



# **GROW. PRAY. STUDY.**

The Church of the Resurrection – Weekly Guide

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## **“A Question and a Calling”**

### **SUNDAY 3.4.18 *Jesus in the Gospel of Mark***

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples...“Who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?” *Mark 8:27-36*

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

## **“He had compassion on them”**

### **MONDAY 3.5.18 *Mark 6:30-44***

When Jesus met people with problems (illness, hunger or many other human challenges) he did not lecture them about what they’d done wrong, say God was teaching them a lesson or try to duck responsibility for helping. When his disciples said, “Send these people away,” Mark said Jesus’ reply was “You give them something to eat.” Jesus regularly showed compassion, and a desire to make things better.

- Any gardener or farmer expects to harvest multiple ears of corn, bearing a few hundred kernels each, from planting one corn kernel. God built many miracles of multiplication like that into the natural world at creation. Jesus multiplied “seven loaves and a few fish” to feed 5,000 people—the same power at work, but in a more unusual, immediate way. How has God used miracles (usual, everyday ones or unusual ones) to sustain and fill your life?
- Note the contrast between how Jesus responded to the crowd and how the disciples did. “You give them something to eat” seemed to alarm the disciples. When you see people hurting, are you more inclined to respond like the disciples or like Jesus? What concerns or fears do you have, if any, about what might happen if you more often responded to suffering with active compassion?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, remind me that the good things that come into my life are not there just for me to hoard. Make me more responsive to your commands to bless others. Amen.

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**“It’s me. Don’t be afraid.”**

**TUESDAY 3.6.18 Mark 6:45-56**

After Jesus fed 5,000 people (Mark 6:33-44), he sought solitude for prayer. Prayer seemed to be the most renewing “break” activity in Jesus’ life. But the disciples’ little boat got into trouble in a strong wind on the lake. Jesus walked out to them to help. At first terrified, the disciples were glad then the wind settled down. But they “were so baffled they were beside themselves.... because they hadn’t understood about the loaves.”

- ✚ What had the disciples not understood? In verse 50, “Jesus seems to identify himself with the divine name I Am (see Exod 3:13-15; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10-11).” \* But even after watching Jesus feed 5,000 people, they didn’t fully see that, in Jesus, God was here inaugurating God’s kingdom. What helps you to trust Jesus to be with you during life’s worst storms, in all his divine compassion and power?
- ✚ Seeing Jesus walking on the lake, the disciples were terrified. It wasn’t the lack of power that frightened them, but the idea of a power beyond their imagining. In C. S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Mr. Beaver said of Aslan the Lion (the book’s Christ figure), “Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good.” \*\* Do you ever find the idea of God actually “showing up” a bit scary? In what ways is Jesus “not safe”? What gives you confidence that “he’s good”?

**Prayer:** Loving God, at times I’m comfortable with this world’s broken ways. Then your power to change the world can frighten me. Make me secure in trusting that you are always good. Amen.

\* Suzanne Watts Henderson, study note on Mark 6:50 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 79 NT.

\*\* Lewis, C.S. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Chronicles of Narnia Book 2) (p. 80). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

**Purify the inside, not the outside**

**WEDNESDAY 3.7.18 Mark 7:1-23**

Ancient Jewish culture was extremely strict about purity laws, especially food laws. Jesus said it's not what goes into a person's body that is bad; it is what comes from within a person. He went further to show that many people’s keeping of the Hebrew religious rituals had become empty and destructive. The most hurtful, defiling stuff, he said, comes from inside, from the human heart apart from God’s guidance.

- ✚ To people devoted to carefully following the Old Testament food laws, Jesus’ statement was shocking: “Nothing outside of a person can enter and contaminate a person in God’s sight; rather, the things that come out of a person contaminate the person.” God’s main concern is your heart's motives and your relationship with God. What helps you to focus your primary energy and concern on the state of your heart, rather than on trying to make your outward behaviors look good?
- ✚ In verse 21 Jesus said, “It’s from the inside, from the human heart, that evil thoughts come.” God covers us with grace, and the Holy Spirit bears fruit in our lives. But God doesn't change our hearts without our collaboration, working with him to shape our thoughts and actions. How can you keep religious rituals from becoming empty forms, just done for the sake of doing them? Which faith rituals truly draw you closer to God?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, continue changing and renewing me from the inside out. Teach me each day how to make my heart one from which your qualities of life flow out. Amen.

**Jesus ministered outside of Israel’s borders**

## THURSDAY 3.8.18 Mark 7:24-37

Hard on the heels of teaching about what was truly unclean in God's sight, as opposed to what outer ceremonial rules deemed unclean, Mark showed Jesus acting on that principle with a non-Israelite woman many would have thought unclean. (Matthew wrote an expanded version of Jesus' dialogue with the desperate mother—cf. [Matthew 15:21-28](#)). Then Jesus healed a man's hearing and speech, a miracle that evoked memories of [Isaiah 35:5-6](#), a passage that anticipated God's love bringing renewal and deliverance.

- ✚ Look up Tyre on a map of ancient Israel. Jesus went well outside Israel's boundaries, into modern Lebanon, when he met this Canaanite woman and healed her daughter. [Ephesians 2:14-16](#) said one outcome of Jesus' ministry was to break down barriers between people. When has Jesus brought healing to strained and broken relationships in your life?
- ✚ After seeing Jesus restore a man's power of hearing and speech, Mark said "people were overcome with wonder." Scholar N. T. Wright said that in urging people to follow Jesus, Mark "envisages, not a boring life of conventional religion, but things happening that would make people astonished. If we're still too deaf to hear what he's saying, the problem is perhaps with us rather than with the message." \* However long you've followed Jesus, what things help keep alive a vital sense of wonder and astonishment in you?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, preserve (or deliver) me from any sense of boredom or tedium as I follow in your footsteps. Keep my heart alive to the awe your presence inspired when you walked this earth. Amen.

\* N. T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 99.

## "Another large crowd"—of Gentiles this time

### FRIDAY 3.9.18 Mark 8:1-21

Mark's purpose, in telling this story (not long after [Mark 6:30-44](#)), was not merely to say, "Jesus did it again!" This event likely took place in the region of the Ten Cities, the Decapolis (cf. [Mark 7:31](#)), and if so, most of the 4,000 would have been Gentiles. Jesus fed them as bountifully and as caringly as he did the Jewish crowd in chapter 6. Yet when he tried to use the image of yeast to warn his disciples against teachings different from his, they took him with an almost silly literalism.

- ✚ [Acts 11:1-3](#) and [15:1-6](#) show that some early Christians, trained in the Jewish faith, found it hard to accept Gentiles as full citizens in God's Kingdom. How would Mark's stories of Jesus miraculously feeding two crowds, one Jewish and one Gentile, point toward God's view of that issue? Are there any people who, for whatever reasons, you aren't sure "fit" in God's family today?
- ✚ What was "the yeast of the Pharisees," and "the yeast of Herod"? The Pharisees wanted a Messianic kingdom set up just for law-keeping Jews; Herod and company wanted a political kingdom that treated them as legitimate kings. Jesus' vision was different from both, higher and more expansive, and he wanted his disciples to "get it." How do you see Jesus' kingdom (for which we pray each week in worship)? Have there been times when Jesus' actions and teachings expanded your sense of the kingdom's reach and impact?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, it seems all your disciples could see in your feedings of large crowds was fish and bread. Help me focus my attention on your life-changing power and compassion, on your kingdom that is higher and greater than anything I could imagine. Amen.

**It can take time to see clearly**

## **SATURDAY 3.10.18 Mark 8:22-33**

“This story is unique in the New Testament in that the healing happens in two stages. Mark’s account, however, has an important, symbolic significance as well: Clarity about Jesus’ mission comes only after confusion.” \* Right after the story of the blind man’s healing, Mark showed Peter’s great confession of Jesus as “the Christ” (the anointed one in Greek, equivalent to the Hebrew “Messiah”), followed immediately by Peter’s confused effort to “correct” Jesus’ explanation about what it meant to be the Christ. Glimpsing the truth, but only in a fuzzy image “like trees...walking around,” Peter couldn’t yet grasp that Jesus truly meant that his mission involved rejection, suffering and execution.

- ✚ The gospels said Jesus faced temptation right at the start of his ministry (cf. [Mark 1:12-13](#), [Luke 4:1-13](#)). Those temptations involved becoming the kind of “Christ” who would fit people’s expectations and wishes. So when Peter “took hold” of Jesus to correct him, Jesus recognized the voice: “By calling out Satan, Jesus exposes an evil force behind Peter’s response. The problem is that Peter denies that Jesus’ mission as the Christ includes suffering. He isn’t thinking from God’s point of view.” \*\* In what ways has your understanding of Jesus and his mission become clearer over time? Are you willing to follow a king whose path to God’s eternal kingdom went straight through suffering and crucifixion, not around them?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, open my heart to think God’s thoughts, not human thoughts, about what it means for me to follow you and serve your kingdom. When that takes courage, give me that courage. Amen.

**Family Activity:** At times, everyone feels alone or unloved. As a family, share ideas about how you can work with God to bring comfort and care to others. Discuss each person’s unique gifts and abilities. How can that person use those gifts to comfort others? How can family members combine their gifts to care and help? Use construction paper to create the symbol of a heart. On it, write or draw one or two gifts of each person. Also, write or draw names of people who are sad or lonely. Pray together, asking God to help guide you to use your ideas and gifts to comfort those in need. Display your family’s “heart” as a reminder to comfort others. Commit to being intentional in comforting and loving others and pray for God’s help.

\* Suzanne Watts Henderson, study note on Mark 8:24 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 84 NT.

\*\* Suzanne Watts Henderson, study note on Mark 8:33 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 84 NT.