

The background is a soft-focus image of a bright blue sky with large, white, fluffy clouds. In the center of the image, there are three overlapping circles. The leftmost circle is a muted teal color. The middle circle is a dusty purple color. The rightmost circle is a warm gold or mustard yellow color. The circles overlap in the center, creating a small area where all three colors meet. The text "THE KINGDOM AMONG US" is written in a dark, sans-serif, all-caps font across the middle of the image, positioned over the overlapping circles.

THE KINGDOM AMONG US



THE KINGDOM AMONG US

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Preface

In the opening of Mark's gospel, Jesus proclaims a revolutionary message: "The Kingdom of God is near!" This wasn't just an announcement about a future reality—it was a declaration that God's reign was breaking into our world through Jesus Himself.

Today, God's Kingdom continues to unfold among us—in us and through us—as followers of Christ. The Kingdom of God isn't just a far-off hope—it's a present reality that each of us is invited to enjoy and participate in daily. When Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom's arrival, He wasn't just speaking about His own ministry; He was inaugurating a new way of living that would continue through all of His followers, empowered by His Spirit.

Too often, we've relegated the work of the Kingdom to pastors and church staff—viewing ourselves as passive spectators rather than active participants in God's ongoing work. And we often act as though Kingdom work occurs primarily in church buildings. But Jesus shows us a different way.

Every believer is called to be an ambassador of Christ's Kingdom. Whether you're a teacher shaping young minds, a business professional making strategic decisions, a parent raising children, or a neighbor building community relationships, you are positioned to demonstrate and declare the reality of God's Kingdom. Every interaction becomes an opportunity to embody the peace, power, and presence of Jesus.

Historical Background and Context

Author: John Mark (Acts 12)

Date: Between A.D. 55 AND 65

Audience: Christians in Rome

Who was John Mark (often shortened to Mark)? Why did he have influence with the church in Rome? He wasn't even one of Jesus' twelve disciples. Mark's family was among the early believers in Jerusalem and Mark became a close friend of Peter,¹ the leader of the Jerusalem church. They met after Peter miraculously escaped from prison and made his way to Mark's mother's home,² where the Jerusalem church was earnestly praying for him.³

Mark, a young man, was asked by his cousin Barnabas⁴ and the Apostle Paul to accompany them on their first missionary journey. Along the way, Mark abruptly left Paul and Barnabas.⁵ Afterward, Paul said he "deserted" them. Later on, when Barnabas wanted to take Mark on a subsequent missionary journey, Paul adamantly refused. This led Paul and Barnabas to split ways, with Barnabas taking Mark on a different trip and Paul taking Silas.⁶

Little else is known about Mark, except that he later joined Paul in Rome during Paul's imprisonment there, and he was a significant comfort to Paul at that time.⁷ During Paul's second imprisonment, and just before his execution, he asked Mark to return to Rome, "because he is helpful to me in my ministry."⁸

Mark wrote his gospel late in his life during a time when the Church faced major crises. Eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus were dying, and persecution was growing more and more intense. How would the Church be stabilized? How would the life and

¹1 Peter 5:13

²Acts 12:1-4

³Acts 12:12, 25

⁴Colossians 4:10

⁵Acts 13:13

⁶Acts 15:36-41

⁷Colossians 4:10-11; Philemon 24

⁸2 Timothy 4:11

person of Christ be remembered? How would persecuted Christians be able to hold onto their faith?

The persecution in Rome experienced by the Christians was largely led by the brutal and ruthless Roman Emperor, Nero. He killed his own mother and his chief advisers, Seneca and Burrus. He also killed many of the nobility in order to seize their fortunes and solidify his power. In A.D. 64, fire destroyed a large part of Rome. Scholars believe Nero ordered the fire himself to make room for a new palace, but he deflected blame by accusing the Christians. Thus began the terrible persecution of the church in Rome that included torture, executions, and cruel coliseum entertainment. Some followers of Christ were covered in animal skins and torn to pieces by dogs. Others were fastened to crosses and set on fire, serving as torches at night for the city.⁹

Mark's gospel presents the Kingdom of God as a central theological theme, intricately woven into a historical context of intense persecution and church crisis. Mark presents the Kingdom as both a present reality and future hope, demonstrating its power through Jesus' ministry while acknowledging the paradox of suffering within God's reign. His gospel portrays the Kingdom through parables, while also showing its power through healing miracles, the casting out of demons, and other miracles.

For Mark's persecuted audience, the Kingdom message provided a powerful counter-narrative to Roman imperial authority, offering hope of ultimate victory through apparent defeat. Mark's presentation of the Kingdom challenges existing power structures, elevates the marginalized, and redefines greatness through service.

⁹Mark, *Life Application Bible Commentary*. Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1994. xv-xvi

Mark Reading Plan

This study focuses on the theme of the Kingdom of God throughout the book of Mark. While this concept is found on every page, not every chapter of the book is going to be studied. To understand this gospel to the fullest, we encourage you to read it in its entirety. To do so, you may want to utilize the following reading plan.

Reading Plan for the Gospel of Mark

Week 1: Mark 1-3

Week 2: Mark 4-6

Week 3: Mark 7-9

Week 4: Mark 10-12

Week 5: Mark 13-14

Week 6: Mark 15-16

The Kingdom Is Here

Lesson 1

Mark 1:1-15

“The gospel is not just a message about individual salvation; it is the announcement that God’s rule has begun.” – N.T. Wright¹



Intro Questions

What does the phrase “Kingdom of God” mean to you?

The Kingdom of God—it is spoken about throughout the New Testament; we even pray for it to come in the Lord’s Prayer in **Matthew 6:9-13**.² But what does it really mean? Look over the various definitions below and then write out your own definition.

- “The kingdom is: God’s reign through God’s people over God’s place.”³
- “The kingdom of God is the vision of the world reordered around the powerful love of God in Christ.”⁴

¹Wright, N. T. *Simply Jesus: A New Version of Who He Was, What He Did, Why It Matters*. HarperOne, 2018. 75

²**Matthew 6:9-13**: “Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.”

³Treat, Jeremy. *Seek First*, Zondervan. 2019. 15

⁴Treat, Jeremy. *Seek First*, Zondervan. 2019. 17

- “The reign of God is not a spatial category but a dynamic event in which God intervenes powerfully in human affairs to achieve his unfading purposes.”⁵
- “The Kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among men, and that this Kingdom, which will appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver men from its power, and to bring them into the blessings of God’s reign. The Kingdom of God involves two great movements: fulfillment within history and consummation at the end of history.”⁶
- “One day in the future, Jesus will establish His kingdom and reign over the entire universe. For now, His kingdom is His governing power OVER your life, as well as the power of His Holy Spirit IN your life. Thus, God’s kingdom is present AND future reality.”⁷

Write your own definition:

⁵ Garland, David E. *NIV Application Commentary: Mark*. Zondervan, 1996. 59

⁶ Ladd, George Eldon. *The Presence of the Future*. William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2002. 218

⁷ Smith, James Bryan. *The Good and Beautiful Life: Putting on the Character of Christ*. IVP Books, 2010. 41-42



Read Mark 1:1-15

Read **Mark 1:1-15** below. As you read, consider these two questions:

What do you notice about Jesus
from this passage?

How do you see Jesus ushering in
the Kingdom of God?

1 This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. It began 2 just as the prophet Isaiah had written:

*"Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
and he will prepare your way.*

*3 He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord's coming!
Clear the road for him!'"*

4 This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. 5 All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. 6 His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey.

7 John announced: "Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!"

9 One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. 10 As Jesus came up out of the

water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy."

12 The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, 13 where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.

14 Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. 15 "The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"

1 What stands out to you about John the Baptist (his person, his message, etc.)? What was John's role in ushering in the Kingdom of God?

2 How is the Trinity represented at Jesus' baptism? What did God say about Jesus? What do you think was significant about God's declaration?

3

How do you think God's declaration about Jesus' identity helped prepare Jesus for the temptations He experienced next?

Reflect: Take some time to listen for God's heart and voice toward you. In **Psalm 139**, the Psalmist says that God has precious thoughts about us and they are so numerous that they cannot be counted. So, we get to ask God—what are Your thoughts about me?

4

How does knowing your identity in God help you through both the highs and lows of life?

5

After Jesus returned from the wilderness, what was His first message in the gospel of Mark and what is significant about His command?

6

How do you think Jesus' message would have landed on the hearts and minds of those hearing it, knowing that there had been silence from God for more than 400 years?⁸

⁸After the time of the prophets and the rebuilding of the temple in the Old Testament, there were 400 years of silence from God. He spoke no prophetic words, psalms, or encouragement to His people. BibleProject. "The Birth of Jesus: Making The Impossible Possible." *BibleProject*, 18 Feb. 2025, bibleproject.com/articles/birth-jesus-luke/.

Jesus then went throughout the land, demonstrating what He meant by the Kingdom being near:

Mark 1:21-45

21 Jesus and his companions went to the town of Capernaum. When the Sabbath day came, he went into the synagogue and began to teach. 22 The people were amazed at his teaching, for he taught with real authority—quite unlike the teachers of religious law.

23 Suddenly, a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, 24 “Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

25 But Jesus reprimanded him. “Be quiet! Come out of the man,” he ordered. 26 At that, the evil spirit screamed, threw the man into a convulsion, and then came out of him.

27 Amazement gripped the audience, and they began to discuss what had happened. “What sort of new teaching is this?” they asked excitedly. “It has such authority! Even evil spirits obey his orders!” 28 The news about Jesus spread quickly throughout the entire region of Galilee.

29 After Jesus left the synagogue with James and John, they went to Simon and Andrew’s home. 30 Now Simon’s mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away. 31 So he went to her bedside, took her by the hand, and helped her sit up. Then the fever left her, and she prepared a meal for them.

32 That evening after sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. 33 The whole town gathered at the door to watch. 34 So Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons. But because the demons knew who he was, he did not allow them to speak.

35 Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. 36 Later Simon and the others went out to find him. 37 When they found him, they said, “Everyone is looking for you.”

38 But Jesus replied, "We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came." 39 So he traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons.

40 A man with leprosy came and knelt in front of Jesus, begging to be healed. "If you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean," he said.

41 Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out and touched him. "I am willing," he said. "Be healed!" 42 Instantly the leprosy disappeared, and the man was healed. 43 Then Jesus sent him on his way with a stern warning: 44 "Don't tell anyone about this. Instead, go to the priest and let him examine you. Take along the offering required in the law of Moses for those who have been healed of leprosy. This will be a public testimony that you have been cleansed."

45 But the man went and spread the word, proclaiming to everyone what had happened. As a result, large crowds soon surrounded Jesus, and he couldn't publicly enter a town anywhere. He had to stay out in the secluded places, but people from everywhere kept coming to him.



How did Jesus demonstrate the Kingdom throughout the first chapter of Mark?

8

What does this tell us/teach us/reveal to us about the Kingdom being both a physical and spiritual reality?

“What is the good news of the kingdom of God? In the book of Genesis chapters 1-2, we see that we were created to live in a world in which all relationships were whole—psychologically and socially perfect—because God was the King. But Genesis chapter 3 tells the next part of our story: that we have each chosen to be our own king. We have gone the way of self-centeredness. And self-centeredness destroys relationships. ... Why do we have wars? Class struggle? Family breakdown? Why are our relationships constantly exploding? It's the darkness of self-centeredness. When we decide to be our own center, our own king, everything falls apart: physically, socially, spiritually, and psychologically. ... But we all long [for our true king]. ... A true king will come back to put everything right and renew the entire world. The good news of the kingdom of God is this: Jesus is that true King.”⁹

9

So, understanding that Jesus is the true King and looking at your definition of the Kingdom of God from the intro questions, how does this reality impact the way you live day to day?

⁹Keller, Timothy. *King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus*. Riverhead Books, 2013. 16

10

Question nine can be hard to answer without ideas, thoughts, and help from others. Brainstorm and discuss together, what does “ushering in/doing/being/bringing” the Kingdom of God truly mean?



Discipleship Pathway

B.L.E.S.S. Practice

Taken from the “Leading and Serving” Discipleship Pathway Resource

“Christ has no body but yours, No hands, no feet on earth
but yours, Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world, Yours are the feet with which he walks to
do good, Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the
world.” —Teresa of Avila

The B.L.E.S.S. practices described on the next page are a practical and accessible way for you to partner with Jesus in ushering in the Kingdom of God in the everyday moments of life.

B.L.E.S.S. OTHERS



B - Begin with prayer

In the places God has placed you, spend time praying for people by name. Ask God for opportunities to get to know people who don't know Jesus.



L - Listen

Instead of talking, focus on asking questions, listening well, and learning about others' stories.



E - Eat

Invite those people you have been praying for and listening to, to share a meal or grab a coffee.



S - Serve

As you build relationships, pay attention to any practical needs that come up and offer to help.



S - Share your story

Look for opportunities to share what a difference Jesus has made in your life. Don't feel like you have to tell your life story all at once—think “bite-size” stories.

Time to Practice

B - Begin with prayer

Write down the names of 2 people you are in relationship with who don't know Jesus and start praying for them:*

1. _____

2. _____

L - Listen

With the people above in mind, write a couple of questions you could ask them to learn more about their story:

1. _____

2. _____

E - Eat

When in the next few days or weeks can you get something to eat or grab a coffee with one of these people?

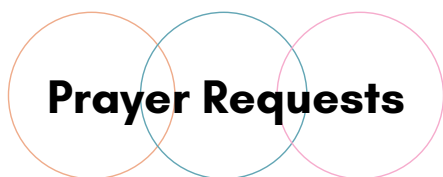
S - Serve

As you think about their lives, where have they expressed they are in need? What is something you could do to respond to that need?

S - Share your story

If you get the opportunity to share part of your story, what would you want someone to know about the difference Jesus has made or is currently making in your life?

*If you struggle to think of anyone you know who isn't a follower of Jesus, pray for opportunities and ways to engage with those who don't know Jesus in the contexts God has placed you.



Prayer Requests



Kingdom Power, Kingdom Peace

Lesson 2

Mark 4:35-41; 5:1-43

“The peace of Christ is not the absence of struggle but the presence of His transforming power.”
– Tim Keller ¹



Intro Question

How do you typically respond in situations where circumstances feel out of your control or you feel powerless?



Read Mark 4:35-41 and 5:1-43

Read **Mark 4:35-41** and **5:1-43**. As you read both passages, consider the following questions:

What do you notice about Jesus from this passage?

How do you see Jesus ushering in the Kingdom of God?

¹ Keller, Timothy. *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*. Penguin Books, 2016. 75

35 As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." 36 So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). 37 But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water.

38 Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?" 39 When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. 40 Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

41 The disciples were absolutely terrified. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind and waves obey him!"

1 What was the disciples' response to Jesus' power? Why do you think they responded this way?

2 Jesus' teachings and actions—His Kingdom—often turned the status quo upside down. Previously, "when Jesus was with the Pharisees on the Sabbath he said, 'I am not just someone who can instruct you to take rest; I am rest itself' (**Mark 2:28**). Now, by his actions [in the passage above], Jesus is demonstrating, 'I am not just someone who has power; I am power itself.'"² What does it mean that Jesus is "power itself"? To you? To the Kingdom?

Mark 5:1-43

1 So they arrived at the other side of the lake, in the region of the Gerasenes. 2 When Jesus climbed out of the boat, a man possessed by an evil spirit came out from the tombs to meet him. 3 This man lived in the burial caves and could no longer be restrained, even with a chain. 4 Whenever he was put into chains and shackles—as he often was—he snapped the chains from his wrists and smashed the shackles. No one was strong enough to subdue him. 5 Day and night he wandered among the burial caves and in the hills, howling and cutting himself with sharp stones.

6 When Jesus was still some distance away, the man saw him, ran to meet him, and bowed low before him. 7 With a shriek, he screamed, “Why are you interfering with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In the name of God, I beg you, don’t torture me!” 8 For Jesus had already said to the spirit, “Come out of the man, you evil spirit.”

9 Then Jesus demanded, “What is your name?”

And he replied, “My name is Legion, because there are many of us inside this man.” 10 Then the evil spirits begged him again and again not to send them to some distant place.

11 There happened to be a large herd of pigs feeding on the hillside nearby. 12 “Send us into those pigs,” the spirits begged. “Let us enter them.”

13 So Jesus gave them permission. The evil spirits came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the entire herd of about 2,000 pigs plunged down the steep hillside into the lake and drowned in the water.

14 The herdsmen fled to the nearby town and the surrounding countryside, spreading the news as they ran. People rushed out to see what had happened. 15 A crowd soon gathered around Jesus, and they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons. He was sitting there fully clothed and perfectly sane, and they were all afraid. 16 Then those who had seen what happened told the others about the demon-possessed man and the pigs. 17 And the crowd began pleading with Jesus to go away and leave them alone.

18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon possessed begged to go with him. 19 But Jesus said, "No, go home to your family, and tell them everything the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been." 20 So the man started off to visit the Ten Towns of that region and began to proclaim the great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed at what he told them.

21 Jesus got into the boat again and went back to the other side of the lake, where a large crowd gathered around him on the shore. 22 Then a leader of the local synagogue, whose name was Jairus, arrived. When he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet, 23 pleading fervently with him. "My little daughter is dying," he said. "Please come and lay your hands on her; heal her so she can live."

24 Jesus went with him, and all the people followed, crowding around him. 25 A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding. 26 She had suffered a great deal from many doctors, and over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse. 27 She had heard about Jesus, so she came up behind him through the crowd and touched his robe. 28 For she thought to herself, "If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed." 29 Immediately the bleeding stopped, and she could feel in her body that she had been healed of her terrible condition.

30 Jesus realized at once that healing power had gone out from him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my robe?"

31 His disciples said to him, "Look at this crowd pressing around you. How can you ask, 'Who touched me?'"

32 But he kept on looking around to see who had done it. 33 Then the frightened woman, trembling at the realization of what had happened to her, came and fell to her knees in front of him and told him what she had done. 34 And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over."

35 While he was still speaking to her, messengers arrived from the

home of Jairus, the leader of the synagogue. They told him, "Your daughter is dead. There's no use troubling the Teacher now."

36 But Jesus overheard them and said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid. Just have faith."

37 Then Jesus stopped the crowd and wouldn't let anyone go with him except Peter, James, and John (the brother of James). 38 When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw much commotion and weeping and wailing. 39 He went inside and asked, "Why all this commotion and weeping? The child isn't dead; she's only asleep."

40 The crowd laughed at him. But he made them all leave, and he took the girl's father and mother and his three disciples into the room where the girl was lying. 41 Holding her hand, he said to her, "Talitha kum," which means "Little girl, get up!" 42 And the girl, who was twelve years old, immediately stood up and walked around! They were overwhelmed and totally amazed. 43 Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone what had happened, and then he told them to give her something to eat.

3

Use the following chart to record the different responses to Jesus' power in the story of the demon possessed man. (5:1-20)

The demon's response:

The herdsmen's response:

The crowd's response:

The possessed man's response:

4

How would you say the family of the little girl and the woman³ who had bled for years experienced Jesus' peace and power? (**5:21-43**)

5

Do these passages change, challenge, or enhance your understanding of Jesus' peace and Jesus' power? If so, how?

6

In these passages, "Jesus not only demonstrated great power, he also showed tremendous compassion. Jesus' power over nature, evil spirits, and death was motivated by compassion—for a demon-possessed man who lived among tombs, a diseased woman, and the family of a dead girl. The rabbis of the day considered such people unclean. Polite society avoided them. But Jesus reached out and helped."⁴ What could it look like to follow Jesus' example of authority and compassion in your current context(s)?

³ "This woman had a seemingly incurable condition causing her to bleed constantly. This may have been a menstrual or uterine disorder that would have made her ritually unclean (**Leviticus 15:25-27**) and excluded her from most social contact." *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*, Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014. 1628

⁴ *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*, Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014. 1629

7

How can we distinguish between worldly peace and power and Kingdom peace and power?

Here are some ways Jesus modeled what it looked like to bring kingdom peace and power:

- He met chaos with calm
- He transformed fear into faith
- He restored dignity and purpose
- He often commissioned the restored to share their story

So, Jesus used His power compassionately to bring peace. This is not the way of the world where the use of power is often self-serving and cruel, usually resulting in enmity and division between people—a far cry from peace.

8

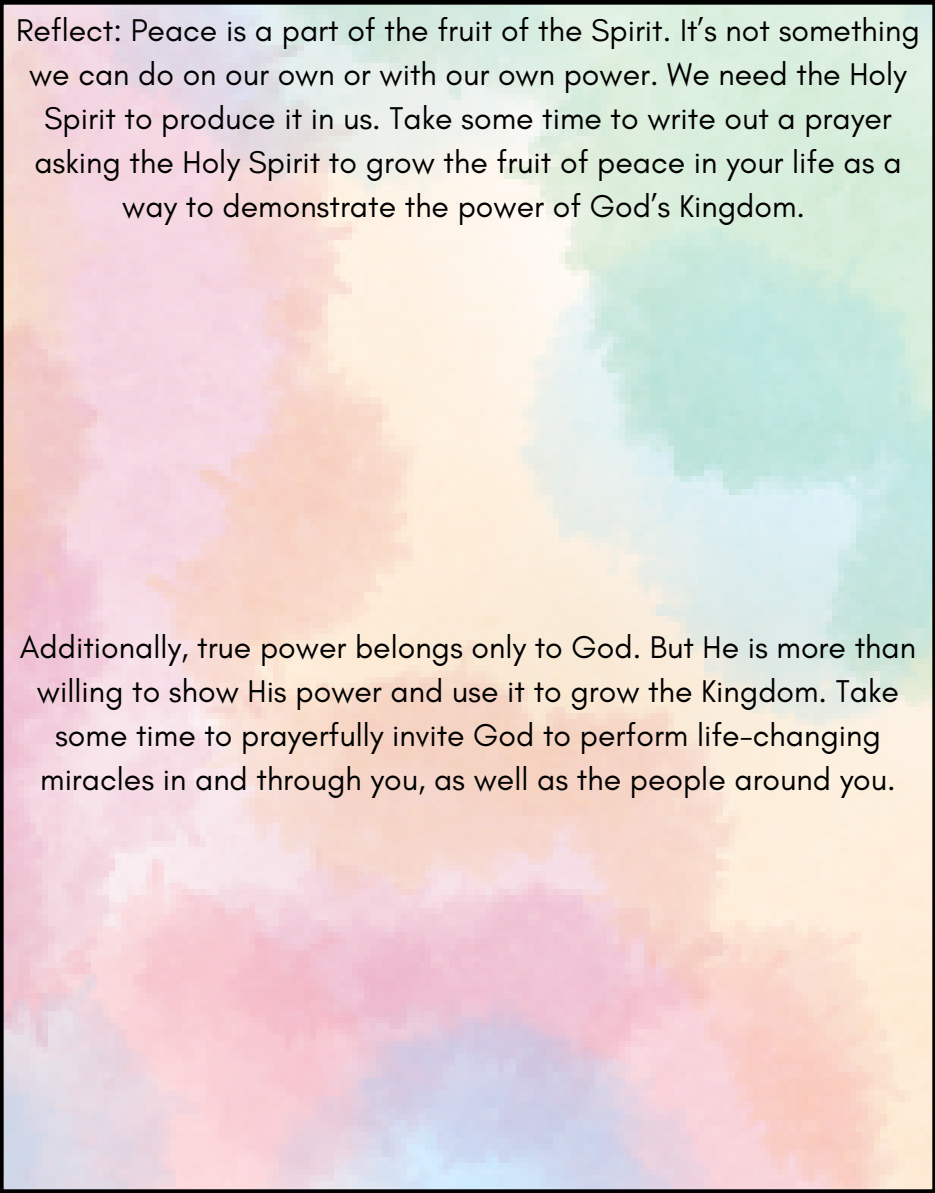
What is your experience with the relationship between power and peace?



Think through some practical examples of how you can partner with Jesus in ushering in the Kingdom of God—both its peace and power—today. Here are some examples:

- Addressing workplace anxiety by checking in on stressed colleagues and offering support
- Posting content that builds bridges rather than deepens divides
- Responding to hostile comments with genuine questions and understanding
- Practicing active listening—repeating back what you hear to ensure understanding
- Looking for common ground and shared values
- Celebrating small steps toward reconciliation
- Showing kindness to service workers facing angry customers
- Praying for healing

Add your own:



Reflect: Peace is a part of the fruit of the Spirit. It's not something we can do on our own or with our own power. We need the Holy Spirit to produce it in us. Take some time to write out a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to grow the fruit of peace in your life as a way to demonstrate the power of God's Kingdom.

Additionally, true power belongs only to God. But He is more than willing to show His power and use it to grow the Kingdom. Take some time to prayerfully invite God to perform life-changing miracles in and through you, as well as the people around you.



Discipleship Pathway

Prayer of Relinquishment

Taken from the “Surrender and Healing” Discipleship
Pathway Resource

Read over the prayer of relinquishment below.⁵

Today, O Lord, I yield myself to you.

May your will be my delight today.

May your way have perfect sway in me.

May your love be the pattern of my living.

I surrender to you my hopes, my dreams, my ambitions. Do with them
what you will, when you will, as you will.

I place into your loving care my family, my friends, my future. Care for
them with a care that I can never give.

I release into your hands

my need to control,

my craving for status,

my fear of obscurity.

Eradicate the evil, pacify the good, and establish your kingdom on
earth.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.⁶

⁵ “Relinquishment comes from the verb relinquish, to give up. The Latin root of both words is *relinquere*, ‘leave behind, forsake, or abandon,’ which combines *re*, ‘back,’ with *linquere*, ‘to leave.’ The act of giving up and abandoning a struggle or task etc.” “Relinquishment – Definition, Meaning & Synonyms.” Vocabulary.Com, www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/relinquishment. Accessed 18 Feb. 2025.

⁶ Foster, Richard J. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. PerfectBound, 2003.

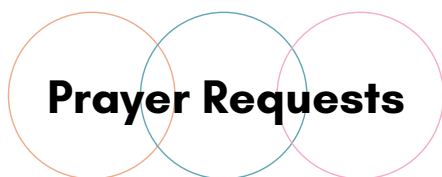
Time to Practice

As you reflect on this prayer, consider writing out one of your own using the prompts below.

List the things that you can place into God's powerful hands in order to walk out each day in peace and power.

In which specific situations do you long to grasp for control? How could you release those to God?

Turn those things you listed into a prayer of relinquishment to God this week.





The Cost of the Kingdom

Lesson 3

Mark 8:27-38

“... The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ.”

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer ¹



Intro Question

What do you value the most?



Read Mark 8:27-38

Read **Mark 8:27-38**. As you read, consider the following questions:

What do you notice about Jesus from this passage?

How do you see Jesus ushering in the Kingdom of God?

¹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. Touchstone, 2018.

27 Jesus and his disciples left Galilee and went up to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. As they were walking along, he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

28 "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets."

29 Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?"

Peter replied, "You are the Messiah."

30 But Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

31 Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead. 32 As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things.

33 Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. "Get away from me, Satan!" he said. "You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."

34 Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. 35 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. 36 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? 37 Is anything worth more than your soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

1 Why did Jesus rebuke Peter?

2

What do you think Peter might have been misunderstanding?

3

How do we often make the same mistake as Peter? In those moments, how can we adjust our point of view?

4

Why is it important for us to have a solid understanding of who Jesus is? How does that shape our calling to help Him usher in His Kingdom?

There are multiple situations throughout the book of Mark that show how costly discipleship and following after Jesus can be. Read the following passages for some examples:

Mark 6:1-16

1 Jesus left that part of the country and returned with his disciples to Nazareth, his hometown. 2 The next Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. They asked,

"Where did he get all this wisdom and the power to perform such miracles?" 3 Then they scoffed, "He's just a carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters live right here among us." They were deeply offended and refused to believe in him.

4 Then Jesus told them, "A prophet is honored everywhere except in his own hometown and among his relatives and his own family." 5 And because of their unbelief, he couldn't do any miracles among them except to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6 And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then Jesus went from village to village, teaching the people. 7 And he called his twelve disciples together and began sending them out two by two, giving them authority to cast out evil spirits. 8 He told them to take nothing for their journey except a walking stick—no food, no traveler's bag, no money. 9 He allowed them to wear sandals but not to take a change of clothes.

10 "Wherever you go," he said, "stay in the same house until you leave town. 11 But if any place refuses to welcome you or listen to you, shake its dust from your feet as you leave to show that you have abandoned those people to their fate."

12 So the disciples went out, telling everyone they met to repent of their sins and turn to God. 13 And they cast out many demons and healed many sick people, anointing them with olive oil.

14 Herod Antipas, the king, soon heard about Jesus, because everyone was talking about him. Some were saying, "This must be John the Baptist raised from the dead. That is why he can do such miracles." 15 Others said, "He's the prophet Elijah." Still others said, "He's a prophet like the other great prophets of the past."

16 When Herod heard about Jesus, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has come back from the dead."

Mark 10:23-31

23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!" 24 This amazed them. But Jesus said again, "Dear children, it is very hard to enter the Kingdom

of God. 25 In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!”

26 The disciples were astounded. “Then who in the world can be saved?” they asked.

27 Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.”

28 Then Peter began to speak up. “We’ve given up everything to follow you,” he said.

29 “Yes,” Jesus replied, “and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, 30 will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life. 31 But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.”

5 In the Mark 6 passage, Jesus was rejected in His hometown. These were the people who watched Him grow up, those He had done life with, those who knew Him well—yet they rejected Him. How would you describe what it feels like to be rejected?

6

How do you think Jesus felt when John was killed? Does knowing Jesus had experiences and emotions similar to us (rejection, grief, etc.) help you process what it means to take up your cross and follow Him? If so, how?

7

What things does Jesus ask His followers to give up both tangible (wealth etc.) and intangible (status and reputation, etc.)?

8

What thoughts or reactions does that bring up for you?

“Jesus used the image of carrying a cross to illustrate the ultimate submission required of his followers. He is not against pleasure, nor was he saying that we should seek pain needlessly. Jesus was talking about the heroic effort needed to follow him moment by moment, to do his will even when the work is difficult and the future looks bleak.”²

9 In your own words, explain what it means to pick up your cross and follow Jesus.

“In [Mark 8] Jesus says two things: ‘I’m a King, but a King going to a cross, and If you want to follow me, you’ve got to come to the cross too.’ ... Jesus is saying, ‘Yes, I’m the Messiah, the King, but I came not to live but to die. I’m not here to take power but to lose it; I’m here not to rule but to serve. And that is how I’m going to defeat evil and put everything right.’”³

“Many people spend all their energy seeking pleasure. Jesus said, however, that worldliness, which is centered on possessions, position, or power, is ultimately worthless. ... Are you willing to make the pursuit of God more important than the selfish pursuits?”⁴

²Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation, Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014. 1638

³Keller, Timothy. *King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus*. Riverhead Books, 2013. 97

⁴Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation, Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014. 1638

Reflect: As you read the quotes on the previous page, what's your initial reaction? Be honest. Jesus' challenge was certainly difficult and outside of anyone's comfort zone. Take some time to examine what might be uncomfortable for you. Also take some time to apply the challenge to your own real/everyday life.

10

How might Jesus be asking you to take up your cross today, to make the pursuit of God the most important thing?

11

How does your discipleship journey with Jesus—living out your faith—defy cultural norms?

12

The Kingdom is costly—but totally worth it. In seasons when the cost seems high, how can the following truths remind us of our purpose? (Space to answer on the next page.)

Romans 5:1-5

1 Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. 2 Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory. 3 We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. 4 And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. 5 And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

“For us, the kingdom of God begins with weakness, relinquishment, giving up our rights to our own life; it begins with admitting that we need a Savior. We need someone to actually fulfill all the requirements and pay for our sin. That's weakness. Jesus started in weakness—first by becoming human, and second, by going to a cross. And if we want him in our life, we have to start in weakness too. The kingdom begins there, but it won't end there. Someday, when Jesus returns and ushers in a renewed creation, love will totally triumph over hate and life will totally triumph over death.”⁵

⁵Keller, Timothy. *King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus*. Riverhead Books, 2013. 107-108

13

As you think through this lesson and the ideas of weakness, taking up your cross, and dependence on Christ alone, how might our endurance draw others into the Kingdom?

(Examples: trusting God through a lengthy illness, taking the high road in a disagreement, giving away hard-earned time and money, our perseverance when we don't know anyone is watching, etc.)⁶



Discipleship Pathway

"What Do I Value Most" Exercise

Taken from the "Discovering and Following" Discipleship Pathway Resource

Human beings cannot help but assign ultimate value and worth to someone or something. That doesn't mean everyone worships God. One's ultimate devotion can rest in money, success, a person, a garden, a creed, a cause, and so forth. Ultimately, what we are devoted to will shape our lives.

⁶"It is one thing to go through a crisis grandly, but a different thing to go through every day glorifying God when there is no witness, no limelight, and no one paying the remotest attention to you." Oswald Chambers, *Mark, Life Application Bible Commentary*. Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1994. 114

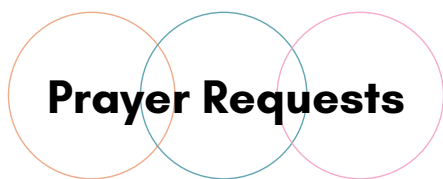
Time to Practice

1. Come before God with an open and listening ear.

Answer this question: "What do I value most?" To help you discern what you value most, consider what you spend the most time, money, and attention on.

2. Next ask your kids, spouse, colleagues, family members, church friends, and/or God the same question about yourself. What do they think you value most? Where are there similarities and differences to the things you wrote down above?

3. As you reflect on your values and the things others say that you value, what could or does it look like to express worship to God as your highest value? Is there something that needs to change in your life for this to happen? Ask the Holy Spirit to bring His gentle conviction and guidance.



Prayer Requests



The King Who Brings Peace

Lesson 4

Mark 11:1-11

“This odd juxtaposition [a king riding a donkey’s colt] demonstrates that Jesus was king but that he didn’t fit into the world’s categories of kingship. He brought together majesty and meekness.”
-Tim Keller¹



Intro Question

Have you been surprised when someone in authority acted with humility? What impact did that have on you?



Read Mark 11:1-11

Read **Mark 11:1-11**. As you do, consider the following questions:

What do you notice about Jesus from this passage?

How do you see Jesus ushering in the Kingdom of God?

1 As Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. 2 “Go into that village over there,” he told them. “As soon as you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks, ‘What are you doing?’ just say, ‘The Lord needs it and will return it soon.’” 4 The two disciples left and found the colt standing in the street, tied outside the front door. 5 As they were untying it, some bystanders demanded, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” 6 They said what Jesus had told them to say, and they were permitted to take it. 7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it, and he sat on it. 8 Many in the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others spread leafy branches they had cut in the fields. 9 Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting,

“Praise God!

Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

10 Blessings on the coming Kingdom of our ancestor David!

Praise God in highest heaven!”

11 So Jesus came to Jerusalem and went into the Temple. After looking around carefully at everything, he left because it was late in the afternoon. Then he returned to Bethany with the twelve disciples.

“This was the Sunday of the week that Jesus would be crucified, and the great Passover festival was about to begin. Jews came to Jerusalem from all over the Roman world during this week-long celebration to remember the great exodus from Egypt (see **Exodus 12:37-51**). Many in the crowds had heard of or seen Jesus and were hoping he would come to the Temple (**John 11:55-57**). Jesus did come, not as a warring king on a horse or in a chariot, but as a gentle and peaceable King on a donkey’s colt, just as **Zechariah 9:9**² had predicted.”³

²**Zechariah 9:9** says, “Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey’s colt.”

³Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation, Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014. 1644-1645

1

What are your thoughts and feelings on Jesus entering Jerusalem in this way?

2

The Jews were living under Roman rule and had been waiting for centuries for the King that was promised, the Messiah. And they likely expected that He would come in, rescue them, and set up His physical kingdom where they would have places of power—no longer under the rule of someone else—but that wasn't the plan. "Here was Jesus Christ, the King of authoritative, miraculous power, riding into town on a steed fit for a child ..." ⁴

What expectations do we have of those in positions of power and authority? For example: our bosses, our mentors, our pastors, our political leaders, etc.

3

Do you sometimes place these expectations on Jesus and His power? If so, how?

4

How have you treated Jesus as a “genie,” expecting Him to use power to benefit you and make life more comfortable?

Reflect: Look at the following prayer and take some time to talk with Jesus.

Jesus, at times I want You to use Your power to benefit me, change my eyes and my heart to see the compassion in, and humility of, Your power and the ways You are moving in the world to usher in Your Kingdom. Help me accept Your invitation to join You in ushering in Your Kingdom today.

In **Mark 10:35-45** Jesus gives a very clear explanation of the upside down “power” structure found in the Kingdom of God. Read the passage on the next page and answer the question that follows.

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came over and spoke to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do us a favor."

36 "What is your request?" he asked.

37 They replied, "When you sit on your glorious throne, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left."

38 But Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?"

39 "Oh yes," they replied, "we are able!"

Then Jesus told them, "You will indeed drink from my bitter cup and be baptized with my baptism of suffering. 40 But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. God has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen."

41 When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. 42 So Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. 43 But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

5

How does this passage challenge our modern views of power and success?

Reflect: Meditate on Jesus' willingness and ability to live a life of humility and peace. Take some time to offer prayers of worship and admiration.

6

How can we embrace and follow Jesus' model of humble leadership/influence? What does that look like practically? In our workplace, in our homes, in our church, in our school or the schools of our children, at our gym, in the office of a medical professional—all the places where we set foot—what does it actually look like to bring peace and humility?

7

The people in Jesus' time wanted a warrior king, someone to overthrow the powers of the time. Jesus' plan didn't fit their expectations; Jesus was a peaceful king. What does it mean for us to be citizens of a peaceful Kingdom in our often non-peaceful world?



Discipleship Pathway

Lectio Divina

Taken from the "Learning and Belonging" Discipleship Pathway Resource

Lectio Divina, also known as devotional reading, is not an exercise in mentally critiquing or understanding the text but is a practice of hearing and responding to the loving voice of God through the words of Scripture. It's an invitation to deeper communion with God and provides opportunity for greater experiential knowing of His love for us like Paul describes in **Ephesians 3:19**: "to know this love that surpasses knowledge."

Lectio Divina is traditionally made up of four steps:

1. **Read.** Read the passage slowly and carefully. Take your time. As you move through the text, pay close attention to what words and ideas draw your attention in unique ways. When your focus is drawn to a particular word or thought, pause momentarily and make note of what you are noticing.

2. **Reflect.** Return to the beginning and read again. On your second reading through the text, allow the text to connect with you personally. Which words or phrases assume a particular resonance in your heart, your season of life, your person in this moment. Ask, "What

do I need to know, be, or do in light of the text? What does this mean for my life today?"

3. **Respond.** Talk to God about your experience. If you're confused, say that. Moved? Express gratitude to God. Upset? Tell Him about it. Compelled to worship? Worship. If the text has brought something else to mind, talk to God about that.

4. **Rest.** Pause to sit in God's presence before moving on. Allow yourself to feel and experience these things quietly with God.

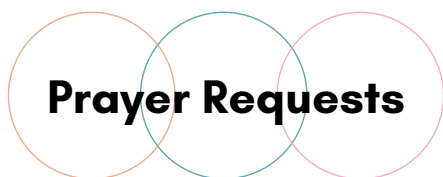
Time to Practice

Take some time to experience Lectio Divina following the steps outlined above, using **Philippians 2:1-11** below—which highlights both God's power and humility.

1 Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? 2 Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. 4 Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. 5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. 6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. 7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form, 8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. 9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.



Prayer Requests



The Triumph of the Kingdom

Lesson 5

Mark 16:1-8

“Jesus’s resurrection is the beginning of God’s new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven.”
—N.T. Wright¹



Intro Question

What was a surprising piece of news you have received and how did you respond to it?



Read Mark 14:3-9; 15:24-27, 33-41; and 16:1-8.

Read **Mark 14:3-9; 15:24-27, 33-41; and 16:1-8.** As you do, consider the following question:

What do you notice about the women from these passages?

¹Wright, N. T. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church.*

Mark 14:3-9

3 Meanwhile, Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon, a man who had previously had leprosy. While he was eating, a woman came in with a beautiful alabaster jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard. She broke open the jar and poured the perfume over his head.

4 Some of those at the table were indignant. "Why waste such expensive perfume?" they asked. 5 "It could have been sold for a year's wages and the money given to the poor!" So they scolded her harshly.

6 But Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. Why criticize her for doing such a good thing to me? 7 You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them whenever you want to. But you will not always have me. 8 She has done what she could and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time. 9 I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be remembered and discussed."

Mark 15:24-27, 33-41

24 Then the soldiers nailed him to the cross. They divided his clothes and threw dice to decide who would get each piece. 25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. 26 A sign announced the charge against him. It read, "The King of the Jews." 27 Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

33 At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. 34 Then at three o'clock Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

35 Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. 36 One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink. "Wait!" he said. "Let's see whether Elijah comes to take him down!" 37 Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last. 38 And

the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

39 When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed, "This man truly was the Son of God!"

40 Some women were there, watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James the younger and of Joseph), and Salome. 41 They had been followers of Jesus and had cared for him while he was in Galilee. Many other women who had come with him to Jerusalem were also there.

Mark 16:1-8²

1 Saturday evening, when the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went out and purchased burial spices so they could anoint Jesus' body. 2 Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they went to the tomb. 3 On the way they were asking each other, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" 4 But as they arrived, they looked up and saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled aside.

5 When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side. The women were shocked, 6 but the angel said, "Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. 7 Now go and tell his disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died."

8 The women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, and they said nothing to anyone because they were too frightened.

² "Now, if you look in your Bible, you'll see that the Gospel of Mark has more. It's a longer ending where Jesus appears and speaks to the disciples, but there's also a note telling you that this ending is not part of the original manuscripts. It's possible that the original ending got lost or that Mark never actually finished his account, but it's most likely that the abrupt ending with the terrified women is intentional to make a point." Mackie, Timothy P. *Read Scripture: Illustrated Summaries of Biblical Books*. The Bible Project, 2017. 88

1

What strikes you about each woman's dedication to Jesus?
What can we learn from their examples?

2

How does the extravagance of the woman washing Jesus' feet demonstrate what you have learned so far about the Kingdom? How does Jesus' response confirm the values of the Kingdom?³

3

The king had died. Usually that means the end of a kingdom; yet Jesus had said over and over: "the Kingdom of God is near/the Kingdom of God is here." This wasn't the end—but it must have felt like the end for those following Him. Put yourself in their shoes. What do you think you might have been thinking and feeling at this moment?

³ Feel free to look back at lesson one for a review of the definition and description of God's Kingdom.

In **Mark 16:6**, as the women came to the tomb, the angel told the women “Don’t be alarmed”—yet their final response is one of trembling and bewilderment (**16:8**). Why do you think they reacted this way? How might you have reacted?

“The entire story [of Mark] has focused on the shocking claim that puzzled Jesus’ disciples all throughout the story, that the suffering, crucified, and now risen Jesus is the messiah and Son of God. God’s love and upside-down kingdom were revealed when Jesus died for the sins of the world. The story ends without closure, forcing you, the reader, to grapple with this strange and scandalous claim. Will you run away like the disciples, or will you recognize the crucified Jesus as your king? Will you go forth and tell the good news?”⁴

Reflect: What thoughts or feelings does that abrupt ending bring up for you? How does the abrupt ending of Mark make you want to respond to the message?

5 The women were commissioned to share this world-changing news. We know from other gospels that the message from the tomb was spread, but the point Mark was trying to make here was: “What are you, the reader, going to do about this Good News?” How does this relate to your own calling to share the Gospel?

The resurrection of Jesus signals the triumph of the Kingdom of God over sin and death. The union between Heaven and Earth in the Garden of Eden, once broken, is now being restored through Jesus’ death and resurrection. While we don’t have the physical Garden, His followers are now the place where God dwells—heaven and earth are again united where we are. Therefore, we get to be Kingdom people because we embody the Kingdom—we are the place where God’s space and humanity’s space overlap.⁵

Now that you have seen Jesus throughout the book of Mark—how He acted, who He interacted with, and what He did to usher in God’s Kingdom—and knowing that you embody God’s Kingdom today, choose three or four words from the list on the next page and describe what it could look like for you to live out that aspect of God’s Kingdom in your personal context. (Feel free to add other Kingdom words to the list.)

⁵“Heaven & Earth Biblical Theme.” *BibleProject*, bibleproject.com/explore/video/heaven-and-earth/. Accessed 18 Feb. 2025.

Love	Grace	Authenticity
Justice	Peace	Community
Mercy	Humility	Inclusion
Kindness	Beauty	Holiness

We don't muster the ability to usher in God's Kingdom on our own. Jesus left us the gift of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 1:8; 2:1-4**).

Acts 1:8

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 2:1-4

1 On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. 2 Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. 3 Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. 4 And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

Reflect: Take time to thank God for His gift and ask the Holy Spirit to continue to empower and fill you completely. You can also ask for the wisdom to see how He is moving in the world and where He is actively empowering others.

We get to rely on the Holy Spirit's power to help us—He gives us the very power of the resurrection (**Romans 8:11**).

11 The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

6

How can this reality give you courage to face each day—the good and the hard?



Discipleship Pathway

Visio Divina

Taken from the “Learning and Belonging” Discipleship Pathway Resource

Visio Divina, holy seeing, is a way to pray using our eyes. For centuries the church has put icons, the cross, stained glass, mosaics, art, and statues in churches as invitations to pray using our eyes.

Time to Practice

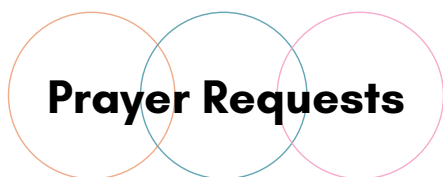
Take some time to look at the piece of art on the next page.

As you do, use the following steps to guide your response:

1. **Be still.** Let your inside noise quiet and put yourself in God’s presence. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you.
2. **Gaze.** Gaze at the image with openness and seek to see with God’s eyes.
3. **Ponder.** Notice what stirs within you. What responses, memories, and feelings does the image evoke? What connection does the image make with your life? Take your time.
4. **Respond to God.** Respond to God about what you are seeing and sensing. Ask Him what He is revealing to you through this experience. Let the image draw you into deeper communion with God throughout your day.



"Women Arriving at the Tomb" by Chinese artist He Qi.



Prayer Requests



Spirit-Empowered Mission

Lesson 6

Mark 16:14-20

“Trying to do the Lord’s work in your own strength is the most confusing, exhausting, and tedious of all work. But when you are filled with the Holy Spirit, then the ministry of Jesus just flows out of you.”
–Corrie ten Boom¹



Read Mark 16:14-20

Read **Mark 16:14-20**.² As you do, consider the following questions:

What do you notice about Jesus from this passage?

How do you see Jesus ushering in the Kingdom of God?

14 Still later he appeared to the eleven disciples as they were eating together. He rebuked them for their stubborn unbelief because they refused to believe those who had seen him after he had been raised from the dead.

15 And then he told them, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone. 16 Anyone who believes and is baptized will

¹Ten Boom, Corrie. *Tramp for the Lord: The Story that Begins Where The Hiding Place Ends*, CLC Publications, 1974. 63

²“Now, if you look in your Bible, you’ll see that the Gospel of Mark has more. It’s a longer ending where Jesus appears and speaks to the disciples, but there’s also a note telling you that this ending is not part of the original manuscripts. It’s possible that the original ending got lost or that Mark never actually finished his account, but it’s most likely that the abrupt ending with the terrified women is intentional to make a point.” Mackie, Timothy P. *Read Scripture: Illustrated Summaries of*

be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned.
17 These miraculous signs will accompany those who believe: They will cast out demons in my name, and they will speak in new languages.
18 They will be able to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won't hurt them. They will be able to place their hands on the sick, and they will be healed."

19 When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, he was taken up into heaven and sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand. 20 And the disciples went everywhere and preached, and the Lord worked through them, confirming what they said by many miraculous signs.

1 Notice how Jesus balances rebuke with empowerment—what does this reveal about His character?

2 What characteristics of the Kingdom of God do you see in Jesus' commission to the disciples? Additionally, use the following verses from the gospel of Matthew as you answer.

Matthew 28:16-20

16 Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!

18 Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Reflect: This commission was spoken directly to the disciples. These words are also meant to be heard and lived by those who follow Jesus in every time and place. Take a moment to read them again. As you do, hear them as being directly spoken to you. Make note of any responses you have to Jesus' powerful words of challenge, empowerment, and commissioning.

Important Note: **Mark 16:18** may be confusing or even upsetting, but it is important to read each passage of Scripture with the whole of Scripture in mind, and to remember that not every verse is prescriptive, some are simply descriptive. Here is one explanation from a Biblical scholar:

"At times God would miraculously intervene on behalf of his followers. While some people have taken the 'picking up snakes' literally, believing that one's faith is demonstrated by handling rattlesnakes, the writer seems to have in mind incidents like the one described in

Acts 28:1-6 where Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake without being harmed. The same could happen for someone who accidentally drank deadly poison. This does not mean, however, that we should test God by putting ourselves in dangerous situations. [See **1 Corinthians 10:9**] ... No, God does not ask us to tempt the laws of nature. God is not a safety net for people who leap off tall buildings. No one should build a religion on a portion of Scripture, not even in the New Testament canon. God calls us to live as new citizens in the eternal kingdom and to witness by word and service to God's love and power. Our witness should center on Jesus..."³

3 It is clear that Jesus does miraculous things through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is also clear that we are meant to do the same. How does this passage from Mark challenge or encourage your view of Spirit-empowered mission? See **Ephesians 1:19-23** below as you answer.

19 I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power 20 that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. 21 Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. 22 God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. 23 And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

4

If you have had a miraculous Kingdom experience, consider sharing it with your group to help build up each other's faith.

In **Mark 4:26-32**, Jesus shared two agricultural parables about the Kingdom of God:

26 Jesus also said, "The Kingdom of God is like a farmer who scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, while he's asleep or awake, the seed sprouts and grows, but he does not understand how it happens. 28 The earth produces the crops on its own. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. 29 And as soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle, for the harvest time has come."

30 Jesus said, "How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story should I use to illustrate it? 31 It is like a mustard seed planted in the ground. It is the smallest of all seeds, 32 but it becomes the largest of all garden plants; it grows long branches, and birds can make nests in its shade."

5

In what ways might these parables have been encouraging to the disciples and others listening?⁴

⁴"God's mysterious power as shown by the seed's growth cycle can be compared to how the gospel works in the hearts of believers and how the Holy Spirit works through each of us. This would have been great encouragement for Mark's readers, who may have compared their small ministry with the power and position of Jerusalem or Rome and become discouraged. But the Holy Spirit works day and night. Sometimes growth is imperceptible. We must stay faithful to God and to his work because his power is working even if we can't always see the results." *Mark, Life Application Bible*

6

Take a look again at **Mark 16:20**. How does this verse demonstrate the ongoing partnership between Jesus and His disciples?

7

In what ways are you currently participating in Jesus' commission?

8

How can we better equip and encourage one another for living out our Spirit-empowered Kingdom mission?



Discipleship Pathway

B.L.E.S.S. Practice

Taken from the “Leading and Serving” Discipleship Pathway resource

Let’s revisit the B.L.E.S.S. Prayer practice from lesson 1 and continue to learn how to practically partner with Jesus to usher in the Kingdom of God each day and in every encounter.



B - Begin with prayer

In the places God has placed you, spend time praying for people by name. Ask God for opportunities to get to know people who don't know Jesus.



L - Listen

Instead of talking, focus on asking questions, listening well, and learning about others’ stories.



E - Eat

Invite those people you have been praying for and listening to, to share a meal or grab a coffee.



S - Serve

As you build relationships, pay attention to any practical needs that come up and offer to help.



S - Share your story

Look for opportunities to share what a difference Jesus has made in your life. Don't feel like you have to tell your life story all at once—think “bite-size” stories.

Time to Practice

B - Begin with prayer

Write down the names of 2 people you are in relationship with who don't know Jesus and start praying for them:

1. _____

2. _____

L - Listen

With the people above in mind, write a couple of questions you could ask them to learn more about their story:

1. _____

2. _____

E - Eat

When in the next few days or weeks can you get something to eat or grab a coffee with one of these people?

S - Serve

As you think about their lives, where have they expressed they are in need? What is something you could do to respond to that need?

S - Share your story

If you get the opportunity to share part of your story, what would you want someone to know about the difference Jesus has made or is currently making in your life?

A Great Next Step

Gifts, Passions, Story (GPS) Assessment

As followers of Jesus, each of us has a unique and significant role to play in seeing God's Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. More specifically, we believe that here at Salem Alliance, each member of our church has a unique and significant role to play in seeing Salem become a city at peace with God.

The GPS assessment is an insightful tool designed to help you discover your unique Kingdom role. It's a free online assessment that explores your gifts, passions, and story and how they intersect to empower you to live on mission.

Time to Practice

1. Complete the GPS Assessment to discover the unique way God has created you.

Scan the QR code or visit

<https://www.salemalliance.org/gifts-passions-story/gps-assessment/>



2. Meet with a GPS coach to further process your results.

Discussing your results with a GPS coach can bring greater awareness and engagement, and help you better discern the ways that God has uniquely created you to serve.

3. Take your next step toward serving.

Based on your Gifts, Passions and Story, what next step is God inviting you to take?

