



# 1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

## OVERVIEW

### Study: Mark, Part 1

### Theme: Follow

**Overview:** Mark's fast-moving Gospel presents Jesus as the Son of God who acts with power. In this unit, students will follow the One with authority, listen thoughtfully to the intriguing Teacher, let the miraculous One open their hearts and eyes, and believe the startling reality of the risen One.

## 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.

# INTRODUCTION

## Author

The Gospel does not name its author, but early church tradition consistently attributes it to John Mark, a companion of both Paul and Peter (Acts 12:12, 25; 1 Peter 5:13). Early Christian writers said Mark recorded the preaching of the apostle Peter.

## Audience

Mark appears to have written primarily for Gentile Christians, likely in Rome. He explains Jewish customs (Mark 7:3, 4) and translates Aramaic words (5:41; 15:34) for readers who would not have known them.

## Date

Many scholars date the Gospel to the AD 50s or 60s, possibly around the time of Nero's persecution of Christians in Rome. Many believe Mark was the first of the four Gospels to be written.

## Setting

Mark begins with the ministry of John the Baptist and moves quickly through Jesus' ministry in Galilee, centered around Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee, then on to Jerusalem, the cross, and the empty tomb. Its frequent use of "at once" or "immediately" gives the book a sense of urgency.

## Theme

Follow. Jesus calls, "Come, follow me" (Mark 1:17). Mark shows Jesus' authority over demons and disease, his intriguing teaching in parables, his miracles, and his

resurrection, all of which give good reason to follow him.

## Why Study Mark?

Mark's Gospel invites readers to see who Jesus really is and to respond. This study calls believers to recognize Christ's authority and his call on their lives, to listen to his teaching with growing faith, to let his miracles move them to believe he is God's Son, and to believe the startling reality of his resurrection.

## STUDY CONTENT

**WEEK 1:** Mark 1:16-28

**WEEK 2:** Mark 4:24-34

**WEEK 3:** Mark 8:14-26

**WEEK 4:** Mark 16:1-11

## WEEK ONE

**LESSON AIM:** **Recognize Christ's  
authority and his call on  
your life.**

**STUDY:** Mark, Part 1

**THEME:** Follow

**LESSON TEXT:** Mark 1:16-28

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Mark 2:1-12

## FOLLOW THE ONE WITH AUTHORITY

BY MARK SCOTT

Today we begin an eight-week series from the Gospel of Mark. This series will lead up to and beyond Easter. The first four lessons emphasize following Jesus. The last four lessons emphasize trusting Jesus. Since we cast a vote in our salvation, what better words than “following” and “trusting” can we use to describe our response to this mysterious Savior of the second Gospel?

At the root of all religious issues is the question of authority. Particularly, who has it? The leaders, the laity, or the Lord? The Greek word for authority means “the power to act or the right to command.” It appears 102 times in the New Testament and 10 times in the Gospel of Mark.

**Authority to Call Out the Fishermen***Mark 1:16-20*

Mark contains no birth or boyhood narratives of Jesus. Mark blazed across the theological landscape to give us the best of the good news. Following the theme verse (Mark 1:1), John the Baptist had already started preaching (vv. 2-8) and Jesus, at age 30 (Luke 3:23), showed up to be baptized (Mark 1:9-11). Then the Holy Spirit “threw” Jesus out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. After John the Baptist was incarcerated, Jesus began his preaching career (vv. 14, 15).

Jesus may have preached to the masses, but he disciplined leaders one by one, calling others to join him in his mission to multiply his ministry. In Jesus’ day students would usually closely follow a teacher and thereby come under the tutelage of that teacher. Jesus’ method differed from the typical model. He initiated the call to these four men by his own divine authority. In the next chapter Jesus called Levi (Matthew) and by chapter three all 12 disciples were in place (3:13-19).

Jesus used the Sea of Galilee (and Capernaum in particular) as the geographical center of his ministry. Along the shores of that pear-shaped lake (682 feet below sea level) Jesus encountered four men (two sets of brothers). When he encountered Simon (Peter) and Andrew, they were casting their small shoreline nets over their heads and into the lake for smaller fish that fed along the banks of the sea. Jesus gave them an imperative (“Come, follow me”) and a promise (“I will send you out to fish for people”). At once (one of Mark’s favorite words, occurring also in the Greek text of verses 20 and 28) the brothers followed Jesus. Was this their first encounter with Christ? No (John 1:35-42), but the immediacy of their following is still impressive.

Jesus also called James and John from their fishing business. Their father’s name (Zebedee) was mentioned as were his hired men (a family of means?). They were preparing (repairing or mending—the word was used for the setting of a broken bone) their larger nets that were to be pulled through the water by two boats at night. What did Zebedee think as they walked away from him and the fishing business? Hopefully Zebedee recognized Jesus’ authority, too. All four fishermen would have their lives radically rearranged in obedience to this authoritative figure.

**Authority to Call Out the Demons***Mark 1:21-28*

The first incident following the calling of the fishermen was a power encounter between the Son of God and the demons of Hell. This time they manifested themselves through a man in the Capernaum synagogue. Jesus’ habit was to attend synagogue services (Luke 4:16). He was allowed to teach, and the people were *amazed* (overwhelmed or struck out of their senses) at his teaching. Mark is the “amazement gospel.” Six different Greek words were used to emphasize this response to Jesus (a different one is used in verse 27). Mark records only two speeches of Jesus (chapters 4 and 13), but we are told that he taught often (2:13; 4:1, 2; 6:2, 6, 34; 8:31; 10:1; 11:17; 12:35; 14:49). And his powerful words were matched by his powerful deeds.

The needy man with an *impure spirit* (Mark’s typical way to identify demon possession), asked Jesus two questions and identified him as the Holy One of God. The demon in the man knew Jesus wanted something from it and evidently knew that Jesus would *destroy* (literally, “loose from”) it someday. A paraphrase of what Jesus answered would be, “Shut up and get out!” With a shriek the demon obeyed Jesus’ authority. Luther’s lyrics come to mind, “One little word shall fell him.”

The people in the synagogue that day were so *amazed* (surprised or astonished) that they spread news about Jesus. And Mark went on to tell of his authority to call out sickness (1:29-39), call out leprosy (1:40-45), call out paralysis (2:1-12), call out tax collectors (2:13-17), and call out hypocrisy (2:18-3:6). Recognize his authority on your life.

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## KEEP SEWING

BY DAVID FAUST

When she was in her 80s, my mother bought some balls of yarn and started crocheting six-inch squares. She intended to sew them together into a large afghan, but she never finished the project. After Mother died last year, my daughter Michelle took her leftover yarn and started crocheting and sewing to carry on the work. It gives me joy when I see my daughter completing a project her grandmother began years ago.

Jesus envisioned a generational hand-off when he told his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). The Master Teacher had no classroom, desk, gradebook, or red pen, but he was an unparalleled educator. Jesus used witty stories and penetrating questions to equip and empower his disciples, so when it was time for him to return to Heaven, they were ready to carry on the work. Paul told Timothy to entrust the lessons he had learned “to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2).

### Faithful Teachers

When I count my blessings, the list includes the teachers God has placed in my life. In the first grade, Mrs. Tolle introduced me to God’s creation by bringing tadpoles into the classroom so my classmates and I could watch them grow into frogs. Our music teacher, Mrs. Fieke, taught us to appreciate different musical styles. (Her first name was Patience, and the way my friends and I behaved, she needed a lot of it.) I was a pain in the neck in the eighth grade, but my English teacher, Mrs. Miller, pushed past my resistance, insisting that her students diagram sentences down to the last preposition. Through this thankless process, she instilled in me an appreciation for language that blossomed into a love for writing when I became an adult.

Outside the classroom, I have gleaned countless lessons from parents, grandparents, coaches, elders, friends, business advisors, and board members who motivated me to pursue excellence while giving me grace when I made mistakes. Today I continue to learn by listening to my wife, children, and grandchildren; by rubbing shoulders with neighbors whose worldviews differ from mine; and by interacting with young adults who are willing to cross the generational divide.

In Bible college and seminary, I studied with caring teachers like Chuck Lee, whose apologetics course fed my hungry mind, and Clint Gill, whose classes on the life of Christ and the book of Acts deepened my determination to serve Jesus. Joe Ellis lit a fire in my heart for ministry. Wilke Winter opened my eyes to the characters and wisdom of the Old Testament. Lewis Foster made the New Testament come alive by combining in-depth scholarship with down-to-earth stories. Jack Cottrell deepened my appreciation for God’s grace, and Archibald Hart taught me the importance of emotional intelligence. I learned how to preach mainly just by doing it week after week, but I also benefited by observing faithful, skillful preachers like Bob Shannon, Bob Stacy, Jim Walker, Charles Faust, and Bob Russell.

A bumper sticker says, “If you can read this, thank a teacher.” Another good piece of advice? “If you know Christ, thank the people who taught you about him.” But the greatest compliment to those who went before us might be this: Keep working on the afghan they began to sew.

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## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

*Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:*

- Where would you turn to get an exact definition of a word? to learn which new car is the most reliable? to keep up on current events? Explain your reasons for doing so.
- What are some differences between a person who is authoritative and a person who is authoritarian? While both words describe someone who has the power to act and the right to command, how does each type of person establish authority?

### Read Mark 1:16-20

1. Have you ever met someone you could call a “professional student,” a person who was always in school but never held a job? Separate the two clauses (separated by “and”) in verse 17. Explain how that verse shows that Jesus was inviting his first disciples both to learn and to practice what they would be taught.
2. Jesus’ encounter with these disciples described here was not the first time they met him. Skim through John 1:29–2:11, verses that recount events of about a year before. How did the first disciples become convinced of Jesus’ authority?

### Read Mark 1:21-24

3. Recall teachers you have had in the past. Can you think of one who just “taught the textbook”? Can you think of another you considered to be an expert on his or her subject? How could you distinguish one from another? From which one did you learn more? Why?
4. What does it mean when someone argues that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”? How would the words of the man described in verses 23 and 24 be more likely to convince others in the synagogue to accept Jesus’ authority rather than reject it?

### Read Mark 1:25-28

5. Underline the word *authority* in verses 22 and 27. Contrast the reasons for describing Jesus as authoritative in each case. What conclusion about the scope of Jesus’ authority would the people attending synagogue that day have drawn?
6. Briefly read through the account following our text (Mark 2:1-12). What point about the scope of his authority did Jesus make in this case? Why were Jesus’ claims/teaching and his actions both necessary in making that point?
7. Some argue that one should follow Jesus on an authoritarian basis—accept him as Savior or suffer eternal punishment. Try to construct an evangelistic strategy that presents Jesus on an authoritative basis—that he knows what people seek and has the power to supply that.

## WEEK TWO

**LESSON AIM:** **Listen thoughtfully to Christ's teaching and respond with growing faith.**

**STUDY:** Mark, Part 1

**THEME:** Follow

**LESSON TEXT:** Mark 4:24-34

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Mark 7:14-23

## FOLLOW THE INTRIGUING TEACHER

BY MARK SCOTT

Jesus really was a master teacher. Of course, it was his identity as the Son of God that made his words most important. But also outstanding was the variety of his supporting material. In the preaching of Jesus there was “something for everyone” (Raymond Bailey, *Jesus the Preacher*). He talked about farming, fishing, leaven in dough, treasures in fields, pearl merchants in search of fine pearls, weddings, new patches on old clothes, wineskins, and so on. Also outstanding was his pedagogy. His use of questions (307 to be exact), how he extended conversations to a higher spiritual level, and his stories all made Jesus a most intriguing teacher.

His use of story is evident in one of the two discourses in Mark’s Gospel (Mark 4:1-34; the other discourse is Mark 13). Jesus preached that day entirely in parables. Mark says, “He did not say anything to them without using a parable” (4:34). Parables start out as true-to-life comparisons that move to fictional analogies and leave the listener dumbfounded as to such an upside-down story. C. H. Dodd said, “At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought” (*The Parables of the Kingdom*, 5).

**The Intriguing Teacher’s Mandate and Method***Mark 4:24, 25, 33, 34*

In the parables of Jesus, volition matters more than cognition. A willingness to learn trumps IQ. That is why Jesus can say, “Consider carefully what you hear” (literally, “See what you hear”). In fact, “hear” is the main word attached to parables. It means more than “listen.” It means to heed and even obey. Jesus holds our feet to the fire from the stories he told. That is why he can use the “stewardship of responsibility” language in more than one teaching. “Measurement used and measurement received” can be applied to matters of judgment (Matthew 7:1-6) as well as opportunities to hear and obey. He clearly gives an oxymoron when he says, “Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them” (Mark 4:25). We have a responsibility to hear the intriguing teacher. It is a mandate.

Jesus used a variety of teaching styles. Parables were his method, but only as much as they could understand. For as intriguing as stories were, they could not always carry the freight of the teaching. Sometimes straightforward prose was needed to explain the

stories. That is why the text says, “But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained (untie, release, explain, or expound) everything.”

**The Intriguing Teacher’s Stories***Mark 4:26-32*

The sermon in parables is recorded in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8. Matthew’s account records eight parables, Mark records four, and Luke—at this point—records just two. Two parables are in our text today, (vv. 30-32). Both deal with the government of God (his kingdom). The first of those two stories is unique to Mark’s account. It has been labeled the parable of the “growing seed” or the parable of the “mysterious growth” of the kingdom.

One reason that the reign of God is rather mysterious is because it is a strange combination of the human and divine. Clearly the divine is the senior partner, but there is a man in this story who scatters seed on the ground and also harvests the crop when the time is just right. People have a responsibility in advancing the reign of God. But the main role belongs to God. While the sower sleeps, God is at work growing a seed to harvest. In fact, the whole process happens *all by itself* (the Greek word is where we get the English word *automatically*). Worry about your role in advancing God’s cause. You do not need to worry about God’s role.

The mustard seed parable is a double interrogative parable. It begins with two questions. God’s government is like a small mustard seed. In fact, 725-760 mustard seeds equal one gram, and 28 grams equal one ounce. Wow, pretty small. But it grows so large that birds can nest in the branches. There is no reason to suggest that birds in this parable are symbols of evil as they are in Mark 4:4, 15. While starting rather small in Acts (first 12, then 120, then 3,000, then 5,000 and on), the reign of God simply expands across the earth. Christianity has a foothold in up to two-thirds of the population of the earth today. Not a bad start from a single intriguing teacher from Nazareth in Galilee.

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## ONLY A TINY FRACTION

BY DAVID FAUST

How many creatures live under the sea? It's now thought that between 700,000 and one million species dwell in the world's oceans. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 91 percent of ocean species remain unclassified and 95 percent of the ocean remains unexplored. There's still a lot to learn down there.

How big is the universe? Space.com describes the observable universe as a sphere with a diameter measuring a mind-blowing 92 billion light-years. Since the universe appears to be expanding, though, other researchers estimate that it may be 250 times larger than what we can observe—at least seven trillion light-years across. My brain aches when I try to comprehend such massive numbers. Physics.org answers the question, "How big is our universe?" by simply saying, "Well, we don't really know, but it's big." Even more mind-boggling is the God who created the stars and the seas.

### Beyond Comprehension

I believe the miracles recorded in the Bible truly occurred, but I have many questions about them. How did Jesus make blind people see? I don't know. Since he could heal people instantly, why on some occasions did he heal in stages, as he did with the man who at first saw people "like trees walking around" (Mark 8:22-26)? On second thought, the sense of sight is such a marvelous skill that I can't explain why our eyes can see in the first place! How did Jesus multiply the bread and fish when he fed the 5,000? I don't know; but neither can I fully explain how tiny seeds grow into fields of wheat from which we make bread, or how fish multiply every day in oceans, lakes, and streams.

When the Bible says Jesus went around "healing every disease and sickness among the people" (Matthew 4:23), it implies that many more stories could be told.

What happened to all of those other individuals Jesus healed? And what about the ones he didn't heal? Our world contains so much suffering and pain. Why doesn't the God of miracles step in immediately and heal all of our ills? Job asked questions like those, but he found that interrogating God was like trying to fathom the size of outer space or the depths of the ocean. Job understood only a tiny fraction of the total picture, so he humbled himself and admitted, "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know" (Job 42:3).

The God of miraculous power is also the God of infinite wisdom. He can do anything, but he always does the right thing. He knows how, when, and why to intervene with a miracle, and when not to do so. Mix together all of the books ever written and all of the computer data ever compiled; add the combined knowledge of the greatest scholars who ever lived; then throw in the resources found in every library, university, and museum on earth. Sum it all up, and it still equals only a tiny fraction of the mind of God. So let's keep asking the hard questions, but at the same time let's exclaim with the apostle Paul, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Romans 11:33).

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## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

*Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:*

- What are some of your favorite children's stories? Include ones that you remember being told and stories or books you read to your children or grandchildren. Why do you think storytelling is one of the most common teaching methods for children?
- What stories have you been asked to read repeatedly? In your experience, does understanding the point of a story grow after repeated readings, or as the hearer grows older? Explain.

**Read Mark 4:24, 25, 33, 34**

1. What is the difference between listening and merely hearing? Try to paraphrase verses 24 and 25 to explain what is being measured, given, and taken depending on how carefully we hear the teachings of Jesus. What seems to matter more to Jesus—our intellect or our interest? Defend your answer.
2. Tell about a time when you felt overwhelmed by the amount of information you were receiving all at once. Referring to verses 33 and 34, how did Jesus keep his disciples from suffering information overload? How can we imitate Jesus in that way when we teach others about him?

**Read Mark 4:26-29**

3. Imagine having a job in which your boss demanded big results but gave no further direction. How successful do you think you would be under those circumstances? Review this parable and explain God's plans for his growing kingdom.
4. President John F. Kennedy is remembered for admonishing Americans, "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." The growing seed parable of Jesus focuses on these same two points for citizens of God's kingdom. From this parable, list our responsibilities and God's responsibilities for kingdom growth.

**Read Mark 4:30-32**

5. Jesus spoke about founding a worldwide kingdom with a handful of followers in a small nation occupied by an imperial army. How does the mustard seed parable address the questions Jesus' followers would have had?
6. The Roman Empire, like other human empires, conquered nations and made them servants. Notice what Jesus said about providing a shady spot to perch. How would God's kingdom differ from other kingdoms regarding its subjects?
7. These two parables use agricultural terms. Try to retell either parable with other terms. For example, how would you retell a parable to a baker, a musician, or a sports fan?

**WEEK THREE**

**LESSON AIM:** **Let Christ's miracles  
move you to believe he  
is God's Son.**

**STUDY:** Mark, Part 1

**THEME:** Follow

**LESSON TEXT:** Mark 8:14-26

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Mark 9:2-29

## FOLLOW THE MIRACULOUS ONE

BY MARK SCOTT

Miraculous events make up 31 percent of Mark's Gospel. With only two discourses in the book, the accent is clearly on the deeds of Jesus. Jesus is portrayed as no mere sleight-of-hand magician but as a true worker of wonders. Miracles are sprinkled in these middle chapters of Mark (4–10) as the events move us through boat narratives, bread narratives, and blind narratives.

Our text today concludes the bread stories (6:30–8:21) and gets us ready for the blind stories (8:22–10:52). The bread stories climax with the disciples learning about hardness of heart. The blind stories, which function as brackets in this section of Mark, teach the disciples the importance of having spiritual sight.

### The Miraculous One Can Open the Heart

*Mark 8:14-21*

Jesus was good with bread. He was born in the “house of bread” (Bethlehem, Luke 2:4). He lived by the bread of God (Matthew 4:4). He was the bread of God (John 6:35, 48). He multiplied bread (Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-10). He consecrated bread (Mark 14:22-25). He broke bread (Luke 24:30).

The disciples, who often are portrayed in Mark's Gospel as “out to lunch,” needed to go to the culinary school of bread. Jesus had just fed the 4,000 and showed his exasperation with the Pharisees over their request for a sign (Mark 8:1-13). Since they wanted a sign “from Heaven,” they were probably thinking of something dramatic like manna (i.e., bread). Jesus used it as a teachable moment.

Jesus noticed the skimpy supply of physical bread due to the disciples' forgetfulness. They had only one loaf (think of a pancake). Jesus said, “Be careful . . . and . . . watch out.” But he was not talking about physical bread. He elevated the conversation with his disciples by talking with them about the “teaching” of the Pharisees and the Herodians (Matthew 16:12). Leaven (yeast—a bacteria of sorts) became the metaphor for Jesus to drive home the truth of the Pharisees' hypocrisy and the Herodians' lack of a moral compass.

Jesus drew a bead on the connection between bread and the brain. He spoke about the physical multiplication of bread in the two miraculous feedings of the 5,000 and the 4,000. The miraculous provisions were so abundant that leftovers were picked up both times. Those two bread meals should have served as evidence that Jesus could not only provide for the disciples' needs but also free their minds and hearts from “stinkin' thinkin'.” Twice in the text the phrase, “Do you still not understand?” occurs. The

miracle of multiplying bread is one thing, but a miracle on the human heart (and mind) is even greater.

### The Miraculous One Can Open the Eyes—of the Heart

*Mark 8:22-26*

The miracle of the blind man healed in stages is unique to Mark's Gospel. He lived at Bethsaida, a little fishing village on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. He must have had his sight at one time because he knew what a tree looked like. But at some point he had become blind. He had probably heard that this worker of wonders had touched other blind people and made them see, so he made his request (beseeched or begged).

The miracles of Jesus on blind people are some of the most tender. Jesus had no interest in some kind of carnival show, so he led the man out of the village and attended to his need with the compassionate bedside manner of a loving physician. He used spittle—believed to have medicinal qualities in Jesus' day—on the man's eyes. Jesus asked him, “Do you see anything?”

What happened next is most intriguing. The man did see—somewhat. But his sight was blurred and people looked like trees to him. There might be several scientific explanations for this phenomenon, but legally blind people have testified that this is exactly what they see at times—movement but no clarity. Did the man have insufficient faith that required a second touch? Did Jesus have a power shortage? Neither.

Just as Jesus elevated the conversation about bread in the previous event, so he used this miracle to demonstrate and teach about spiritual sight. Three verbs are used to help us “see” this. When Jesus touched him a second time the man could see “up, in, and through” (opened, restored, and clearly). The disciples needed this lesson as much as the man needed to be healed. Jesus sent him home so he could reunite with his family and not have to beg any more.

There is such a thing as spiritual sight (John 9:39-41), having the eyes of our hearts enlightened (Ephesians 1:18). Jesus would teach on several other aspects of discipleship until he encountered Bartimaeus, another blind man, who, upon being healed, would follow Jesus “in the way” of the cross.

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## DYING TO . . .

BY DAVID FAUST

Death isn't a joking matter, but the word *dying* has found its way into our vocabulary as a common form of exaggeration. Do you ever say, "I'm dying to get home and take a hot shower"? Maybe you're feeling weary at work, so you exclaim, "I'm dying to take a vacation," or "If the boss gives me one more assignment this week, I'm going to die!" We even use such dire hyperboles to describe our food preferences. Ever hear kids say, "I'm dying for some pizza," or adults insist that the chocolate cake is "to die for"?

Years ago when my son was 4 years old, I took him with me to run errands on a cold snowy day. I was driving an old car that had an aging battery. After we stopped at a bank and returned to the parking lot, I turned the car's ignition key, but the engine growled weakly and refused to start. Frustrated, I pounded my fist on the dashboard and loudly exclaimed, "Oh no, the car is dead!" As soon as he heard those words, my son began to cry. In retrospect, "The car is dead" probably wasn't the best way to tell a literal-minded 4-year-old what was happening, so I tried to reassure him. I had some jumper cables in the trunk, so I said, "Don't worry, Matt. It's OK. I'm going to jump the car, and everything will be all right." Now Matt's tears turned to laughter. He thought it would be funny to see his dad jump the car, though in his childlike mind, he had no idea why a person jumping over a dead car would suddenly make it start!

Just as children struggle to comprehend their parents, sometimes we don't fully understand our heavenly Father, but he knows what he's doing. Christ is the author and finisher, the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the beginning and the end—the creator of life and the giver of hope when life on earth concludes. We need to view life's mysteries through eyes of faith, as Abraham did, who considered it reasonable to believe that the one who created life in the first place "could even raise the dead" (Hebrews 11:19).

### Longing for Hope

Why does the resurrection of Christ remain so relevant to us day after day, year after year? Because our hearts long for purpose and hope, now and forevermore. The cross is Jesus' way of saying, "I'm dying to give you those very gifts!" It's his way of reassuring us, "I'm dying to save you. I'm dying to forgive your sins. I'm dying to ensure that death doesn't have the last word. I'm dying to show you the extent of the Father's love. I'm dying to restore you to God's family." And the resurrection is Jesus' way of saying, "I'm living to give you new life."

We are residents of a dying planet, walking down a path that slopes steadily and irrevocably toward the grave. There is only one way of escape, and that's through Christ, who on the cross was dying to "free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2:15). Now he "always lives to intercede" for us (Hebrews 7:25). Hallelujah, he is risen indeed!

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## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

*Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:*

- If you were to find the proverbial magic lamp and were granted three wishes, what would they be? Were any of your wishes related to safety/security? How about desires/appetites? Did any relate to deeper understanding/relationships?
- Give yourself one minute to make two lists: 1) things that I don't have but want and 2) things that I have and for which I am grateful. Which list was easier to create quickly, off the top of your head? Do you think it is easier for most people to list their wants or to list the blessings they already have? Explain.

### **Read Mark 8:14-18**

1. The Old Testament law commanded that households be cleansed of yeast/leaven in preparation for the Passover, the celebration of freedom from Egypt. With that in mind, what do you think Jesus was implying when he spoke about the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod? What could not happen if their "yeast" was present?
2. Review the five questions Jesus asked in verses 17 and 18. Do you think he expected an answer, or were the questions rhetorical—having an obvious answer? If so, what was Jesus saying about his disciples' priorities?

### **Read Mark 8:19-21**

3. Mark's Gospel focuses on Jesus' miracles and how they relate to one another. Note the common theme of his "boat miracles"—4:35-41 (especially v. 39) and 6:45-52 (especially v. 51a). What do they say about safety and security?
4. Mark includes two "bread miracles"—6:30-44 and 8:1-10. What do they teach about appetite and hunger? After both bread events the disciples were back in a boat, and they received the same evaluation of their "heart condition" (6:52; 8:17). What is the common theme of all four of these miracles?

### **Read Mark 8:22-26**

5. In this miracle, a man's eyes were literally opened and his vision restored. How do we use those terms (having one's eyes opened, getting vision) figuratively? Look back at Jesus' question in verse 21. Do you see a relationship between the gradual restoration of a man's sight and the figurative eyes of the disciples' hearts being opened?
6. Move beyond our lesson text to vv. 27-30 and 9:2-8. What was the eye-opening revelation that finally came after the disciples had witnessed miracle after miracle?
7. This week be mindful of what you ask for in your prayers—especially safety/security and desires/appetites prayers. Allow those prayers to mature into the understanding/vision/relationship prayer in Ephesians 1:17-19a.

## WEEK FOUR

**LESSON AIM:** **Believe the startling reality of Christ's resurrection.**

**STUDY:** Mark, Part 1

**THEME:** Follow

**LESSON TEXT:** Mark 16:1-11

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Mark 16:12-20

## FOLLOW THE RISEN ONE

BY MARK SCOTT

Clark Pinnock said, “The biggest objection to Christianity is that it seems too good to be true.” But it is true. Christ has been raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20). That fact alone compels us to follow the Risen One.

The story of the resurrection has everything in it a great story needs. It has grief—over a loved one who has died. It has devotion—of women who wanted to pay their respects. It has the supernatural—an angel in a tomb. It has shock and wonderment—people amazed but hoping against hope that Jesus might just be alive. It has angst—how come in Mark’s account of this event Jesus does not even show up? Where is the Risen One?

**Honor the Dead***Mark 16:1-3*

When the Sabbath was over—which could be as early as 6:00 p.m. Friday evening—three women made preparations to go to the tomb of Jesus. Other women evidently joined these three (Matthew 28:1; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55; 24:1-3; John 20:1, 2) to anoint Jesus’ body. Israelites did not embalm as the Egyptians did. But the onslaught of Sabbath following the death of Jesus at 3:00 p.m. on Friday did not allow enough time to properly anoint, and thereby honor, Jesus’ body.

“Very early on the first day of the week” (a phrase that occurs six times in Mark’s Gospel) just after sunrise, these women made their way to the tomb. (Matthew says it was “toward the dawn” (28:1); Luke says it was “at early dawn” (24:1); John says that “it was still dark” (20:1). The point would be “not quite sunrise.”) En route to the tomb they discovered that they had not accounted for the stone that was in front of the tomb entrance. Their grief had affected their logic, but their devotion to honor Jesus was noble.

**Hear the Angel***Mark 16:4-7*

The women arrived at the tomb only to find it unoccupied by Jesus and inhabited by an angel. Luke and John mention two angels. Matthew and Mark focus on just one. The women were the first to believe the resurrection story, but the young man dressed in a white robe was the first to announce it.

The angel gave a six-fold message. First, there was the pastoral statement: *don’t be afraid*. The angel said this because they were. Easter is actually scary. Second,

there was the indicative statement: *you are looking for Jesus . . . True—they were*. Third, there was the gospel statement: *He has risen! He is not here*. This is the heart of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4). Fourth, there is the apologetic statement: *See the place where they laid him*. Investigate it. Check out the claim. Easter does not ask us to kiss our brains goodbye. Ours is to be an informed faith. Fifth, there was the commissioning statement: *but go, tell his disciples and Peter . . .* The fact that Peter is singled out is most engaging. We are not told why he is singled out, but if Jesus were alive, it would be extremely good news to this denier. Finally, there was a promising statement: *he is going to Galilee and there you will see him*. If they would see him then obviously he would be alive.

**Believe the Fact***Mark 16:8-11*

The resurrection is a fact claimed to have happened in history. We put no faith in the resurrection. Our faith is located in the Risen One and we appropriate his grace by virtue of his “livingness.” The women and the disciples had the same challenges in believing this fact as we do today—and they were there.

No wonder Mark clusters several terms that psychologically challenge this fact. They were *trembling* (traumatized), *bewildered* (stand outside of themselves), and *afraid* (full of phobia, scared). In fact, Mark used about six different terms from the “phobia family” in his Gospel to speak of this unsettling Messiah.

The text goes on to speak of one of Jesus’ resurrection appearances, to Mary Magdalene (John 20:1, 2, 11-18). She was one of the most devoted followers of Jesus—no doubt due to the demonic deliverance that he had given her. Her testimony of the Risen One was not embraced by the disciples—at least at first. Maybe, for them, it was too good to be true.

Note that most English translations footnote the verses that follow verse eight. The oldest and best manuscripts do not contain Mark 16:9-20. There are several challenges to this ending in Mark (see Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*).

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## FOLLOW THE BEST LEADER

BY DAVID FAUST

Viewed a certain way, some of my recent actions might seem irrational, but they actually make good sense.

- I let a total stranger tell me what to do. (He was a police officer directing traffic.)
- I paid a lot of money to place my life in the hands of someone I have never seen. (An airline pilot flew a plane across the ocean, and I was a passenger.)
- I trusted my physical safety to a teenager. (My 16-year-old granddaughter is learning to drive.)
- I met a person for the very first time, and five minutes later she stuck a needle into my arm. (A nurse drew blood as part of my annual physical exam.)
- I handed my keys to complete strangers. (Mechanics at the repair shop were going to fix my car.)

Faith is a part of everyday life. We place ourselves and our possessions in the hands of others we consider trustworthy. We surrender our wills to people we believe have the authority and expertise to act in our best interests. In a similar way, based on solid evidence, Christians consider it reasonable to trust in God.

### Who Is in Charge?

Authority is an unpopular concept today. We question it (often for good reasons), but sometimes we rebel against it for less-than-righteous reasons. Authority can refer to a person who has the final say-so, like a sheriff who enforces the law or parents who love and lead their children. A scholar who does thorough research is considered an authority on a subject. The baseball commissioner has authority to enforce league rules. Some religious groups grant too much authority to a human leader, such as the pope, a dynamic preacher, or a self-proclaimed prophet. Or we simply claim sovereignty for ourselves, and each person becomes his or her own authority, as in the days of the Judges when individuals did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

A song by country music singer Kacey Musgraves expresses this philosophy when it urges, "Follow your arrow wherever it points."

Authority also can be wielded by a group of people. When a crime occurs, we call in the authorities (the police). As a group, members of the Supreme Court have authority to interpret the law. In matters of faith and morals, today it's popular to submit to the whims of the current social climate, allowing our peer group to become our authority. Authority also can refer to a document that serves as the standard by which actions or beliefs are measured, like the U.S. Constitution that governs our nation or a staff handbook that lays down policies and procedures for workers.

After establishing his messianic credentials by rising from the dead, Jesus boldly proclaimed, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). The word *authority* in that verse translates the Greek *exousia* (from *ex*, "out of," and *ousia*, "being" or "essence"). Authority flows out of the essence of Christ. By his very nature, he is Lord. He guides and instructs us through the Bible, the document his followers consider authoritative above any other book. Following Christ stretches our faith, but it's a wise, rational decision. Who could possibly be more trustworthy than Jesus Christ? If he isn't in charge of your life, then who is?

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## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

*Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:*

- What is the difference between these two phrases: “the beginning of the end” and “the end of the beginning”?
- When have you experienced a loss that seemed to be the end of the life you knew, only to discover later that it was the beginning of a new chapter of your life?

### **Read Mark 16:1-3**

1. Who were the women who went to the tomb? How were their lives strongly connected to the life of Jesus? See 15:40, 41. How do you think they imagined their lives changing in the days to come?
2. Note the timing of the visit mentioned in the first words of 16:1. Review Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:55, 56. How important to these women was anointing Jesus’ body? How can you tell?

### **Read Mark 16:4-7**

3. Look at the description of the person at the tomb. Compare that description to Matthew 28:2-5. How does that enhanced description help explain the emotional reaction of the women?
4. List the commands the angel gave to the women. What was the significance of each one?

### **Read Mark 16:8-11**

5. Earliest and most complete manuscripts end Mark with verse 8. How do you react to the abruptness of the ending? Many scholars point out that Mark was written to believers in Rome around the time of Nero’s persecution of Christians. They argue that it is reasonable that the original ending of the gospel was destroyed and reconstructed later. Does that explanation seem reasonable? Explain.
6. How did the disciples who did not go to Jesus’ tomb react to the women who reported what they saw at the tomb? What are some lessons we can learn from this?
7. What do you do when something you are looking for is not where you expect it to be? How appropriate is it that an empty tomb is not the end of our following Jesus but the beginning of a new life seeking to know him better?

**For Next Week:** This week’s lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional “1717: Your Word Is Truth” studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at [ChristianStandard.com](http://ChristianStandard.com).