

Growing Deeper

Shook

Week One: Episode 01

Mark 1:1-28

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Chapter 1 of Mark is the presentation of Jesus. If you were asked, “Who is Jesus?,” what would you say?
2. It is believed Mark’s Gospel was written in Rome primarily for non-Jewish Roman Christians. These Christians had already heard and believed the good news of Jesus. One commentator writes, “They needed to hear it again with a new emphasis to catch afresh its implications for their lives in a dissolute and often hostile environment.” How closely does this describe you?
3. Read Mark 1:1-28. Read it again as if you had never heard of Jesus. What strikes you as startling or even shocking?
4. Each event Mark describes has startling elements. Look again at Mark 1:1-8. What unsettles you in these verses?
5. John the Baptist’s appearance may not have been as startling then as it seems now. It was the dress of a poor man living off the land, who focused on relaying God’s message. How is John’s message of “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” unsettling? How does it prepare people to believe in Jesus?
6. John describes someone coming who is very powerful and important. What could be unsettling about this: then, now?
7. John goes on to say the powerful one would baptize with the Holy Spirit instead of water. What comes to mind when you think of being totally immersed in the Holy Spirit? End your FIFTEEN asking God for a fresh understanding of him. Spend time in repentance. Ask him to immerse you in himself.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Read Mark 1:9-13. What two events does Mark consider key for people to know about Jesus?
9. What do these events teach someone who doesn’t know Jesus? What do they teach someone who already knows and trusts Jesus?
10. Put yourself into the scene at Jesus’ baptism. What might it have looked like to see “heaven being torn open” and the “Holy Spirit descending”? What might the voice have sounded like? How does this make you look at Jesus in a fresh way?

11. Put yourself into the scene at Jesus' temptation. What startles you?
12. How do these two events shake up your expectations of Jesus?
13. End your FIFTEEN asking to see Jesus as he really is. Ask God to show you how this could change how you live.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

14. Read Mark 1:14-20. What seems shocking?
15. What do you think Jesus means when he says, "The time has come"?
16. What does he mean by "the kingdom of God has come near"? How is this "the good news of God"?
17. How does the arrival of God's rule on earth in Jesus comfort you? Challenge you?
18. Unlike a Rabbi whose pupils sought him out, Jesus took the initiative and called his followers. Put yourself in the place of Simon and Andrew or James and John. Would you find Jesus' command unsettling? Why or why not?
19. What is God asking you to leave? What is he asking you to begin? What is Jesus calling you to do as he holds out his hand and says "Come, follow me"? End your FIFTEEN asking him these questions. Ask him to remove your fear and any other barriers.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

20. Read Mark 1:21-28. What is unsettling?
21. Why would the ruler of the synagogue invite Jesus to teach? What do you think they expected to hear?
22. What amazed the people about Jesus' teaching? What does this tell Mark's readers about Jesus?
23. How do Jesus' actions authenticate his teaching?
24. How does this show us that God's kingdom had come near (v. 15)?

25. The people called Jesus' teaching a new teaching – one with authority. Think about all you know about Jesus' teaching. What makes it different from any other teaching?
26. End your FIFTEEN remembering the times Jesus has used his power and authority to drive evil out of your life. Give thanks for what he has done.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

27. Mark introduces Jesus with energy. He displays Jesus' power and authority immediately. Reread Mark 1:1-28. How many ways do you see Jesus' power and authority highlighted?
28. Why can people with power and authority be unsettling?
29. How does Jesus use his power and authority in these verses?
30. What comfort do you find in the ways Jesus uses his power?
31. How does this understanding of Jesus impact your current situations?
32. End your FIFTEEN in worship and prayer. Praise Jesus, Son of God, who holds all power and authority. Praise him for wielding his power on your behalf. Ask him to give you victory over evil in your life and courage to follow him.

Week Two: *Episode 02*

Mark 1:29-2:12

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Read Mark 1:29-34. Where had Jesus and the disciples been before arriving at Simon Peter and Andrew's home? What had they just witnessed? (See Mark 1:21.)

2. Upon arriving home, Simon Peter and Andrew find Peter's mother-in-law in bed with a fever. What do they do?

3. After Jesus healed her, what did she do?

4. When people heard about Jesus' miraculous works, they came to Jesus, bringing their sick and demon-possessed. How do you react after you have seen something amazing like that? Do you attribute the amazing work to God? Why or why not?

5. Look at Mark 1:24. What title does the evil spirit give to Jesus?

6. Verse 34 tells us that Jesus would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was. Why do you think that Jesus would prevent them from speaking about him?

7. Did you catch that the people waited until after sunset to bring the sick and possessed to Jesus (v. 32)? Since it was the Sabbath day, they were not allowed to carry people to Jesus because carrying was a form of work – and no work was to be done on their day of rest. These laws had been devised by the Jewish leaders in order to help the people keep the Table of the Law (the 10 Commandments). However, the laws had been added to and redefined so much that there were over 600 of them to be kept to be considered a righteous Jewish person. But they were not the first people to do this. Read Genesis 2:16-17 and Genesis 3:2-3. What did the woman add to God's command?

8. The practice of adding our rules to God's rules is as old as sin itself! Like the Jewish Laws, do you find yourself adding to God's directions? God's commands were given to give freedom. Read Exodus 20. How do these commands give freedom to us?

9. Jesus wanted to give freedom back to God's people. Freedom from the law – which had become burdensome – and freedom from sickness – both spiritual and physical. He didn't wait for sunset on the Sabbath to heal the demon-possessed man at the synagogue or Simon Peter's mother-in-law. As you pray, ask God to show you what you need freedom from. Be open to receiving his grace in your life.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

10. Read Mark 1:35-39. When did Jesus get up to pray?

11. He chose that time because no one else was going to be awake and asking things of him. He could spend that time uninterrupted with his Father. Do you have a set time and place to meet with God?
12. Why have you chosen that time and place? If you haven't set aside a daily time with God, think through your day and find a time to set aside. Remember, some time with God is better than no time with God. 😊
13. What does your time with God look like? If you don't have a regular routine of meeting with God, there are podcasts, online devotions through emails and websites, books, and individual Bible studies, just to name a few. Consider what would work best for you. God wants to meet with you just like your friends enjoy being with you. Friendships take time to develop.
14. Once the disciples wake up, they find Jesus is gone. So, they go looking for him. They seek him until they find him. Do you find yourself looking for Jesus? Does it feel like he is close or distant? God's Word tells us that he is always with us. See Joshua 1:5; Isaiah 41:10; Matthew 28:20; Romans 8:38-39. That is a fact – even when we feel far from God. How can you remind yourself of this fact when you are feeling far away from God?
15. After the disciples find him, Jesus tells them that they will be moving to other villages. Why does Jesus want to move on from Capernaum?
16. As you end your FIFTEEN in prayer, thank God for your relationship with him. Ask him how you can deepen your relationship with him.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

17. Read Mark 1:40-45. Imagine coming home to your family after a time away – maybe it was for a business trip, or you don't get home to visit your parents as often. How are you typically greeted?
18. Leprosy (or any skin disease) during Bible times was treated by sending the leper away for periods of 7 days. On the 7th day, the priest would inspect the skin and pronounce the person clean or unclean. Unclean meant seven more days of waiting. Clean meant it was time to wash and return home. (See Leviticus 13-14.) How might the leper have felt when approaching Jesus?
19. What was Jesus' reaction to the leper?
20. Jesus' compassion and willingness to touch the leper were unheard of at the time. Anyone touching someone with a skin disease would also be considered unclean for seven days and unable to return home or to worship in the synagogue. It seems harsh, but God's Word in Leviticus helped to establish the societal rules as Moses led God's people out of Egypt after 400 years of slavery. They needed expectations for how to handle illnesses in their newly formed country-on-the-move. Think about what would be considered today's leprosy. Who are the people on the fringes of our society? What should our attitude be towards them?

21. After the healing, Jesus gives the man two instructions: a “do” and a “don’t.” What are they?
22. After receiving his instructions, the man clearly did not obey them. He went off telling everyone about what Jesus had done. What instructions has God given you? Are you obeying or not?
23. Sometimes our disobedience doesn’t seem like much. But the man stole the opportunity for the priests to hear about Jesus’ healing and to learn that he really was the Son of God, the one who could heal leprosy. Jesus was exactly who the demon in Mark 1:24 said he was: The Holy One of God. As you close your FIFTEEN with God, go back to Jesus’ reaction to the leper: compassion and willingness. Reflect on how God sees you in spite of your disobedience. See Psalm 103:12. Thank God for his deep, abiding love for you.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

24. Read Mark 2:1-12. News of Jesus had spread in Mark 1:28. The story of the leper’s healing had been widely told. Now Jesus is in Capernaum teaching in a house so crowded that no one could get close to the door. Why was everyone so drawn to Jesus?
25. Some men came carrying a paralyzed man and they were so desperate to see Jesus that they dug through the roof to lay their friend before Jesus. What draws you to Jesus?
26. What problem did Jesus take care of first for the paralyzed man? Why?
27. Why did Jesus tell the man to take his mat and walk and go home?
28. Jesus knows us intimately and knows what we need. There is no hiding ourselves from him. And there is no hiding of how God feels about us, his people. Read Ephesians 1. Write down all the actions that describe how God sees us. Praise God for all of his work on our behalf. Then end your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to deepen our understanding of his grace towards us.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

29. Skim Mark 1:29-2:12. Note the reactions of different people (or things) as they encountered Jesus. Put yourself in the crowds as they meet Jesus for the first time. What impresses you about him? What intimidates you? How would you feel if you met him face to face?
30. Would you find yourself seeking out more of his teaching, or would you go for the spectacle of the healings? Why?
31. Mark 1:34 states that the demons knew who Jesus was. Who do you say that Jesus is?

32. Now place yourself in the crowd at the house in Capernaum. Did you get there early to find a good seat? Were you one of the latecomers gathered at the door and windows? Think about your reaction as Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic. Do you believe that Jesus can do that? Why? Write it out logically, thinking as one would given what you have seen and heard.

33. Now given the gift of time and perspective of today, why can Jesus forgive sin? Are the reasons the same?

34. End your final FIFTEEN this week by praising God for sending his son Jesus to be your Savior!

Week Three: *Episode 03*

Mark 2:13-3:35

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Humans divide themselves into so many groups, starting with our families of origin. Brainstorm a quick list of some of the types of groups into which we divide ourselves.
2. Read Mark 2:13-17. How did the Pharisees divide people?
3. Notice the setting of the narrative in Mark 2:15. Where was Jesus?
4. Obviously, the Pharisees saw this group as too outrageous for them to associate with. What group would that be for you? What would it take for you to have dinner in the home of someone in this group?
5. How would your family and friends feel about you associating with someone of this group? Would you want them to know?
6. Clearly Jesus was not worried about appearances when he went to the home of an undesirable! The Pharisees might have been shook up by his actions, but he was not. End your FIFTEEN in prayer by asking Jesus to give you courage to act as he did toward those marginalized by our society.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

7. Yesterday we saw how the Pharisees divided people as good or bad. Name some of the ways we divide people into groups. What criteria is typically used to make those divisions?
8. Read Mark 2:18-22. Note the Pharisees' concern in verse 18. Was Sabbath really the issue, or was it something deeper?
9. Describe an example when we tend to pick on a behavior rather getting to the heart of what is bothering us.
10. Look again at verse 18. What three groups did the Pharisees name?
11. The Pharisees were certainly keeping track of which groups were keeping the rules and which ones were not. Why might the rules have been important to the Pharisees?

12. How did Jesus answer the Pharisees' question in verses 19-22?
13. What seems to be most important to the pharisees?
14. Jesus' seeming disregard for the rules shocked the religious leaders of his day; after all, rule-keeping was their claim to fame. But even more shocking was comparing himself to the bridegroom in a joyous wedding celebration. As you end your FIFTEEN, think about the ways you allow the old ways of rule-keeping to keep you from experiencing the joy of being in Jesus' presence.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Are you a rule-keeper by nature, or are you the type of person who feels like rules are simply guidelines? Explain your answer.
16. Read Mark 2:23-3:6. What was the issue with which the Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus?
17. Look at Mark 3:2. What was their true motive?
18. Look again at Mark 3:4. Why do you think the Pharisees remained silent when Jesus asked them his question?
19. If you were in their shoes, how do you think you would have responded to Jesus? With silence like the Pharisees, or would you try to answer him?
20. What was Jesus' reaction in verse 3:5?
21. Jesus wasn't just angry, he was distressed. Some versions of the Bible use the word "grieved." Jesus knew the severity of their hard hearts. And it grieved him. What was his answer to this situation in verse 5?
22. How did the Pharisees react to this amazing act?
23. Jesus could have done a lot of things to get their attention: yelled, quoted scriptures, called down angels, you name it. Instead, he tried shocking them out of their stubbornness with a stand-up miracle in front of their very eyes. As you close your FIFTEEN in prayer, ask God to help you see what the Pharisees did not.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

24. When you do something noteworthy, is it in your nature to share it with others? Or do you tend to be uneasy talking about these things? How does your willingness to share change when you are part of a group or team effort?

25. Read Mark 3:7-12. Why were the people crowding around Jesus? What does that say about his reputation?

26. Have you ever been overwhelmed by the needs of others? Describe the circumstance.

27. Look at Mark 3:9. How did Jesus prepare for the onslaught of demand? Did this planning suggest he did not care about the needs of the people? Why or why not?

28. Look at verse 11. How did the impure spirits behave in Jesus' presence? What does that say about Jesus' power?

29. How were the people thronging around Jesus different than the Pharisees?

30. Imagine for a moment how the people afflicted with the impure spirits might have been suffering. It's safe to assume that they knew they needed help. As you end your FIFTEEN, think about the people longing for Jesus' help in contrast to the attitude of the Pharisees. As you end in prayer, ask God to help you to maintain an awareness of your need for him in order to avoid falling into the same trap as the Pharisees.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

31. Read Mark 3:13-19. Who were the people that Jesus called to be by his side? What types of things were they going to be tasked with doing?

32. Think back to Day One when we talked about the different ways we divide ourselves into groups. One of the most obvious ways is our families. How is your family of origin similar to or different from your current household?

33. Jesus too had a family of origin. His parents, Mary and Joseph, are fairly well-known, but the Bible tells us that Jesus had brothers and sisters too. Four brothers who are mentioned by name and an undetermined number of sisters who were not named. (See Mark 6:3.) How do you think his brothers and sisters felt witnessing all of the throngs of people that were surrounding Jesus?

34. Just for fun, try to imagine that one of your siblings or very close friends was actually Jesus. What would it take for you to believe they were the Son of God?

35. Read Mark 3:20-34. How did Jesus' family react to what he was doing?

36. How did Jesus react to hearing that his family was looking for him?

37. For Jewish people in Jesus' time, family was everything. For many, putting others before your family might have been the most shocking thing he'd done. How does Jesus' willingness to invite others in, in spite of the division of family, demonstrate how he feels about those outside of his current flock?

38. One thing Jesus has demonstrated in this episode of his life is that he does not have closed circles! As you end your FIFTEEN, conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving that everyone, including you, is welcome in his family.