine Jesus winking at her when he said these things, perhaps intending to draw her out.

Jesus’ strategy worked, for she was not put off. She realized her place, but she refused to give up. She reminded the Lord that little puppies eat the crumbs that fall from the table. She essentially was saying, “I’ll take whatever help you can give me—even a crumb.” Ralph Martin called this event, “The Day that Jesus Met His Match.” Jesus must have followed his wink with a smile when he told her, “*For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.*” She had the faith to take Jesus at his word and went home. She found her daughter *on the bed* (sleeping peacefully?), *and the demon gone*. Demons know only how to hurt, but Jesus invited the hurting to himself.

Hurt by Disability

Mark 7:31-37

A world not yet fully redeemed has demons and people with disabilities in it. Jesus left the area of Tyre and went north through Sidon before heading back east and south. Jesus had not been in the *region of the Decapolis* on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee since his encounter with the Gadarene demoniac from the cemetery (Mark 5:1-20). After casting out the demons named Legion from the man, the townspeople begged Jesus to leave. Now they brought to him a man with more than one disability. Why this 180-degree change in the people of that region? The cured man did what Jesus told him to do (Mark 5:19-20).

The disabled man had two problems—he was deaf and therefore mostly mute. (After all, we learn to speak by listening.) Jesus had no interest in hoopla, so he *took him aside, away from the crowd*. Jesus entered his world of silence with sign language. Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears and touched his tongue (the places of his disabilities) to sign what he intended to do. Jesus looked into heaven (to acknowledge from where the healing would come). He gave a *deep sigh* (Empathy? Frustration? Tongue speaking? See Scot McKnight’s book, *Open to the Spirit*), and then spoke the Aramaic word for “open.” The man’s ears and tongue were healed.

Jesus told the man not to tell, but the man did anyway. Everyone was amazed and exclaimed that Jesus did everything with excellence! Demons and disabilities are no challenge to Jesus when he invites the hurting to himself. ■

APPLICATION

WHEN THINGS DON'T GO YOUR WAY

BY DAVID FAUST

Most of us like to be in control. You probably have a certain way you like your coffee and a preference about the thermostat's temperature setting. Unfortunately, control issues can cause big problems. Husbands and wives engage in power struggles. Bosses and middle managers disagree about business decisions. Politicians wrestle for control in Congress. Elders and staff members don't always agree.

How do you respond when things don't go your way? You can't control the weather, but you can carry an umbrella if it looks like rain. You can't control how others drive, but you can keep your car in good repair and drive defensively. Parents rule the roost when our kids are young, but when they become adolescents and adults, we must give up the reins and exchange outright control for subtler techniques like influence and persuasion.

Christ is the greatest leader ever to walk the earth, and the Gospels portray him leading not by coercion or force, but by the persuasive power of truth and love. Because the Creator endowed human beings with the ability to choose, he knows what it's like to be disappointed by the actions and reactions of others. Jesus described himself as having protective instincts, like a mother hen that wants to gather her chicks under her wings, but sadly, some choose not to accept his help (Matthew 23:37; John 1:11). He possesses "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18), but sometimes people do the opposite of what he wants.

Presence That Couldn't Be Concealed

On one occasion, Jesus "entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret" (Mark 7:24). At this point in his ministry, Jesus wanted privacy, not publicity; but his presence couldn't be hidden.

Most of us have times we don't want to be "on"—when we prefer to be alone and don't want to be bothered. Yet, duty calls. Friends and family track us down.

It's wise to have boundaries. Jesus often went off by himself, withdrawing to "lonely places" where he could pray (Luke 5:16). But it seems Jesus used those quiet times not merely to isolate himself, but to refresh himself for ministry. When he was "on," the Lord was available, adaptable, and interruptible—even willing to assist a woman from a foreign region whose daughter was in desperate need (Mark 7:25-30). Jesus' dynamic presence couldn't be hidden.

Good News That Couldn't Be Silenced

Soon afterward, Jesus healed a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and the witnesses of this great miracle were amazed. "Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it" (Mark 7:36). Again, Jesus didn't get his way. It's understandable why people were excited, but it's stunning that they disobeyed his direct command. Ironically, in this case Jesus said *not* to tell anyone about the miracle, and they kept talking about it anyway. In the Great Commission, Jesus said we *should* share the good news with everyone, and we tend to keep the message to ourselves!

In a culture obsessed with personal empowerment, the Lord offers a unique alternative to control. It's called "surrender." By saying, "Follow me," he invites us to slide away from the steering wheel and let him drive.

Personal Challenge: Discuss this question in your small group or with a trusted friend: "In my life right now, what am I trying to control that I need to surrender to the Lord?" ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Did you get together with anyone who is far from God to just hang out or share a meal? If so, how did that go?
 2. When have you been overwhelmed with amazement? Please describe it
- Ask two people to read aloud **Mark 7:24-37** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.
3. What stands out to you most in this passage?
 4. Jesus used what Mark Scott calls “highly figurative language” with the mother whose daughter was possessed by a demon. “*Children* = Israelites; *bread* = the gospel or spiritual nourishment from God; *dogs* = pagans, Gentiles, unbelievers.” How does that help you understand what he was saying to her?
 5. Scott also suggests that the woman’s reply to Jesus essentially was, “I’ll take whatever help you can give me—even a crumb.” How would you describe her faith?
 6. What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?
 7. What do you learn about yourself?
 8. Referring to verse 36, David Faust says, “Ironically, in this case Jesus said *not* to tell anyone about the miracle, and they kept talking about it anyway. In the Great Commission, Jesus said we *should* share the good news with everyone, and we tend to keep the message to ourselves!” With whom will you keep talking about what Jesus has done in your life?
 9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: “I will . . .”
 10. In your life right now, what do you most need to surrender to the Lord?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Mark 14:1-9**. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■