

## **Study 1: The Beginning (1:1-13)**

**Setting our Compass:** Mark's was almost certainly the first of the gospels to be written. It carries the hallmarks of a first-hand account, probably based on Peter's experiences of Jesus. The gospel bustles with life and action, and concentrates on story-telling. If you were a newspaper editor and the story of Jesus 'broke' as news, what headline would you write?

**Studying the Route** Read Mark 1:1-13

- In the text, who is being prepared? For what?
- Who is doing the preparing and what different forms does it take?
- Re-read the first verse. What strikes you about it?

### **In Step with Jesus**

- In what ways does the passage prepare us for what Mark's gospel has in store for us?
- How might we be tempted during the study ahead? What will keep us on track?
- How might we be blessed and renewed by Mark's gospel? Share your hopes for the series.

### **Prayer Points**

- Pray that the Spirit will prepare our hearts and minds for our study of Mark through to Easter next year. Pray that He will make us ready to receive the good news afresh and with new purpose,
- Pray for each other and all other groups that we might be drawn into deeper and closer relationships with Jesus through this time.

## **Study 2: Fame and Secrecy (Mark 1:29-45)**

- **Setting our Compass:** What's the best bit of news that you have had to share? What would it have felt like to keep it secret?

In this passage we are at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. The disciples have just been called and Galilee is abuzz with a recent healing (1:27-28). We find out more about how Jesus will react and what this reveals about his identity and mission.

### **Studying the Route**    Read Mark 1:29-45

- List occasions in the passage when Jesus draws attention to himself. Then list occasions when he seeks to limit what people discover about him.
- What are his motivations in both cases? (Think of both the explicit as well as the more implicit).
- What do we find out about Jesus as a result, both in terms of who he is and what he has come to do?

### **In Step with Jesus**

- In following Jesus, when do you find it helpful to remember Jesus' humanity? When do you find it helpful to remember his divine power?
- What is your experience of solitary prayer? How could we emulate his actions in verse 35?
- Should we keep Jesus a secret? if not, why not?

### **Prayer Points**

- Spend 5-10 minutes in silence as a group waiting on God
- Pray to be aware of Jesus' compassion on you and others in need – mention them by name
- Pray to know Jesus' divine power at work in your life and others on your heart

### **Study 3: Sins forgiven (2:1-12)**

**Setting our Compass:** What have we already learnt about Jesus' authority from Chapter 1? Brainstorm as a group.

In today's passage we learn something further about him, and it's an important milestone in the revelation of Jesus' identity and purpose.

**Studying the Route** Read Mark 2:1-12

- How would you describe the faith of the paralytic man and his friends?
- Why does Jesus respond as he does?
- What do we learn about Jesus in this story? What is the purpose of his miracles?

#### **In Step with Jesus**

- What were your motives in first coming to Jesus? When did you discover your greatest need?
- How could you bring others to him? What needs do people you know think they have, that might allow you to do this?

#### **Prayer Points**

- Pray about things that are causing us anxiety or pain. Seek his comfort that our greatest need will be met, and our suffering will be put in perspective as part of a greater story.
- Pray for opportunities to reveal Jesus as the one who meets our needs.

## **Study 4: Parables of growth (4:1-34)**

**Setting our Compass:** In Chapters 2 and 3, Jesus has taught about his authority in relation to forgiveness, fasting, the Sabbath, Satan and his earthly family. In Chapter 4, he changes focus and starts teaching about the sowing of the word of God and the growth of the kingdom.

**Studying the Route** Read Mark 4:1-34

- Why do you think Jesus uses parables so frequently?
- On the basis of the Parable of the Sower, how would you describe the attitude required to reach maturity as a Christian?
- In the following group of parables, Jesus makes assertions about the kingdom of God. List everything that Jesus states as certainties (from vs 21-34). What does this tell us about the kingdom?

### **In Step with Jesus**

- Thinking of your own faith, which of the soil conditions in the Parable of the Sower is most like yours? Which might it be in danger of becoming?
- In faith terms, how could you become more 'fertile ground'? What steps would be necessary?
- How should the parables of the lamp, growing seed and mustard seed encourage us in spreading the word to others?

### **Prayer Points**

- Pray that God would expose the true condition of our hearts and show us he wants us to change.
- Pray that God would build your own confidence and expectation that he can use you to grow his kingdom.

## **Study 5: A Man Restored (5:1-20)**

### **Setting our Compass**

The region of the Gerasenes was Gentile territory; the city of Gerasa was one of the ten cities of the Decapolis, under the Roman rule of Philip. Situated on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, it was a part of the lakeside where there were many caves in the limestone rock where people were buried. This is a vivid and rather eerie story, probably taking place in the shadows of late evening (see Mark 4:35-5:1). In restoring the demon-possessed man, we find Jesus breaking down barriers that separate Jews from Gentiles, clean from unclean.

### **Studying the Route**

- Jesus has just demonstrated his mastery over the chaos of the storm (Mk 4:35-41). In what ways did this demon-possessed man typify chaos, 'uncleanness' and exclusion? Can you think of modern-day equivalents?
- How does Jesus demonstrate his mastery in this story?
- Why do you think that the people from the town begged Jesus to leave their region (v17)?

### **In Step with Jesus**

- When the man was healed, he did not return to take up life as usual, but instead had a new mission. What was it? What speaks to us personally about God's healing from this?
- It has been said that Christ 'comforts the disturbed, and disturbs the comfortable'. Is that your experience? In what ways might we feel tempted to keep Jesus at a distance, like the people in v17? How can we avoid that?

### **Prayer Points**

- Give thanks that God's healing power can overcome the worst evils in human experience. Pray for those known to you who are struggling, excluded or 'on the edges' of society.

**Study 6: Jesus in Control (6:30-56)**

**Setting our Compass:** When do you feel most in control? Perhaps in driving a car, deciding how to spend money, or in influencing others. Do you relish control or avoid it?

**Studying the Route** Read Mark 6:30-56

- What adjectives best describe the behaviour of the disciples and the crowd?
- Aside from his performance of miracles, what characteristics of Jesus does the passage highlight?
- In what ways does Jesus demonstrate a divine command over events and people? What is the impact on others?

**In Step with Jesus**

- How important to us is 'being in control'? In which areas of life is it most important to us?
- Think of an area of life where we have tried to cede control to Jesus? Share your experience. What has been the result? What did you learn?
- What gives us confidence in Jesus's care for us, and that he holds us in safe arms?

**Prayer Points**

- Pray that we will let Jesus take over the controls of our lives. For trust, reassurance, openness and faith.
- Pray for his grace at times when we don't want to let go of the controls.
- Pray with thankful hearts for those times when his control has saved us.
- Pray for someone else who Jesus can help.

## **Study 7: The Outsiders (7:24-37)**

**Setting our Compass** Have you ever felt an outsider? Maybe in a foreign country, in a new job, or when joining a group of people who know each other very well. Share your experiences. How did it feel? What made you feel isolated and what helped to make you feel included?

### **Studying the Route**

- When talking to the Greek woman, to whom was Jesus referring to when he talked about the 'children' and the 'dogs' in v 27? Why did he stress that the children should be fed first?
- Does this story make you feel uncomfortable? Why?
- Compare the way that Jesus dealt with the Greek woman with his encounter with the deaf Gentile man. What comes over in Jesus' attitude to the deaf man?

### **In Step with Jesus**

- Jesus concedes a point to the Greek woman in their discussion (v29); what does this tell us about him?
- What groups of people might be a modern-day equivalent of the "Gentiles" for us? How do these two stories challenge us to examine how we treat them?
- No-one could stop the people from talking about Jesus' healing power. What motivates us the most to speak of our faith to others? What makes us most grateful to God?

### **Prayer Points**

- Spend some time praising God and thank him for something specific that has happened today, be it big or small
- Pray into those situations where you have may been challenged about your attitude to 'outsiders'

## **Study 8: The Christ (Mark 8:22 – 30)**

### **Setting our Compass**

- identify a turning point in your life. What made it so crucial?

This passage is in the middle of Mark's gospel, and it is also a turning point in his story. Jesus has been continuing his ministry in Galilee and beyond, but there is a big turn ahead. As it is about to take place, we are encouraged to see more clearly than ever before who Jesus really is.

### **Studying the Route** – read Mark 8:22-30

- Why do you think Jesus asks his disciples what others think of him? (vv27-28)
- What did Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ (v29) mean in First Century Palestine? Think of it particularly from the perspective of the Jewish people as well as that of the Roman authorities.
- Why do you think Jesus follows this up with a command to be silent? (v30)

### **In Step with Jesus**

- 'Who do you think Jesus is?' – what different answers might we expect to hear today to that question? Think as widely as you can and note them down on a piece of paper, collect and discuss.
- Which of these answers are consistent with following Jesus? What makes some easy to live out and others difficult, and why?
- What is the value of keeping a clear picture of who Jesus is? What can make it tough to do so and how might we overcome this?

## Prayer Points

- Reflect on the first half of Mark's gospel. What have been the passages that have spoken to you most? Why?
- Use the Jesus Prayer meditation on your own or as a group – for instructions see <http://www.orthodoxprayer.org/Jesus%20Prayer.html>
- Pray for someone who does not have a full picture of who Jesus is