

WEEK 1

INTRODUCTION

GROUP DISCUSSION 1

- *Welcome the participants and introduce yourself. Please give each participant a Bible and a copy of the Study Guide.*
- *Ask participants to turn to Week 1 on page 7 of their Study Guide.*
- *Briefly talk through the format of their Study Guide. Explain that each week has four sections: GROUP DISCUSSION 1, TALK OUTLINE, GROUP DISCUSSION 2, and HOME STUDY. Point out that the PREFACE contains useful background information about Mark and the Bible.*
- *Show participants where to find Mark in their Bibles and explain how chapters and verses work (for example, explain what Mark 1:1 – 3:6 means, and how they would find that passage).*

TALK OUTLINE

“The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” (Mark 1:1)

- There are many reasons to suspect that God might exist: the order of the universe, the beauty of the world and the incredible design of the human body. There’s also the nagging sense that nothing we do or achieve will fully satisfy us, that something is missing in life.
- But how can we know for sure that God exists? We would need him to introduce himself. And according to Mark, that’s exactly what God has done. In order to introduce himself to us, he has become a man: the person we call Jesus Christ.
- Christianity is about being able to have a relationship with God. That’s why “the gospel about Jesus Christ” is good news.

GROUP DISCUSSION 2

- › *When the following question is posed by the course leader or appears at the end of the DVD, encourage participants to answer it in their Study Guide and then read their answer back to the group.*
- › *Note down each of their questions in the space below so that you can deal with them at some point during the course. You may also like to think of your own answer and share it with the group.*

- **If you could ask God one question, and you knew it would be answered, what would it be?**

- › *Use the questions displayed at the end of the talk to further encourage discussion:*

- **What is your view of Christianity?**
- **How do you feel about making time to read Mark?**

HOME STUDY

Each week the course leader will ask participants to explore a few chapters of Mark at home. By the end of Week 6, they'll have read the whole Gospel.

- ▶ Participants will be asked by the course leader to complete the following study at home, and write down any questions they have. Before next week, look through the study yourself, so that you'll be able to help participants with their questions. The **ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR LEADERS** will also help you to prepare. (Note: Groups are not expected to work through the **HOME STUDY** together.)
- ▶ Read Mark 1:1 – 3:6.

Summary: Jesus' true identity begins to emerge, but the religious authorities oppose him.

1 In Mark 1:1–13, who points to Jesus? (look in particular at verses 2, 7 and 11)

Old Testament prophets (note that Mark's quote in vv. 2–3 refers to both Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3); John the Baptist; God the Father.

2 Who is Jesus said to be in these verses?

He is the Lord whose way must be prepared; he is "more powerful" than John the Baptist who is himself a great prophet; he is God's own Son.

3 What sort of power and authority does Jesus exercise? (see Mark 1:16–20, 21–22, 23–28, 40–45; 2:1–12)

He exercises power and authority:

- to call people, who immediately drop what they are doing and follow him
- in his teaching
- over evil spirits
- over sickness, even the most serious illnesses
- to forgive sins

4 What has Jesus come to do? (see Mark 1:14–15, 35–39; 2:17)

He has come to preach, to tell people to repent and believe the good news.

He has come to call sinners.

5 Notice that Jesus' priority is preaching – it comes before healing the body. Why might that be?

In his preaching, Jesus addresses an issue that is far more important than any physical infirmity: our sin.

6 Who opposes Jesus and why do you think this might be? (see Mark 2:6–7, 16; 3:2–6)

The religious leaders oppose him because he claims to forgive sins, because he eats with “sinners” and tax collectors, and because he heals on the Sabbath. Even here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the religious leaders want to kill him.

The underlying reason for their opposition is simple: everything Jesus says and does comprehensively undermines their authority. And they do not want to give up the authority that they have always enjoyed.

7 What do the opening chapters of Mark tell you about who Jesus is? What are the implications for how you relate to Jesus?

These questions are designed to help participants apply what they have learned.

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR LEADERS

Mark 1:2–3 – Mark quotes from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 which, in their contexts, promise a messenger who will announce the arrival of a rescuer King, the Christ, who will save God’s people from judgement. The promise of a messenger is clearly fulfilled by John the Baptist in Mark 1:4–8. Even his clothing (Mark 1:6) was like that of an Old Testament prophet, in particular Elijah (2 Kings 1:8).

Evil spirits (also called “demons” in the Gospel) (Mark 1:23–27) –

The Bible takes the reality of an unseen spiritual world seriously. According to the Bible, Satan is a fallen angelic being who is in rebellion against God and hostile to God’s people. Although Satan – and other fallen angels in alliance with him – are powerful, the New Testament shows that Jesus has overcome Satan by the power of his death on the cross (Colossians 2:15). Note: if this topic arises, deal with it briefly but don’t allow it to dominate the session.

Pharisees – This group did not just obey the Old Testament Scriptures but adhered to a stricter tradition,

so they were seen as some of the most holy men in Israel. They viewed anyone who did not observe the same rigorous rules as a “sinner” and an outcast (see Mark 2:15–16). Jesus called them “hypocrites,” which literally means “play-actors,” because of their public displays of religion and self-righteousness. He strongly condemns them in passages such as Mark 7:6–9 and Matthew 23.

“Bridegroom” (Mark 2:19) –

Jesus is making the point that, for the disciples, fasting is totally inappropriate in his presence, just as it would be for wedding guests to mourn at a wedding. Jesus is identifying himself as the bridegroom of God’s people, promised by the Old Testament (Isaiah 54:5; 62:4–5; Hosea 2:16–20).

“Sabbath” (Mark 2:23) – Sabbath

means “cease” or “rest” and is derived from the Hebrew word used in Genesis 2:2 where God “ceased” or “rested” from his work of creation. It is therefore linked to the biblical concept of “rest” whereby God’s people dwell in God’s place under God’s gracious rule (Genesis 1–2). While this state

of rest was lost at the Fall (Genesis 3), God promised to restore it to his people (Genesis 12:1–3; 17:8). The Sabbath was an opportunity for God’s people to remember God’s creation and how he rescued them from Egypt (see Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–15).

The disciples eat corn (Mark 2:23–26) – The Pharisees accused Jesus’ followers of law-breaking: namely, “reaping” on the Sabbath (Exodus 34:21). What the disciples are doing can hardly be construed as “reaping.” But instead of pointing

that out, Jesus refers to David’s act in 1 Samuel 21:1–6. He observes that David is not condemned by Scripture for doing what he did, and so Jesus draws attention to the Pharisees’ narrow (and unscriptural) interpretation of the law.

“Herodians” (Mark 3:6) – These were loyal supporters of Herod Antipas, the puppet King of Judea, who depended on the controlling Roman Empire for his power. They would have seen Jesus as a threat to Herod’s rule.