

The text 'GO TIME' is rendered in a bold, 3D, metallic silver font. The letters are thick and have a slight shadow, giving them a three-dimensional appearance. The background is a dark blue gradient with large, overlapping geometric shapes in shades of blue and purple, creating a modern, tech-like aesthetic.

GO TIME

Mark 1–8
Study Guide

MARK 1

// WEEK ONE

MONDAY

// Mark 1:1-11

The 54th Massachusetts Infantry was only the second African-American regiment to fight in the Civil War. They took part in one of the most famous episodes of the war, the frontal assault against Fort Wagner, along the coast of Charleston, South Carolina.

Of the 600 men, almost half of them were killed, wounded, or captured. Although they were not able to capture the fort, their sacrifice inspired greater enlistment and mobilization of African-American troops. Laying down their lives prepared the way for more all-black soldiers, one of the keys to President Abraham Lincoln securing victory over the South. Their sacrifice prepared the way for a future victory.

John the Baptist lived a sacrificial life to prepare the way for the victorious Savior. John the Baptist knew his calling... “Prepare the way of the Lord.” He may not have had the best taste in clothing (robe made of camel’s hair and a leather belt) or taste in food (locusts), but he had a great mission for his life. He lived to make much of Jesus!

In a world that promotes self, John the Baptist stands out to us. He may have been a different kind of dude, but he was a good different too. As he himself put it, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.” True humility is a rare trait these days. Humility literally means “lowly.” It doesn’t

mean having an unhealthy view of yourself. C.S. Lewis described it well, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less.” It’s living in an other-centric way.

That described John the Baptist. He lived low! He lived under God’s authority, seeking to prepare the way for Jesus. He poured out his life for others, that they might know him. Can the same thing be said of us? Do we live to prepare the way for the Lord in people’s lives? How are we making much of Jesus in our lives with those around us?

Take time to pray about ways to be more intentional in “preparing the way of the Lord” with those around you. Pray specifically for one person in your life who needs Jesus.

TUESDAY

// Mark 1:12-13 & Matthew 4:1-11

In the 1970’s a research team from Stanford University performed a group experiment called the “marshmallow test.” They placed kids in a room with a bag of marshmallows and a researcher asked questions and had them do a series of tasks. If they did well, they got marshmallows. The researcher would then leave the room. And on the way out would say, “I’m leaving a marshmallow on the table. If you don’t eat the marshmallow while I’m gone, I’ll give you two of them when I get back. But if you eat it, it’s the only one you’re going to get.”

The responses of the kids, trying to overcome the temptation to eat the marshmallow was precious. They would sing songs, sit on their hands or get as close to the marshmallow as possible without touching it. Or they'd sniff at it. Some of the kids resisted the temptation and some gave in.

Now here's what's fascinating about the experiment. They continued to monitor the kids well into their adult lives. And the kids that resisted the temptation to eat the marshmallows ended up more likely to graduate from college and having successful careers than the kids that gave into the temptation of eating the marshmallows.

There's a lesson in this experiment for us as Christ followers. We can give into temptation to experience short-term pleasures, but it will be at the expense of long-term spiritual success. Satan knew what Jesus came to do. He thought he could get Jesus to give into the temptation of pleasure (turning stone to bread), pride (jumping from the temple), and materialism (accepting the kingdom/glory).

1 John 2:15–17 says, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

With Jesus in the wilderness, Satan was appealing to the temptations we all face in life: desires of the flesh (pleasure), desires of the eyes (materialism), and the pride of life (pride). 1 John 2:17 says that “whoever does the will of God abides forever.” Jesus, who in human form was still a perfect God, never sacrificed short-term pleasure for the eternal purposes of God.

What about us? Will we live for the temporary pleasures of the world or for the eternal purposes of God? This side of heaven, we won't always get that question right, but aren't you thankful for the cross and the resurrection? His grace abounds farther than our sin. And His power is stronger than our temptation. In the moment of temptation remember the long-term impact if we resist. And in that moment, fight back with Scripture like Jesus did. And ask God for the power and strength to resist.

Write on a piece of paper... desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, and pride of life. Under each, write one specific way you are tempted in that area. Keep the paper with you and take time each day asking for the strength to resist the temptations. Perhaps ask a friend or mentor to pray over the list with you.

WEDNESDAY

// Mark 1:14–20

The story is told of a time Alexander the Great and a small company of soldiers approached a strongly fortified walled city. Alexander demanded to see the king. When the king arrived, Alexander ordered him to surrender. The king laughed, “Why should I surrender to you? Our city is fortified.”

But Alexander the Great offered to give the king a demonstration. He ordered his men to line up single file and start marching. He marched them straight toward a cliff. The townspeople watched in shocked silence as, one by one, his soldiers marched without hesitation, right off the cliff to their deaths. After 10 soldiers died, Alexander ordered the rest of the soldiers to return to his side.

The king immediately surrendered to Alexander the Great. He realized that if a few men were actually willing to die at the command of this leader, then nothing could stop his eventual victory. Alexander had the total and complete surrender of his troops to his will. Can the same be said by us as followers of Christ?

The call of Christ can only be accepted with no compromise or conditions. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, and then James and John, it was actually the second invitation from Jesus. The first came in John 1. At that time they did not choose to follow Jesus completely. The second time, in Mark 1, they did so, even at

the expense of their greatest financial success.

Matthew’s account of this story records that they caught so much fish with Jesus that their nets broke. But it was at that moment they realized what could compare to a life fully surrendered to Jesus? What amount of earthly riches could compare to a joy-filled, eternally impacting life following after Jesus? It seems so counterintuitive, or should we say counter-cultural. The culture says life is what you accumulate. But Jesus says, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Matthew 10:39)

In surrender, our lives are saved. In losing our lives, a life in Jesus is found. Are we following Jesus without compromise or conditions? The promise, in Mark 1:17, is that He “will make you become fishers of men.” Surrender all and He will make something of our lives. He will use us to impact the lives of those around us.

Take time to ask God to search your heart and help you see if there are still areas in your life that you have not surrendered over to Jesus. It could be a relationship, a career, or an area of sin. Confess it and surrender it to Jesus today.

THURSDAY

// Mark 1:21–28, 40–45

Something that fascinates both believers and unbelievers are the faith healers you see on TV. Some believe,

some are skeptical. The reason there is skepticism by some is because of the accounts of “healers” who have had people in the crowd pretending to be healed. And for some, the skepticism has come from the outrageous amount of money these “healers” are making, and lifestyles that include numerous million dollar homes and private jets. At the very least, the appearance is that the healings and/or miracles (real or faked) are done for personal gain.

Whatever you may believe about these faith healers, there is no doubt that Jesus performed miracles and healings. And there is no doubt that they were not done for personal gain but for the good of others and the glory of God’s name. Whether it was the man who had a demon cast out of him or the man who was healed of leprosy, their lives were forever transformed.

Jesus is still in the miracle-working, healing business. As Mark 1 reminds us, He has authority over demons. There is no sickness, no spirit that can compete with the resurrection power of Jesus. Satan would soon see that, three years after these events, when Jesus conquered the grave!

It might not be an evil spirit in us or leprosy on our body, but each of us still need the healing touch of the Savior. Perhaps it’s a miracle for a marriage on life support, victory over an addiction, freedom from unhealthy thoughts, or healing over sickness. The same Savior we read about in Mark 1 is the same Savior at work today. Do you believe?

Jesus does the work, our job is to pray and believe. And when God shows up and does His thing, we can “spread the news” (v. 45). What better witness can we be for the Savior than to simply share what great things God has done in our lives. And then step back and see what He does in the lives of those we tell!

What miracle or healing do you need to see in your life or in the life of someone you love? Pray by faith today. And who is someone who needs to hear about the resurrection power of Jesus? Pray for the opportunity to tell them.

FRIDAY

// Mark 1:29–39

Loneliness and aloneness are not necessarily the same thing. God doesn’t want us lonely but there are times He want us alone. We live in a 24/7 world, don’t we? It wasn’t that long ago, news was at 6 and 11pm. Now it’s 24/7. We are constantly bombarded with news and ads and activity. Go, go, go. That’s the story of our day. But why not write a new narrative.

God says, “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). How can we really get to know God and have a clear sense of direction for our lives when life is too loud to hear Him. We talk a lot about the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, and serving. But what about the forgotten discipline of solitude, or aloneness. Alone with God, that is.

There were curious set of believers at the end of the second century known as the “Desert Fathers.” These men left everything behind to live alone with God in the desert lands of the Middle East. Solitude with Jesus became their daily way of life. Perhaps a bit extreme, but there are lessons we can learn from them, and more importantly, from Jesus.

Before Jesus began His public ministry, He spent time in the desert. On a regular basis, not just here in Mark 1, Jesus would withdraw from people to be alone with the Father. Verse 35 says He “went out to a desolate place.” The disciples were shocked because they had lots of people they were ministering to. But Jesus understood that it’s not people’s demands, but God’ wishes, that dictate the priorities of our lives.

When the disciples found Him after His alone time with God, He gave them very clear direction of what they needed to do and where to do it. It’s also true for us. Making it a priority to get away regularly with the Father will help clear up confusion of purpose and priorities. We will hear clearer the “gentle whisper of God,” like Elijah did in the desert (1 Kings 19). Where’s a “desert” you can go to be alone with the Father?

Find a quiet, solitude place today. And spend some significant time in silence. Don't be quick to talk. Sit and listen to the Spirit today. Process what you hear from Him and pray for understanding.

MARK 2

// WEEK TWO

MONDAY

// Mark 2:1-5

There are many inspiring true stories of commitment to Christ from the mission field. A well known story is of the five missionaries who tried to bring the gospel to the Huaorani people in the rain forest of Ecuador. After two months of contact with them, on January 8, 1956, they met on a sandbar along the Curary River to share Jesus. Instead, all five missionaries—Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Ed McCully, Peter Fleming, and Roger Youderian—were attacked and speared to death by the Huaorani warriors.

The news of their death was broadcast around the world, and Life magazine covered the event. The deaths of these men galvanized the missionary effort in the United States, leading to an outpouring of funding for evangelism around the world. While this story still inspires today, perhaps the lesser known part of the story is the real inspiration. It's the story of Nate Saint's sister, Rachel Saint, who also was serving as a missionary in Ecuador.

To people's utter surprise, and criticism from some, she refused to leave the mission and continued to reach the Huaorani people with the gospel. She eventually lived among them, and many in the village gave their lives to Christ, including some of the men who had killed her brother and the other four missionaries. One of the killers that day in January was Mincaye. He became a follower of Christ and would eventually "adopt" Steve, the son of Nate Saint.

Rachel Saint never married, instead she gave her entire life to loving and serving the very people who killed her brother. She spent over 30 years with them until she succumbed to cancer in 1994. Many years after her brother's death, Rachel fulfilled the missionaries' dream of establishing a Christian community among the unreached people of the Amazon rain forest.

Her life begs the question: How far would we go to bring the hope and healing of Jesus to people? In today's passage, we see four friends who were going to do whatever it took for their paralytic buddy to find the hope and healing of Jesus. And their commitment did not go unnoticed with Jesus. In v. 5 it says, "And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'"

What an incredible story. Jesus doesn't just heal him, He restores his very soul! And part of the motivation was the faith of the friends. Who in our lives need the hope and healing of Jesus? How far are we willing to go to bring them to Jesus?

Spend time asking God what sacrifices need to be made to help bring people in your life to Jesus. Has God put one particular person on your heart? Pray specifically for that person this week.

TUESDAY

// Mark 2:6-12

Many people believe that all the religions basically believe the same thing. But is that true? Perhaps the most important religious question, the one with eternal consequences, is this... Who is Jesus? Do all religions believe the same thing about salvation? Perhaps an illustration will help.

A man fell into a hole. He fell into a hole and couldn't get out. A traveler passed by and told the man to meditate, to purify his mind, and when he reached nirvana, all suffering would cease. The man did as he was told, but he remained in the hole. Another man appeared and explained that the hole didn't exist, neither in fact did the man; it was all an illusion. The man who did not exist was still stuck in the hole that was not there.

Another visitor arrived and he instructed the man in the hole to perform good deeds to improve his karma. And though he'd still die in the hole, he might be reincarnated into something magnificent. Another man looked down from above and he taught the man to pray five times a day facing East and to follow five important tenants. If he was faithful, one day perhaps, the divine would set him free. The man prayed as best he could but was losing strength, and in the hole he remained.

Another man appeared. There was something different about him. He called down to the man in the hole and asked him if he wanted to be free. This man lowered himself

into the pit, took hold of the man, and brought him out of the pit and into the light. And the man in the hole who couldn't get himself out of the pit, was saved. What separates Christianity from all other religions is that we believe it's what Jesus has DONE not what we DO that brings salvation.

What infuriated the religious leaders was not that Jesus healed, but that He forgave the man's sin. Why? Because only God can forgive. And that was Jesus' point. He wasn't just a good man that did good things for others. He was God, and therefore could forgive a man's sin. Most other religions teach that Jesus is a good man, a teacher, even a prophet. But salvation is only available to those who believe He is God.

And most religions teach what man must do for salvation. But Jesus makes it clear, it's only what He has done that can forgive a man of his sins and give to him salvation. God never provided multiple paths. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) So what about you... Who is Jesus?

Read the following Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 5:17-19 and Ephesians 2:1-10. Afterwards, take time thanking God for your salvation through Jesus.

WEDNESDAY

// Mark 2:13-17

According to the book “The Life of Francis of Assisi,” Francis once invited a young minister to join him on a trip to town to preach. All day long he and Francis walked through the streets, alleys, and suburbs. They rubbed shoulders with hundreds of people. Not once did they share the gospel to the crowds.

As the young man walked home with Francis Assisi, he said to Francis with a sense of disappointment, “I thought we were going into town to preach the gospel.” Francis responded, “My son, we have preached. We were preaching while we were walking. We were preaching as people watched our behavior and interaction with others. It is of no use to walk anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere as we walk.”

What a great reminder that how we live our daily lives around others is the most powerful witness we will have with those who need Jesus. Every day is an opportunity with the people who cross our path to show and share the gospel. It’s not inside the walls of the church, but outside the walls, that are the greatest opportunities to share Jesus with others.

In fact, the gospels record 132 contacts that Jesus had with people. Six were in the Temple, four in the synagogues and 122 were out with people in the mainstream of life. Today’s passage is a reminder that Jesus didn’t come to just hang out with religious people, He came for

“those who are sick” (v. 17). And a lot of spiritually sick people won’t enter the doors of a church. We can’t expect them to come to us; we need to go to them.

Of course, we need to find balance. Time with fellow believers is very important. Scriptures teaches so... “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together...” (Hebrews 10:24-25a). Do you have balance in your life? Time with believers and intentional time with those who do not yet believe in Jesus? If not, our lives will drift towards the Pharisaical life, and we’ll forget why Jesus ate “with tax collectors and sinners” (v. 16).

List five people (or groups of people) that you see on a weekly basis. Which ones don’t know Jesus as Lord and Savior? Take time praying for the opportunity to share the gospel with them. Pray that they would give their lives to Christ.

THURSDAY

// Mark 2:18-22

Maybe you’ve heard it said, “Keep up with the times.” How many dads have heard those words spoken from their exasperated teenager? “Dad, nobody wears that anymore.” Daaaad, don’t be so old-fashioned.” Life is full of change, but for some it’s not always easy to stay up or catch up.

That certainly was the case for John’s disciples and the Pharisees in vs. 18-22. They seemed to be behind when

it came to spiritual fasting. Fasting in the Old Covenant (the Law) was different than fasting in the New Covenant (the age of grace). Fasting was a big deal in the Bible. In fact, it's mentioned 77 times. But the vast majority of the time, it was in the Old Testament.

Under the Law of the Old Covenant, fasting was a requirement once a year and people would wail in sackcloth and ashes to demonstrate repentance from sin. It was a reminder that they were looking for the future restoration of a coming Messiah. But for New Covenant Christians, Jesus had already come.

That's what Jesus was getting at when He talked about not sewing unshrunk cloth on old garments or pouring new wine into old wineskins. These metaphors were reminding them (and us) that you can't mix the Law with grace. Under the New Covenant, we feast instead of fast, because the presence of Christ and the work of Christ, which covers past, present and future sins! Fasting is no longer a requirement.

But some might say, "But Jesus said that when the Groom (which is Jesus) is taken away they will fast." That's true, but "that day," mentioned in v. 20, was most likely referring to when Jesus died until Pentecost (Acts 1), when the Holy Spirit would come and indwell the disciples. It was fitting to fast since it was a period without the constant presence of Christ. It wasn't intended for believers today who have the presence of "The Groom" through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

But that doesn't mean there isn't value in fasting as New Covenant Christians. Fasting is an act of longing and desire for a fuller sense of God's power and presence. Even though we have the "Spirit of Christ" (Romans 8:9) in us, there are times we struggle with feeling His presence. Those would be good times to consider a spiritual fast. In the book of Acts it seemed that the early church would fast when they needed God's presence in determining a course of action to take. Another good time to consider a fast.

As New Covenant Christians, our lives should be marked by the joy of feasting, not fasting. But there are appropriate times that fasting is a spiritual discipline that can help us sense His presence, power and direction in greater ways. Are you in a season of feasting? If not, because of spiritual dryness or confusion of direction, consider seeking God through a fast so that your life can return to feasting!

Consider a one meal or full day fast from food and/or something in your life (TV, computer, etc). Take that time for a little extra time reading the Word and seeking His face in prayer and praises.

FRIDAY

// Mark 2:23–28

In 1959, the legendary Vince Lombardi, was hired to be the coach of the Green Bay Packers with the task of turning around a losing franchise. After yet another miserable showing, the players gathered in the locker room in silence waiting for Lombardi to enter and give them a verbal beating. But instead, he entered and stood there in silence.

After a few agonizing moments, he then lifted the football into the air and broke the silence with one of the most remembered quotes in NFL history, “Gentlemen, this is a football.” He then proceeded to explain the boundaries of a football field, the goal line, how to put the ball across the goal line, etc.

Those five words, “Gentlemen, this is a football,” would mark Lombardi’s legacy. He would time and time again take his team back to the basics. He would remind them why they were doing what they were doing. And boy did it work. Lombardi led the Packers to five championships in just seven years.

When you look at the life of Jesus in the gospels, so many times He would take people back to the basics. He would remind them why they were suppose to be doing what they were doing. An example of this is from today’s passage... the Sabbath. You could almost hear Jesus say, “Gentlemen, this is a Sabbath.”

In v. 27, He clearly told them what the point of the Sabbath was... “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” The Pharisees had added so many rules and regulations to the Sabbath day, that the people were living in fear of violated it. In fact, they made it illegal to spit on the Sabbath. Why? Because if someone spit and then stepped on the spit and it became mud in the dirt, it was considered cultivating the land, and that was work.

Yikes! You can see why Jesus wasn’t too happy with these religious leaders. Jesus was saying to them that the point of the Sabbath isn’t to bring GRIEF to the people, it was intended to be a GIFT. God created it in Genesis, when He rested on the seventh day. He didn’t need a rest but He knew we would. It was, and remains, a day to rest and relax and worship God.

As New Covenant Christians, there’s freedom in how we observe this. We are not bound by the Old Covenant, but this is a rhythm of life God desired for us so that we would not burn out nor forget to take time to remember who the giver of life and the giver of gifts is. Take time to receive God’s gift to you this week... take a Sabbath.

Try to find a full day this week or next to take a full day of rest and relaxation. Figure out some ways to have one on one worship time with God. Or plan a day to do so with your family.

MARK 3

// WEEK THREE

MONDAY

// Mark 3:1-6

Have you ever heard the expression “face the music”? Here’s how that phrase came about.

Many years ago, a man wanted to play in the Imperial Orchestra, but he couldn’t play a note. He was a person of great wealth and influence and demanded to be allowed to join the orchestra so that he could perform in front of the king. The conductor agreed.

He was given a flute, and when a concert would begin, he would raise his instrument, pucker his lips, and move his fingers. He went through all the motions of playing, but he never made a sound.

This deception went on for two years. Then one day a new conductor took over the Imperial Orchestra. He told the orchestra that he wanted to personally audition all the players to see how well they could play.

One by one the players performed in his presence. Frantic with worry when it was his turn, the phony flutist pretended to be sick. The doctor who was ordered to examine him, however, declared that he was healthy. The conductor insisted that the man appear and demonstrate his skill.

Ashamed, the man had to confess that he was a fake. That was the day he had to “face the music.”

In today’s passage, you have Jewish religious leaders who had to “face

the music” with Jesus. He asked a question they could not—or at least would not—answer. To do so would have exposed the motives of their hearts. Motives matter! It’s not just about obeying rules and regulations. If so, the Pharisees would have been accepted by Jesus.

While they looked spiritual on the outside, the reality was that they had a “hardness of heart” (v. 5) that grieved the heart of Jesus. They tried to use God’s law to shame others and elevate themselves. Unfortunately, that can still happen today within the Christian community. Many have left the church due to feelings of condemnation.

What did Jesus say? The law, in this case the Sabbath, is “to do good” not “to do harm,” to “save life” not “to kill” (v. 4). This is not to say that our actions don’t matter. God’s Word should be obeyed. But our attitude matters, not just our actions. The Savior came to save. Our hearts need to turn to Him so that we can live lives of obedience.

Motives matter. Do we need to check our attitude today? Is God’s Word used to grow our faith and the faith of others, or are we using it to build ourselves up and tear others down?

Take time today to read Psalm 139:23-24 and use it as a prayer to God today. Listen throughout the day for how He may be wanting to answer that question in your life.

TUESDAY

// Mark 3:7-12

Muhammad Ali was probably the most famous boxer of all-time. He was known as much for his words as for his boxing. Here's a few of them. "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee." "It's not bragging if you can back it up." And of course, "I am the greatest." Ali did not struggle with self-confidence! But could he back up his words?

Yes he could. Muhammad Ali will go down as the greatest, or one of the greatest, heavyweight boxers of all time. He was able to back up the claims that he made about himself. But being the greatest of all time goes to only one person who walked this planet... Jesus Christ. He claimed to be God. And He backed it up with His life and with His power.

He has never lost a fight. In the passage today, He defeated disease and He had authority over the evil spirits. Why? Because, as even the evil spirits had to admit, He is "the Son of God" (v. 11). He has an undefeated record against Satan.

In the Garden after sin entered the world, God was already working His redemption plan, and states in Genesis 3:15 that "He (referring to Jesus) shall bruise your head (referring to Satan), and you shall bruise His heel." In other words, "Satan, you may strike His heel (referring to Satan's part in Jesus's crucifixion), but He will beat the count and rise from the dead and will ultimately strike the deathblow to your head."

Satan tried to kill Jesus at the MAN-

GER (according to Revelation 12) by inspiring King Herod to kill all the Jewish newborns under the age of 2, but Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus escaped. Even as a baby, Jesus won. In the WILDERNESS, when Jesus had fasted 40 days and night, and was humanly weak, He still resisted Satan's temptations and won those rounds as well.

And of course, Jesus even won at the CROSS. Rising from death, and wiping that wicked smile off of Satan's face. Paul summarizes it in 1 Corinthians 15:55: "Oh death, where is your victory? Oh death, where is your sting?." And you know what? Jesus still isn't done whupping on Satan. He will whip him one last time at the END OF DAYS. Revelation 20:10 says, "and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

So what does it all mean for us? It means we have a Savior we can run to. A Savior who will fight our battles. It means we have nothing to fear, because no obstacle is bigger than our God. It means we cast all our worries on to His powerful "shoulders" and let Him carry them for us. He's the greatest. As John 4:4 says, "... for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

Write down three things that are causing worry or fear in your life. Picture Jesus with His hands raised in victory. Raise your hands in victory. Now pray to God for those three things you wrote down.

WEDNESDAY

// Mark 3:13-21

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur, there was a once a crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves, they went out day or night tirelessly searching for the lost.

Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station, so that it became famous. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding areas, wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews were trained. The little life-saving station grew.

Some of the new members of the life-saving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and so poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. So they replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in an enlarged building.

Now the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they re-decorated it beautifully and furnished it as a sort of club. Less of the members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions, so they hired life boat crews to do this work. The mission of life-saving was still given lip-service

but most were too busy or lacked the necessary commitment to take part in the life-saving activities personally.

About this time, a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boat loads of cold, wet, and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick, and some of them had black skin, and some spoke a strange language, and the beautiful new club was considerably messed up. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where shipwreck victims could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal life pattern of the club. But some members insisted that life-saving was their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a life-saving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the life of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own life-saving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. They evolved into a club and yet another life-saving station was founded. If you visit the seacoast today you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, only now most of the people drown.

In these verses we see Jesus call the apostles. Verse 14 shares the reason why, “so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach.” He called them to be in relationship with Him and also to then go out and help others discover Him. In fact, the word apostle means “sent forth.” You and I have been called to be with Jesus and to go out. Both are important. Otherwise, our church will go from being a life-saving station to just a social club. And that’s not what Jesus gave His life for.

Take time to pray today for balance in your relationships. A balance of time with Christians and with non-Christians. If you know some missionaries, take time to pray for them today as well.

THURSDAY

// Mark 3:22–30

It’s probably not a nice thing to say to someone, but there’s a saying you might have heard before... “You can’t fix stupid.” It’s an expression used when someone says or does something really dumb. It seemed to be a regular occurrence with the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. Despite miracle after miracle, they refused to acknowledge who He was.

Take today’s passage for instance. The religious leaders accuse Jesus of casting out demons because He was demon-possessed. Let that one soak in for a moment. Does that make any sense at all? Yep, sometimes “You can’t fix stupid.” Well, Jesus could, but the leaders weren’t willing. Jesus

breaks it down for them, “How can Satan cast out Satan?” And then he uses the examples of a kingdom and house divided against itself.

These teachings are pretty clear and simple to understand. But then we get to vs. 28–30. Not quite so clear and simple to understand. There have been debates for years on the meaning of these verses. Is Jesus teaching that there is such a thing as an “unpardonable sin”? And how does that match with Scriptures teaching that the death of Jesus can cover all of our sins?

Colossians 2:13–15 says... “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”

These verses tell us that every single sin is forgiven at the cross and the power over sin possible because Jesus disarmed Satan’s authority in our lives. Great news, right? Then what’s the deal with what Jesus said in Mark 3. It seems a contradiction. Sin that’s unforgivable? Specifically, Jesus says it’s when someone “blasphemes against the Holy Spirit.”

Blaspheming the Holy Spirit certainly is a grievous sin. But a person can’t be forgiven even if they repent? And why is it the Holy Spirit only, not the Heavenly Father or Jesus? Keeping

it in context helps give us some answers. The religious leaders were accusing Jesus' healings and miracles of being the work of Satan instead of the work of the Spirit. To do so was blasphemous of the Holy Spirit. And this is important... In doing so, it was a denial of the divinity of Jesus.

They were denying that Jesus is God by refusing to believe His works were done through the Holy Spirit under the authority of the Father. So in reality, they were denying the Trinity. God can forgive ALL sin. But as long as a person denies who God is, specifically, that Jesus is Lord, sins will remain unforgiven. There are not many paths to God, many ways to be forgiven... there's only one. It's through the Person of Jesus Christ, as a result of His work, His death and resurrection. All that to say, the unpardonable sin is unbelief in who Jesus is and what He's done.

Who are people in your life who do not believe that Jesus is God and the only way to salvation? Take some time to pray that they would come to believe. And take some time to thank God for the forgiveness He's provided through the work of Jesus Christ.

FRIDAY

// Mark 3:31-35

Not only was Hall of Fame catcher Yogi Berra one of the all time greats, he was also a man known for his curious sayings. Here's a few of them... "I never said most of the things I said." "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." "Baseball is 90% mental and the other half is physical." "Never answer an anonymous letter." Of course, what made his sayings memorable was that they didn't really make sense.

There were times in the gospels when Jesus' sayings didn't seem to make sense. Today's passage would certainly be an example of that. Jesus talked about the importance of loving people. And who should we love more than our family? And yet, when people told Jesus that His mother and brothers were looking for Him, He states that it's actually the crowd listening to Him that were His mothers and brothers. Seems to be a little disrespectful.

Now, whenever we come to a difficult to understand passage, we need to compare Scripture with Scripture. And when we do so, we see how He lovingly treated His mother, Mary. Even on the cross, He was taking care of her. While dying an agonizing death on the cross, He took the time to tell John to take care of her when He was gone. And yet you see these other curious sayings from Jesus.

In Matthew 10:34-35 Jesus says: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to

bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” And in Luke 14:26: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

What in the world is going on? It was Jesus using hyperbole (exaggeration for affect). He wasn't saying to truly hate them or to use a sword against them. A sword divided. Jesus is saying, “Who's side are you ultimately on?” Specifically if your family does not believe or follow Jesus. Of course, we still love them but where does our ultimate ALLEGIANCE lay? We aren't to hate our family, as we understand the word, it's the idea of “loving less.” Our love for the Savior supersedes our love for family.

Can we honestly say that? Is Jesus our first love? If we had to choose our allegiance, would it be Jesus, even at the expense of family? We need to love our family who don't yet know Christ. But we can't compromise our commitment to Christ and the kingdom when our family disagrees or tries to stop us.

The great news we discover in the gospels is that eventually Jesus' family would come to believe that He was indeed God. What about the family we have who do not believe? We must live with an uncompromising commitment to Christ even if it costs us everything. But let's do so in a way that shows the unconditional love of Jesus. A great formula

for reaching our family for Christ... uncompromising commitment + unconditional love.

Take some time to pray for family today. Pray for those who know Christ but also take time to pray for those family members that need to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior.

MARK 4

// WEEK FOUR

MONDAY

// Mark 4:1-20

Perhaps on the surface, planting a seed doesn't seem that complicated. Dig a hole. Plant the seed. Water it. And that's it, right? Um, no. There's more to it, and more than we have time for. But one of the things that must go into consideration when planting a seed is the soil that you plant it in. You can have good seed and be faithful in watering it, but if the soil is bad the crop will be bad.

That's an important principle right there... if the soil is bad the crop will be bad and if the soil is good the crop will be good. Jesus says a number of times in a number of ways in the Gospels that what's going on in the heart will reveal itself. It will bear fruit, good or bad.

In Matthew 12, Jesus says, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad" (v. 33). A few verses later He says, "The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil" (v. 35). It all comes down to how healthy the soil (heart) is.

So the soil represents the heart. What about the seed? It represents the Word of God. And Jesus gives four examples of the seed (Word of God) trying to get planted in soil (heart). The first three are bad examples and the fourth one is good. In example #1, the bird takes the seed before it gets planted. Jesus says this is when Satan prevents a person from really hearing and receiving the Word of God.

In example #2, the seed is planted on rocky ground and springs up initially, but doesn't ultimately produce a crop because there's no depth of soil. Jesus says this is the person who at first receives the Word into his heart but doesn't really develop deep roots, so when tough times come, he falls away. In example #3, the seed was planted among thorns and caused the crop to be choked. Jesus is saying that the person who loves this world more than God and His Word, will eventually have the good fruit choked out of his life.

But in example #4, the seed is planted in good soil, and it produces good and bountiful fruit. Jesus is saying that this person not only hears the Word, but internalizes it into his heart and strives to live it out in his life. A person who embraces God's Word like this is a person that will bear much kingdom fruit!

So how can we have a healthy heart? Be on guard for the attacks of Satan. Don't let him draw you away from God's Word through busyness or sin. When life gets tough, don't run away from God and His Word, run to Him and His Word. Prioritize who and what matters by choosing Kingdom values over worldly values. Let's take the time to cultivate a healthy "soil" so the "seed" can bear it's good fruit in our lives.

Write down all four examples on a piece of paper. Take a moment to pray and ask God to reveal areas of your life that would fit under each of the four. Cross out the things you wrote down in the first three exam-

ples and take time asking God to help remove those unhealthy things out of your life.

TUESDAY

// Mark 4:21-25

Imagine someone buying a really expensive lamp. The most expensive lamp in the store. And they get home and plug it in. And then... they put the lit lamp underneath their bed and leave it there. Ridiculous, right? We'd say that person is "Two fries short of a Happy Meal." But that's essentially what Jesus is describing in today's passage. Someone who puts the lamp under the bed or basket.

Jesus told a similar parable in Matthew 5:14-16: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Now the metaphor of the "light" in Matthew 5 is a little different than the "lamp" Jesus mentions in Mark 4. The "light" in Matthew 5 is referring to the good works in the life of a follower of Jesus. The "lamp" in Mark 4 is Jesus Himself! But they are connected. A person who lets Jesus shine in their life is a person who will produce good works that shine before mankind.

So is Jesus on full display in our lives? Or is He "hidden under the bed"? Would the people we work with say that Jesus shines brightly in us, in the

way we work, in our attitude, and in the way we treat others? How about our family, do they see Jesus in the way we live and love? Or would those around us be surprised to hear that we are followers of Jesus? Hard but important questions to ask ourselves. In the passage, Jesus says something curious, "... with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you" (v. 24). What does Jesus mean here? It means that the more you let Jesus be on display in your life, the more power He will demonstrate in your life. Hide Him and there will be very little of His power in your life.

Jesus concludes this parable by saying, "For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (v. 25). This does not mean possessions, per se. It really means how much possession of your life will you give Jesus? The more you give Him, the more blessings He adds to your life. Give Him little of you, and little of His blessings will you discover. What a promise we have from Jesus. If you let Him, He will shine brightly in and through your life. Isn't that the point of the "Lamp"?

Is there an area of your life where you have not allowed Jesus to shine? Write it on a piece of paper and place it somewhere you will see it each day. Each day this week, take a flashlight and shine it on the paper and take a moment to pray that God would help you let Jesus shine in that area.

WEDNESDAY

// Mark 4:26–29

William seemed an unlikely candidate to impact the world. He was born in an obscure, rural village in England. As a young man, he worked as a shoemaker. Early in his marriage, his first born daughter died when she was two. The family sunk into poverty. But William felt a calling to go into missions, though he had very limited education. Despite all of this, in 1793, he and his family took a ship to India to work as missionaries.

But they had very little success in their early years. The other couple who had went with them would abandon the mission within a couple years. William contracted malaria and nearly died. He had a 5 year-old son die of dysentery. And it was all too much for his wife who became mentally ill and confined to a bed. Of those years he would write, “This is indeed the valley of the shadow of death or me.”

But he didn’t give up. He would go on and write to a friend that he had “no Christian friend, a large family, and nothing to supply their wants.” But then wrote, “Well, I have God, and His Word is sure.” God would honor his beliefs in God’s power and His Word. It would take seven years, but William finally baptized his first convert to Jesus. He would go on to translate the entire Bible into Bengali and 5 other languages, and parts of the Bible into 209 other languages.

By the time he died, William Carey had spent 41 years in India, led over

700 to Christ, brought education and social reform to the country, and has been called “The father of modern missions.” Legendary missionaries Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor, and David Livingstone credit him as their inspiration for pursuing missions. He is known for saying, “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God!”

Never underestimate what God can do in a person, even if they seem an unlikely candidate. William Carey believed in the power of God’s Word and he gave his life to reading it, teaching it, and translating it. Carey was right, “His Word is sure.” Remember this... Let the Word loose and watch it work!

That’s what Jesus was getting at in today’s passage. When He talks about the seed being planted and it producing fruit with very little help from the farmer, He’s reminding the disciples that it is God’s power through His Word that will advance the kingdom of God. Our part is to be faithful to the Word. To “scatter seed” into the lives of those around us. And when we do, watch out!

Jesus will return some day, as He put it, “the harvest has come.” And we will see just how much impact people who were committed to sharing the Word really had. Daniel Akin wrote, in his exposition on Mark, in regards to the kingdom of God, that “God planted it in the coming of a Galilean peasant, a homeless man from Nazareth, who gathered about Him a bunch of nobodies.”

God doesn't need much. But He is looking for people who will expect great things from God as they attempt great things for God.

Take some time to think about how God could use you to share His Word with others. Take time and ask God to open those doors in your life.

THURSDAY

// Mark 4:30-34

In Today's passage we have the third parable that Jesus gave about "seeds" from Mark 4. In the first one, Jesus talks about the kind of soil needed for the seed to bear fruit. He was talking about a healthy heart that receives the Word of God and applies it to life. In the second story about seeds, Jesus lets the disciples know that the seed, which is the Word, has great power. So let the Word loose and watch it!

Here in the third seed story, Jesus reminds the disciples that the kingdom is going to spread all over the world. He compares it to a mustard seed, one of the smallest seeds in the world. Maybe you've heard the saying, "It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog." Sometimes it really is the smallest things that can produce the biggest impact.

If you fast forward a few years to after Jesus' resurrection from the dead, He makes a promise to the disciples before ascending back to the Heavenly Father. In Acts 1:8 He said,

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Those who had embraced the kingdom of God at that time were a very small amount of people, around 500, the size of a "mustard seed" in comparison to all the people in the world. But Jesus said it would eventually spread to the "end of the earth." Within 50 years of Jesus' promise, it had reached many thousands and had indeed reached into many parts of the world. And today, those who would identify themselves as Christians represents the largest religion in the world. Jesus' words have come true, Christianity has become "larger than all the garden plants" (religions) of the world.

Maybe you don't think you have a lot to offer the kingdom of God. It's okay, because it's not your power, it's the power of the One you follow! Jesus talked about mustard seeds in another place in the gospels. In Matthew 17 Jesus said, "if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed... nothing will be impossible for you" (v. 20). Give God what you got and watch what God can do.

The little boy only had a few pieces of fish and bread and Jesus fed the multitudes. It's not how big your faith is, it is having faith in a big God. Believe that and offer your times, talents and treasures and God will use it to impact lives for the kingdom of God. So how about it, what will you offer to Jesus?

Make three columns with the followings headings: Time, Talent, Treasures. Under each, write what you have to offer. And take time praying over each one, asking God to use you.

FRIDAY

// Mark 4:35-41

Without an occasional hurricane, the world's weather might be even worse. Fierce tropical storms play a vital part in maintaining the heat balance between the tropics and polar regions. The tropics and subtropics receive more heat from the sun than they lose by radiation. To prevent cooling of the poles and scorching of the equatorial regions, hurricanes help keep the balance.

"If hurricane control were successful and none were allowed to go through their full life cycle," says Gordon E. Dunn, former director of the National Hurricane Center at Miami, "nature would undoubtedly find some other method of maintaining the heat balance, and who can say that this new method might not be even more disastrous than the hurricane?"

The point is, storms can actually serve a positive purpose. Now, a person stuck in a major storm like a hurricane is probably not thinking about the positive purposes of a storm! They just want to survive. It's easy for us to do the same thing. When the "storms of life" come our way, we just want to get through it. We don't oftentimes think about the

purpose God may have in our lives with the storm.

It was no different for the disciples in the boat. The storm was suppose to build their faith, but instead it revealed their lack of faith. James tells us that "a storm" is the "testing of our faith" (James 1:3). It reveals if we are trusting God or not with our lives. But the verse also says that it is an opportunity for the storm to "produce steadfastness."

It's an opportunity to learn how to trust more deeply in Jesus. Because He's got control over the storms, just as He did in today's passage. When you don't understand the storm you are facing, focus on what you do understand about God. Take time to lean into His character. Praise Him. Pray to Him. Take time to celebrate Him. What He said to the winds in today's passage, "Peace! Be still!" Is the same thing He wants to say to us in our storms.

Be still and let the peace of Christ flow over you. Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God." Will you take time to be still today? Jesus was sleeping during the storm! Can't get more still than that. Jesus is ruler of our lives, and He's ruler over the storms of life. So be still and rest in Him today.

Take time to pray for the "storms in your life." And then go take a nice nap! Sleep is an act of faith.

MARK 5

// WEEK FIVE

MONDAY

// Mark 5:1-13

Charles Spurgeon, British pastor from the 1800's, told the following story. "There was once a tyrant who summoned one of his subjects into his presence, and ordered him to make a chain. The poor blacksmith (that was his occupation) had to go to work and forge the chain. When it was done, he brought it into the presence of the tyrant, and was ordered to take it away and make it twice the length.

He brought it again to the tyrant, and again he was ordered to double it. Back he came when he had obeyed the order, and the tyrant looked at it, and then commanded the servants to bind the man hand and foot with the chain he had made and cast him into prison. "That is what the devil does with men," Spurgeon said.

"He makes them forge their own chain, and then binds them hand and foot with it, and casts them into outer darkness."

You've probably heard the saying, "They are their own worst enemy." It's true, isn't it? Much of the pain we experience in life is self-inflicted. We keep going after the very things that enslave us. Solomon puts it bluntly in Proverbs 26:11, "Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly." How can these chains be broken in our lives? Go to the King!

Satan is a tyrant who wants to kill, steal and destroy. He dresses the sin up nicely, but in the end that's his

goal for us. But the King came to set us free and give us life, and life more abundantly. Notice in today's passage that Jesus had authority over the demons. He's got all the power and strength we need to have the chains released in our lives.

Colossians 2:13-15 says, "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Because Jesus was victorious over death, we can be victorious over sin! The evil one has no authority over us. Why? Because he and his cronies have been disarmed. Any power they have over us is us choosing to arm them again. We need to run from sin by running to the Savior. Prayer is our walkie-talkie to call in heavenly reinforcements. God's Word is our manual for battle. The power for victory is there, but we need to put in the preparation. We have a part to play. Are we playing it?

List a few areas of struggle. Find some Bible verses dealing with those struggles. Read them as a prayer of commitment to the Lord.

TUESDAY

// Mark 5:14–17

Have you ever gotten a response that was the opposite of what you expected? In the romantic comedy “Hitch,” Hitch goes on a first date with Sarah. Hoping to impress her, he plans an elaborate date that culminates with her seeing the name of her great-grandfather, “the Butcher of Cadiz,” in the immigration book at Ellis Island.

As she looks at the book, Hitch has a smile on his face, assuming she is touched by the gesture. Instead she cries hysterically and runs out of the room. Not the reaction Hitch was expecting. He comes to find out that Sarah’s great-grandfather is not a butcher that sells meat. It was a nickname given to him because he was a murderer!

Sometimes the response is not what we expect. The same thing could be said in today’s passage. Jesus had just performed a miracle. For years the demon-possessed man had lived in torment and had traumatized the people. And with a word, Jesus changed everything. You would think the people would have been grateful. You would’ve thought they’d have brought other people from the village to be healed. But that’s not the response they gave.

Instead of embracing the Savior, they kicked Him out of town. Why in the world would they have done that? One of the reasons was financial. Those 2,000 pigs represented a lot of money lost. They cared more about themselves than the well-being of the man healed. If we want to

see miracles in the lives of people we love, we have to get over ourselves and be willing to sacrifice in order for people to experience the power and presence of Jesus.

There was another reason the people responded the way they did. It says in v. 15, “they were afraid.” Why was that? Well, it doesn’t tell us. Perhaps the supernatural was just too much for them. A God outside of their box was more than they bargained for. The truth is, there is a spiritual battle going on all around us. Life is more than the material, there’s a spiritual realm that we are a part of. And we can’t be afraid and run from it. We have to run to the battle. We need to run to Jesus.

Whatever it is that keeps you from experiencing the life God wants for you, Jesus has the power and authority to cast it out of your life. Fear will always tempt us to choose flight over fight. But those moments of fear are just a reminder to run to the King and let Him fight on our behalf. Whatever it is that seeks to destroy us, we must choose to fight over flight.

What makes you fearful? Get on your knees in a posture of surrender to the King and ask God to cast those fears out of your life.

WEDNESDAY

// Mark 5:18–20

Younger brothers are a real fascination. They will get roughed up and made fun of, but will still come back for more. Younger brothers tend to adore their older brothers. They

want to try to keep up with the older brother and his friends. Oftentimes as the brothers get older they become the best of friends. But as kids, the younger brothers can be an annoyance, seen simply as a “tag along.”

The Bible says that there’s one “who sticks closer than a brother.” Ultimately, this is Jesus. He’s the “Older Brother,” the One who protects and defends. We are “joint heirs with Jesus.” And the good news is that Jesus doesn’t get annoyed and won’t prevent us from “tagging along.” However, it almost looks that way in today’s passage, doesn’t it?

The man that Jesus healed simply wanted to go with Jesus. But Jesus wouldn’t let him. What’s the deal with that? It’s because Jesus had a plan for the man’s life. He was going to use him to reach others for Jesus. And it wasn’t a complicated strategy to do so. Jesus said to the man, “tell them how much the Lord has done for you” (v. 19).

We tend to complicate serving God and sharing Jesus. Really, it’s not too complicated at all. Just make it a priority to tell others all that God had done for you! And what was the response of the people? Verse 20 says, “everyone marveled.” How important is it for us to see the people in our lives marvel at Jesus? Sometimes we want people to marvel at us. We want people to be impressed with us. But the way of Jesus is to live that others might be impressed with Jesus.

Who are some people in your life that need Jesus? That need to understand that He can cast out of their lives the

“demons” that have controlled their lives for so long. His death and resurrection ensures the potential for victory over sin and death. Will you make it a priority to tell them all that God has done for you? And let them know that God can do it for them as well!

Make a list of some of the things that God has done for you over the years. Take time to pray and give thanks for those things. Next to each one, think of person who needs God to do a similar thing for them. Take time to pray for the opportunity to share those things with them.

THURSDAY

// Mark 5:21-34

There’s a story of a woman who telephoned a friend and asked how she was feeling. “Terrible,” came the reply, “my head’s splitting and my back and legs are killing me. The house is a mess, and the kids are simply driving me crazy.” Very sympathetically the caller said, “Listen, go and lie down, I’ll come over right away and cook lunch for you, clean up the house, and take care of the children while you get some rest. By the way, how is Sam?”

“Sam?” the tired housewife gasped. “Who is Sam?” “My heavens,” exclaimed the first woman, “I must have dialed the wrong number.” There was a long pause. The exhausted mother then asked hopefully, “Are you still coming over?” If you’re a mom, you know what it’s like to

just want some peace and quiet from time to time. And you're as desperate as that woman to find it.

Susan Wesley (mother of John and Charles Wesley) was the mother of 19 children. As you can imagine, finding peace and quiet was no easy task. Among the noise of activity of her many children, Susanna's trick was to pull her apron over her head—signaling to them and anyone else around that she was spending time alone with God in prayer. That was her attempt to find a little peace amidst the chaos of life.

It's not just moms, we all yearn for peace in a world filled with trials and tribulations. Ever since the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden, there has been sin and suffering all around us. And one of the results of rebellion in the Garden, are bodies that have been affected by the curse of sin. Paul put it this way in Romans 8:22, "For we know that the whole of creation has been groaning together." But here's the great news: Jesus came to reverse the curse!

It won't happen fully until Jesus returns again and His eternal kingdom is established. But Jesus still brings healing to people's lives until then. That's what the woman understood in today's passage. He could heal her disease and bring the peace that had been alluding her, her entire life. She thought, "If only I could touch Him, His healing power would touch me." And she was right. Jesus healed her of her disease. But more important—He brought peace into her life.

Sometimes we think that our situation has to change for peace to be experienced in our lives. Perhaps there's some significance to the order in which Jesus said what He said. In verse 34, Jesus said to the woman, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." Notice the order? Faith, first, which leads to peace, which leads to healing coming into her life.

Do we have faith that God can give us peace, no matter our circumstances? That peace is not the result of perfect circumstances but of faith in a perfect God? Reach out to Jesus and He will touch you and give you the "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). And when we get to that place in our lives, our hearts will experience healing.

What "healing" does your heart need today? Take time to pray about it. How about the people in your life? Take time praying for them as well.

FRIDAY

// Mark 5:21–24, 35–43

It's not over until it's over. Those who know football will know Frank Reich as the head coach of the Indianapolis Colts. But back in 1993, he was the backup quarterback for the Buffalo Bills, playing behind Hall-of-Famer Jim Kelly. But with Kelly injured, on January 3rd, Reich would go down as the star of one of the most talked about games in NFL playoff history.

The Bills were down in the 3rd quarter to the Houston Oilers 35–3. An all but impossible score differential to overcome. But, it's not over until it's over. Frank Reich would lead the Bills back from a 32-point deficit to win in overtime, 41–38, which to this day stands as the greatest comeback in NFL history.

What's interesting is that historic comebacks weren't new to Reich. While serving as a college senior for the Maryland Terrapins, he came in for benched quarterback Stan Gelbaugh, down 31–0 to the Miami Hurricanes, and lead them to a 42–40 victory. At the time, it was the record for the greatest comeback in college football history. It's not over until it's over.

A cool part of the story of the Buffalo Bill's comeback is what Frank shared at the post-game press conference. He shared about a Christian song he had listened to that was the source of his inspiration. His sister had called earlier in the week and told him to listen to the song. It was the song "In Christ Alone." He said he listened to it all week before the big playoff game. He would go on to quote a portion of the words of the song as millions watched on their television.

These are the words he quoted, "In Christ alone will I glory, though I could pride myself in battles won, for I have been blessed beyond measure, and by his strength alone I overcome." Frank Reich lived his life as an overcomer. He would go on after his retirement, before returning to football as a coach, to pastor a church and to even serve as president of a seminary. Frank Reich

was a man who was, and is the real deal. He lives for the glory of God and finds his strength in Christ, and Christ alone.

It's not over until it's over. Jairus had an adolescent daughter who was on the verge of death, but he refused to believe it was over. But by the time Jesus got to the girl, she had died. But with Jesus... it's not over until it's over. When told the child had died, Jesus said, "The child is not dead but sleeping" (v. 39). Despite the ridicule of others, Jesus responded to the faith of the father and rose the girl from the dead.

Jesus would go on to make the greatest comeback in all of history. He came back from crucifixion on the cross, to defeat sin, Satan and death. The strength each of us need to overcome the situations that seem impossible in our lives, can only be found in Christ, and Christ alone. Will you choose to have faith today? Because with Jesus... it's not over until it's over.

Write 35–3 on a piece of paper. Keep it with you all week. Take time to pull out the card and pray over the situations that seem to be impossible to overcome. With Christ, all things are possible!

MARK 6

// WEEK SIX

MONDAY

// Mark 6:1-6 & Luke 4:16-30

Philly fans aren't exactly known for their cordiality. In fact, when GQ magazine ran a piece on the worst fans in America, Philadelphia Phillies fans were voted #1 and Philadelphia Eagles fans were voted #2! Which is ironic because Philadelphia is known as "The city of brotherly love." In fact, the first half of the name, "Phila" comes from the Greek word "Phileo," which means "love; warm affections." Former Phillies legend, Pete Rose, once said, "Some of these people would boo the crack in the Liberty Bell."

Here's a few examples of these "loving" fans. When the team picked quarterback Donovan McNabb at the 1999 draft, they booed him mercilessly as he made his way to the stage. In 1983, the Washington Redskins mascot Chief Zee was beaten up so bad by fans that he had to use crutches for a year. And in 1968, they not only booed Santa Claus, they also pelted snowballs at him! The fans have even been known to turn on their own as well.

When first baseman Ryan Howard grounded out to end a game, he barely missed getting knocked out by a fan who threw a beer bottle at his head. When DeSean Jackson was traded, a trade he never initiated, fans showed up early to the next game to burn his jersey. Recently at a home game, quarterback Carson Wentz and the offense got booed coming off the field after an interception. What made it so puzzling was that there were hardly any fans because of Covid restrictions. The boos were done through

an artificial sound machine. It was operated by the home team!

Not even the home team can catch a break from the fans. And the same could be said about Jesus (the two times recorded in the gospels) when Jesus returned to His hometown of Nazareth. The first time, in Luke 4, they didn't like what He was teaching so they tried to throw Him off of a cliff. Side note, this passage makes pastors feel at least a little bit better when they're criticized for their own preaching.

The second time, in Mark 6, they were offended because of His miracles since He was born from a poor family instead of a prestigious family. Sometimes you just can't win with fans! It didn't matter all the good He did or said, they found something to be critical of. Think about that for a moment... Jesus is the perfect and loving Son of God, and they find something to be critical about. His words were so true, "A prophet is not without Honor, except in his hometown" (Mark 6:4).

It poses a good question for us... Are we fans or are we followers? A fan can be fickle. He doesn't like how things are going and he boos. He's paid good money to come to the game so he sees it as his right to treat even the home team however he wants. But a follower is one who is loyal and committed to what is taught or asked by the leader. Jesus deserves and demands our complete loyalty. Do we follow Him wholeheartedly or have we put conditions on our commitment to and affection for Jesus?

Are there ways in your life right now that you're living like a fan instead of a follower? Take time to confess to the Lord and to ask for strength to overcome those areas.

TUESDAY

// Mark 6:7-13

Some people can identify with Buddy the Elf, from the movie “Elf,” when he said “I love organizing. Organizing is my favorite thing.” Of course there is the other extreme. For instance, Garfield, who said in a comic strip, “I’m not messy. I’m organizationally challenged.”

Some people love to have a plan. And they love every detail of the plan worked out ahead of time. And that can be a good thing. Where would we be without organized people in the world. But sometimes a person can be so organized that they are inflexible to any changes in the plan. And that can be a problem because life doesn’t always turn out like we planned it.

When Jesus called His disciples, He called them to drop everything and to come follow Him. Now, Jesus is not against organization. Jesus had a plan for His time on earth, and He had a plan for His disciples. And He still has a plan for our lives. But when you look at the life of Jesus, you see Him being flexible and sensitive to the movement of God.

He stopped and ministered to children when they would come to Him. He saw Zacchaeus in a tree and stopped to talk with him and to

have dinner at his house. He stopped by the well to talk to the Samaritan woman. Jesus took time for people. And Jesus was sensitive to “divine appointments” that came up in His life.

How about us? Could the same be said for us? It’s good to be organized and to have a plan. But we also have to be flexible to the lives that God puts in our path in the course of a day. And we have to be willing to trust God and follow His leadership even when it’s not all laid out to us in detail. Remember this... God normally gives us a COMPASS not an ATLAS. He points us in a direction and asks us to trust Him for where He’s leading.

That’s what we have in this passage. Jesus says not to take food or money. He said that God would provide the food and shelter as it was needed. It’s similar to the story of Abraham, when God called him out to go to a new land, a new life with God. Hebrews 11:8-9 put it this way, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” (vs. 8-9)

God produced much fruit in Abraham’s life as a result. Just as he did with the disciples that we looked at in today’s passage. And it will be the same for us when we choose to go where God calls us to go even if we don’t have all of the details. So how about it? Will you go where God leads even if you don’t know the details of the plan? It begins with a step of faith.

Is God calling you to do something that you don't have all the details for? Take time to pray about what a first step of faith would look like for you. Or maybe you have a family member or friend in that position. Take time to pray for them.

WEDNESDAY

// Mark 6:14-29

We might not be liked, but we will be respected. That's sometimes the case when we choose to stand for Jesus and live with gold integrity in a world that doesn't. Recently a movie was made called "Hacksaw Ridge." It's based on the true life story of Desmond Doss.

Desmond was a man who signed up for the army but refused to bear arms as a "conscientious objector." But he wanted to serve his country so he signed up as a medic. He faced ridicule and abuse from his fellow soldiers but refused to go against his conscious. He refused to quit the army even when his commanding officers tried to have him court-martialed for refusing to carry a weapon.

But Desmond held no grudge and continued to serve in the army, helping the men of his unit with blisters on their march-weary feet, and helping soldiers who struggled with heat stroke. In battle, he showed incredible bravery and personal sacrifice, risking his life to help injured soldiers. The defining moment in the war for Desmond was when his unit was trying to capture the Maeda Escarpment, an imposing rock face the soldiers called Hacksaw Ridge.

After securing the top of the cliff, the soldiers were stunned when enemy forces rushed them in a vicious counterattack. Officers ordered an immediate retreat. Soldiers rushed to climb back down the steep cliff. All the soldiers except one. Less than one third of the men made it back down, the rest laying wounded or dead on the ridge. On May 5, 1945, Doss saved the lives of 75 soldiers! The Americans would eventually take Hacksaw Ridge but not before Doss was severely wounded by a Japanese grenade.

Desmond Doss would recovery from his injuries and three years after that day on Hacksaw Ridge, Three years later, he stood on the White House lawn and received the nation's highest award for bravery and courage under fire, the Congressional Medal of Honor. Whatever your opinion may be of his views, you have to respect that he stood by his beliefs and was willing to pay any price to live his life by those beliefs without compromise.

That would also be a description of the life of John the Baptist. He stood by his belief, that all must repent and believe in Jesus for salvation. And he was even willing to say it to king Herod and his family, no matter the cost. And their was certainly a cost... his head! Herod had married his brother's wife, Herodias, and John the Baptist spoke out against it. Herodias held a grudge again John the Baptist, but Herod himself had a respect of him.

It says in v. 20, "for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righ-

teous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.” People won’t always understand our convictions. When we live by them uncompromisingly and are willing to share Jesus as the reason for those convictions, people may be “greatly perplexed” but many of them will listen to us out of respect for the commitment we have to our beliefs. We might not be liked, but we will be respected.

What commitment are you holding to that others may be bothered by? Take time to pray for the strength to stick to your commitment. Pray for God to use that commitment to impact those around you.

THURSDAY

// Mark 6:30–44 & John 6:1–15

Charles Blondin was a French tight-rope walker from the 1800s. One time while touring the United States he took a tight rope over 1,000 feet across the Niagara Falls. He walked across it to the roar of the crowd, and then he walked across it blindfolded. Next, he walked across it on stilts, after which he walked halfway across, stopped, made himself an omelette & ate it, then walk the rest of the way.

Afterwards, he took a wheelbarrow, filled it with coal, and went back & forth as the crowd went crazy with delight. He then turned to the crowd and asked, “Who here thinks that I could put them in this wheelbarrow and cart them across the Niagara Falls?” Thousands of hands go up.

And then he asks, “Who would be willing to come into the wheelbarrow and prove it?” And every hand went down.

You know, it’s one thing to say that you believe; it’s quite another thing to prove it with your life. Faith is believing that the Great Blondin can take the wheelbarrow across the Niagara Falls. Trust is getting into the wheelbarrow and letting him do it with you! Faith and trust. Faith and trust are kissing cousins but there is a difference between the two. You see, faith is a confidence, trust is a commitment. Faith is a noun, trust is a verb. Faith believes, but trust does. Ultimately, trust is putting your faith into action.

In today’s passages, Jesus puts His disciples to the test. The “feeding of the 5000” is the only miracle told in all four gospels. Now it says that He picked Philip to test. Warren Wiersbe said, “A faith that can’t be tested is a faith that can’t be trusted.” These tests have the potential to stretch our faith & deepen our trust in God.

I think there are two reasons Jesus picked Philip to test. One’s a practical reason. He was from the region. Second, based on other Gospel accounts, Philip tended to be a “bean counter.” The issue was that he would calculate without Christ. And unfortunately that’s what he did in this particular event. Andrew was also tested. At least he did something by bringing the boy to Jesus. But he too struggled with faith, saying, “but what are they for so many?” (John 6:9).

And then there was the boy. He gave all that he had, and in his childlike faith believed Jesus could do a miracle with it. When it comes to trusting Jesus, you see three types of trust from these three individuals. From Philip you see a LACK of trust. From Andrew you see a WAVING trust. And from the boy you see a COMPLETE trust. In the gospels, Jesus says we are to have the faith of a child. We are not to have a lacking or wavering trust, we are to have a childlike faith that believes Jesus can do anything!

What do you need to trust God with today? It can be scary getting into a wheelbarrow and letting Jesus lead you into unknown and scary places. But He knows what He's doing. He's better than the "Great Blondin," He is the "Great Savior." What an adventure it is to jump into the wheelbarrow with Jesus!

If you have a wheelbarrow, go out and pray next to it. If you're feeling adventurous, go ahead and get in it. Take time praying for the things you need to trust in Jesus for.

FRIDAY

// Mark 6:45-56

A man from Colorado moved to Kansas and built a house with a large picture window from which he could view miles and miles of rangeland. "The only problem is," he said, "there's nothing to see." About the same time, a man from Kansas moved to Colorado and built a house with a large picture window over-

looking the Rockies. "The only problem is, I can't see anything," he said. "The mountains are in the way."

Sometimes seeing isn't easy. The older a person gets the blurrier the vision can get. Has anyone ever mistaken you for someone? Maybe you've heard the saying, "Seeing is believing." That may be true. However, what if what you see isn't really what it is? That certainly was an issue for the disciples in today's passage. Instead of seeing Jesus, they thought they had seen a ghost.

Believing it was a ghost, they became afraid. The disciples made the mistake that we can make sometimes... they didn't see Jesus in the storm. Storms are a part of life. Jesus taught a number of lessons to the disciples in the midst of storms. Storms can become a great tool for growth. Storms remind us that we're not in control. Storms remind us that only Jesus has the power to still the seas.

The passage says that the disciples "hearts were hardened" (v. 52). Despite all that Jesus had done for them, they still weren't getting what the miracles were revealing about Jesus. He calms the sea and He heals the sick. So He has the power to meet our every needs. Storms are an opportunity to stop trusting in ourselves and put our hope in the "Storm Rider."

What are some of the storms in your life? Sometimes we create the storms because of our own selfish and sinful choices. Sometimes the storms are caused by others and we face the consequences of their choices. And

sometimes the storms are created by God to chip away at our faith and character. What's so great about our gracious God is that He can reveal His power in whichever storm it may be.

The chapter ends with people running to Jesus for healing. What a great visual for us to have. The chapter ends by saying that when the people touched Jesus they "were made well" (v. 56). It's no different today. Run to Jesus and experience His healing power. Whether it's a storm in your life or a need for healing, Jesus is the answer. He's in the storm, and He's on the shore. Whatever you're going through, wherever you're at, He's there, and He's got it.

Find some time to get by some water. Imagine Jesus walking on the water. Read Matthew 8:23–27. Ask God to help you stay calm with the storms in your life.

MARK 7

// WEEK 7

MONDAY

// Mark 7:1-7

The story is told of a young soldier who had been placed on guard duty at a military post. He was on sentry duty at the main gate of a military outpost. His orders were clear: No car was to enter unless it had a special sticker on the windshield. A big Army car came up to the gate with a general seated in the back seat and a young driver seated in the front.

The sentry said, “Halt, who goes there?” The chauffeur, a corporal, said, “General Wheeler, let us pass.” The young guard replied, “Sorry, I can’t let you through. You’ve got to have a sticker on the windshield and you don’t have it.” The general said to the young driver, “Drive on, son, pay this man no attention.”

The sentry said, “Hold it. You really can’t come through. I have orders to shoot anyone and everyone who tries to enter this base without the proper sticker on the windshield.” The general repeated to the driver, “I’m telling you, son, drive on.” The sentry walked up to the rear window, laid the rifle barrel on the door, pointed his rifle in the car at the general and asked, “General, I’m new at this: who do I shoot first, you or the driver?”

That’s a soldier who took guard duty seriously! How about us, do we take “guard duty” seriously? Solomon, in Proverbs 4:23 said, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” There is nothing more important than to guard our hearts. Why is that? Well, I think this quote by pastor Andy

Stanley helps answer that...

“Our heart seeps into every conversation. It dictates every relationship. We live, parent, lead, relate, romance, confront, react, respond, instruct, manage, problem solve, and love from the heart. Every arena of life intersects with what’s going on in our hearts. Everything passes through on its way to wherever.”

Well, that makes it pretty clear why we need to guard our hearts. Life flows out of the heart. Jesus was frustrated by the religious leaders because they looked impressive on the outside but in reality their hearts were far from God. As Jesus put it, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”

We can go through all the “religious checklists” but that doesn’t guarantee that our hearts are going to be pure and right before God. Things can get in and corrupt. That’s why we have to guard what we allow into the heart. That involves the things we watch and listen too. It’s also being proactive and filling our hearts with God’s Word. How serious have you been in guarding your heart?

Take time and make a list of ways to better guard your heart. Go ahead and pray that God will help you make it a priority in your life.

TUESDAY

// Mark 7:8-13

Wearing jeans or shorts to church. Going to movies. Playing cards. Having drums in church. Playing the lottery or gambling. Smoking or using tobacco. Drinking something with alcohol in it. Rooting for Ohio State. All of these, have been debated in churches. The only one we know for sure that is wrong is rooting for Ohio State. Okay, just kidding OSU fans!

The goal is not to answer these questions, but to simply mention that none of these areas have a clear, definitive verse that says not to do so. Some of them have Biblical principles that you could certainly apply to some of the issues mentioned. But we seem to get really passionate about certain areas that may be “gray areas,” even as we intentionally give in to clear commandments.

For instance, you may have strong feelings about how a person should dress in church while at the same time gossiping about a person who doesn't dress as you think they should. Gossip is clearly forbidden in Scripture but you'd be hard-pressed to find a verse that tells you what to wear to church. This was part of the issue with the religious establishment Jesus was dealing with in today's passage.

Jesus told them, “You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” (v. 8). In other words, you are really committed to man's traditions instead of what God's Word clearly teaches. And Jesus uses family as an example. Scrip-

ture clearly teaches that we are to honor our parents. But the religious leaders had developed traditions (or add-ons to the Law) that actually contradicted honoring their parents.

Jesus made it pretty clear what the greatest commandment was, and really what all commandments come down to. In Matthew 22:37-40 He said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Love is the greatest commandment.

It's okay to have preferences. We just have to be careful that we don't teach them as Biblical mandates for others. And we have to be careful that we don't violate the greatest commandment, love, in the pursuit of our preferences. God's Word is given to help us love Him and others better. It's probably a good idea to remind ourselves of that the next time we study God's Word. The goal is not to prove a preference; the goal of God's Word is to pursue love with God and others.

What are some preferences you have in your life? Take time to ask God if they are rooted in Biblical truth. Take time to ask God to show you ways that you can be more loving to those around you.

WEDNESDAY

// Mark 7:14-23

Have you ever seen a beautiful bowl of juicy apples setting on a table, with not a mark on them.? Did you know that one or two may contain worms inside? Among the thousands of apples grown each year, some of them will contain worms. Although most producers of apples do their best to keep this from happening. Lots of people think the worm works his way in from the outside.

It has been discovered that the worm comes from the inside. When the apple blossom is on the tree, an insect comes along and lays an egg in it. Sometime later, the worm hatches in the heart of the apple, then eats his way out. Sin like the worm begins in the heart.

That's what Jesus was saying in v. 20, "out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts...." That's why we mentioned in a previous devotional that we have to guard the heart above all else.

It was the prayer of David in Psalm 51:10, we all need to pray regularly... "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Swedish chemist Alfred Nobel awoke one morning to read his own obituary in the local newspaper: "Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, who died yesterday, devised a way for more people to be killed in a war than ever before, and he died a very rich man."

But, actually, it was Alfred's older brother who died; a newspaper reporter made a mistake. But the account had a profound effect on Nobel, so he decided he wanted to be known for something other than developing the means to kill people efficiently and for amassing a fortune in the process. So he initiated the Nobel Prize, the award for scientists and writers who foster peace. Nobel said, "Every man ought to have the chance to correct his eulogy in midstream and write a new one."

It's true that it's never too late to change the direction of your life. But it begins by having the heart renewed. A changed life comes from a changed heart! How can we have a renewed heart? First of all, we need to make sure we have a regenerated heart. We have to make sure we have a relationship with Jesus not a religion about Jesus. Making sure you are born again is the beginning place.

Assuming you are, another thing to consider is whether or not there is something else that is consuming your heart. We can't serve two Gods. God will not play second fiddle to anyone or anything. Is there an idol of which we need to repent? God must have first place in our heart. Another thing to consider is our vertical relationships. Our horizontal relationships affect our vertical relationship with God. Is there an unhealthy relationship on earth? It will affect our heavenly relationship with God. Perhaps it's something else, but these items are a good starting place.

Apples are yummy but not if they have worms in them. Hearts aren't

good if they have “worms” in them. What are the “worms” we have to get throw out of our hearts?

Take some time praying Psalm 51:10 today... “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”

THURSDAY

// Mark 7:24–30

How about a few dog jokes? Why did the cowboy buy a dachshund? Because someone told him to get a long little doggy. What kind of dog can use the phone? A Dial-Matian. Speaking of Dalmatians, what did the hungry Dalmatian say after his meal? That hit the spots! Okay, those were pretty bad. Well good thing when Jesus mentioned dogs in today’s passage, He didn’t tell any corny dog jokes.

Of course, Jesus’ teaching today wasn’t really about dogs. It was about the humble faith of a Gentile woman. This woman had none of the religious, moral or cultural credentials necessary to approach a Jewish rabbi like Jesus. She was a Phoenician, a Gentile pagan with a daughter who had an unclean spirit in her.

It appears as if Jesus is comparing this woman to a dog. It almost comes across racist. But Jesus was not teasing the woman about her ethnicity, He was testing her about the authenticity of her faith. We know from other Scriptures that Jesus loves all people no matter the color of their skin or their gender, or economic situation, or anything else.

Jesus came to the Jews first and then to Gentiles. Jesus was still early in His ministry and so He was primarily ministering to the Jews at this time. Now, since Jesus was God, He knew what He was doing and how this would play out. He was going to do a work but He wanted to test her first. And so He essentially says, I’m here for the Jews at this time. And her response is basically, “Yeah, but I’ll take even the crumbs from You!” In another words, she believed that just a little bit of Jesus could heal her daughter.

A.W. Tozer once said that “God is looking for people through whom He can do the impossible. What a pity that we plan only the things we can do by ourselves.” This was definitely not the issue with the woman. She had a desperate faith. And that’s not a bad thing! She was desperate for Jesus to give even just a little bit of power to her daughter. And Jesus honored her for her desperate faith.

How about us? Do we have desperate faith? Or do we live safely within our own strength? What is something that requires the power of God to show up in your life? Will you have a faith like this mother, who believed Jesus could do anything? The “crumbs” of Jesus can produce more than anything we could ever accomplish in our own strength and power.

Pray for a way you need God to show up in a big way. Think about the same thing for someone in your life. Take time praying for their situation.

FRIDAY

// Mark 7:31-37

Myra Welch wrote a poem called "The Touch of the Master's Hand." Take a moment and read it...

Tw'as battered and scarred, and the auctioneer thought it scarcely worth his while to waste much time on the old violin, but held it up with a smile; "What am I bidden, good folks," he cried, "Who'll start the bidding for me?" "A dollar, a dollar; then two!" "Only two? Two dollars, and who'll make it three? Three dollars, once; three dollars twice; going for three..." But no, from the room, far back, a gray-haired man came forward and picked up the bow; Then, wiping the dust from the old violin, and tightening the loose strings, he played a melody pure and sweet as caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer, with a voice that was quiet and low, said; "What am I bid for the old violin?" And he held it up with the bow. A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two? Two thousand! And who'll make it three? Three thousand, once, three thousand, twice, and going and gone," said he. The people cheered, but some of them cried, "We do not quite understand what changed its worth." Swift came the reply: "The touch of a master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune, and battered and scarred with sin, Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd, much like the old violin, A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine; a game - and he travels on.

"He is going" once, and "going twice, He's going and almost gone." But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd never can quite understand the worth of a soul and the change that's wrought by the touch of the Master's hand.

There's something about the touch of the "Master's hand" isn't there? Only Jesus can change a life. Only Jesus can take away an addiction. Only Jesus can give life true joy and purpose. That's what the deaf man who could barely speak came to find out. Just one touch of the "Master's hand" and he was healed. Jesus was God, He could have simply healed Him without touching Him. We've seen Him do that in other portions of Scripture.

But Jesus chose to heal him by touching him. There's power in a touch. We are impacted by physical touch. It communicates love and tenderness. Jesus wanted the man to feel His touch, to feel the tenderness Jesus had for him. It's true for us as well. Jesus loves us tenderly. He cares about the pains and hurts of our lives. He wants to touch our lives and let us experience the change that takes place from the touch of the Master's hand!

How do you need Jesus to touch your life? Take time praying to the Master.

MARK 8

// WEEK EIGHT

MONDAY

// Mark 8:1-10

In 1799, Conrad Reed discovered a seventeen-pound rock while fishing in Little Meadow Creek. Not knowing what it was made of, his family used it as a doorstop for three years. In 1802, his father, John Reed, took it to a jeweler who identified it as a lump of gold worth about \$3,600 (equivalent to \$76,000 today). That lump of gold, which was used as a doorstop for three years in North Carolina, is one of the biggest gold nuggets ever found east of the Rockies.

This man had a treasure for three years without ever realizing it. You could say the same for the disciples. They ministered with Jesus for three years before His death. And they never seemed to really grasp how magnificent and powerful He really was. Take the story in today's passage. Jesus had already done a similar miracle of multiplying the bread and the fish. But how did these disciples respond? Verse 4 tells us, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?"

How? Hello, this is Jesus. He's already showed you how. Pray over the few pieces you have and watch Jesus work. Perhaps we shouldn't be so hard on the disciples. How many times have we had a hard time trusting Jesus, even though we've seen Him work time and time again in our lives in similar ways. We sure can have short-term spiritual memory sometimes, can't we?

It would be a good idea for us to take time on a regular basis and remem-

ber the works of God in our lives over the years. This is exactly what the Psalmist teaches in Psalm 77:11-12... "I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember Your wonders of old. I will ponder all Your work, and meditate on Your mighty deeds." How often are we taking time to "remember the deeds of the Lord"? Thanksgiving shouldn't just be a holiday, it should be a way of life.

Verse 8 says, "And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full." Not only did they have all they needed, there was plenty left over. Isn't that just like God? He not only meets our needs, but He goes above and beyond. Jesus said in John 10, "I've come to give you life, and life abundantly." His blessings are overflowing in our lives. We need to be very intentional in praising God for His goodness to us.

We need to ask when we have a need, but we also need to make it a regular part of our spiritual disciplines to show gratitude through worship. If we do, perhaps we won't forget, like the disciples did, when a need arises. We will remember, Jesus will go above and beyond, we will be filled and there will be some left over!

Take some time to reflect different ways that God has shown up and met your needs over the past year. Now spend time simply thanking Him for how he met those needs.

TUESDAY

// Mark 8:11-21

If you've ever spent time in the ocean, you will know that the waves move in a certain direction. But oftentimes, the direction is subtle. It's a "slow drift." You could be floating in the water or playing with your kids, but before long you'll be a distance away from your towel and chair on shore without realizing it. It'd be different if you were in the Gully River of West Virginia. You'd definitely know you're heading in a direction! And if you're not in a raft it might be to go and meet Jesus!

A slow drift can happen to anyone if they're not paying attention. It can happen in your marriage when you stop taking time to work on the relationship. It can happen at work, when you allow little compromises. It can happen with God when you begin to skip daily time with Him. Any of us can experience a slow drift. Jesus uses a different metaphor for this, He uses the "leaven" used in bread. A little bit can affect the whole dough.

Specifically, Jesus was talking about unbiblical teaching that begins to make its way into a person's beliefs. It happens in theological seminars, when a little unbiblical teaching occurs. It can begin to affect other teachings and before you know it, the seminary has gone theologically liberal. And it can happen in our daily lives, when we begin to believe a lie from Satan and begin to justify unbiblical behavior. It can lead us to an ungodly lifestyle that can hurt our relationship with God and destroy our relationships with others.

The slow drift. Jesus tried to warn His disciples of this. But all they were thinking about were their bellies. Their own personal wants and needs above the kingdom. We can be guilty of this if we aren't careful. And when this happens, it can lead to little compromises that can drift us into bigger ones. Thank goodness for God's mercy and grace. He didn't give up on the disciples and they ended up getting it right eventually. But in this passage Jesus had it right, "Do you not yet understand?" (v. 21)

Jesus had 12 loaves left over the first time He miraculously fed the crowd and He had 7 loaves left over the second time. Jesus will always take care of the needs of His people, and He will go above and beyond. Certainly His patience went above and beyond for the disciples. But His patience and grace in their life would pay off. They would end up taking the gospel around the world after He went back to heaven. Jesus kept them from a slow drift.

How about us? Are we avoiding slow drifts in our lives? If we keep in God's Word we can be guarded against unbiblical drifts in our thinking and behavior. Consistent, ongoing prayer can keep us from drifting farther and farther into worry and fear. And having people in our lives who will "speak the truth in love" can help reveal the drifts we don't realize may be happening. Jesus is good and He is gracious. If there's been some drifting in your life, bring it to Jesus. He patiently worked with the disciples and He will do the same with us.

Are there any drifts that have been happening in your life? If so, confess and ask God to help you bring Jesus back to the center of your life.

WEDNESDAY

// Mark 8:22-26

Sometimes small towns can have a big impact on history. Kitty Hawk, North Carolina only has about 3,000 people. But it was the site of the first flight by a powered airplane. Dahlonega, Georgia has just over 6,500 residents. But it was where the American gold rush began, when a deer hunter tripped over a rock and discovered that it was gold. And then there's Lexington, Massachusetts, a town of about 30,000. It was here that the first shots of the Revolutionary War took place.

Bethsaida was a town that meant "house of hunting/fishing." It was a small fishing village on the coast of the Sea of Galilee. Yet big things happened here. It was the birthplace of Peter and his brother Andrew, and Phillip. And seven miracles were performed there. One of them being the healing of the blind man in today's passage. This certainly isn't the only example of big things happening in small places.

The most significant of all was Bethlehem. In the days of Jesus, the population was 1,435. But it was the birth of "I" that made this the most significant place on earth. It was the birthplace of Jesus. What bigger event could happen than that! Jesus loved to do the significant in the insignificant. That should be good news to us.

If you are feeling insignificant, you are a prime candidate of seeing the significant happen. Look at the ragtag resume of the disciples... fishermen, a corrupt tax collector, a political zealot, among others. Yet they were part of the most significant time in history: the days of Jesus on earth. And they would go on to have a significant impact in the history of Christendom. God delights in doing the significant in the insignificant.

Take the man from today's passage. He was an unknown blind man, living in a little known town. But he had friends and family who loved him and brought him to Jesus. And Jesus healed the man. And here we are, 2,000 years later, talking about it. That's what can happen when Jesus touches our lives. When we allow Him to have all of us. When we believe by faith that God can do great things in our lives.

Feeling insignificant? Perfect. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:27, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong." People can only come to Christ when they come humbly. God wants to use us to help people do that. And He uses the "foolish" and the "weak." That makes many of us prime candidates. Let God have all of you, no matter how insignificant you may feel. If He did it back then, He can do it today.

Offer up a simple prayer to God today... "God, take my insignificant life and do something significant for your glory and for the good of your kingdom. Amen."

THURSDAY

// *Mark 8:27-30 & Matthew 16:13-20*

There was a popular game show in the 1960's called "To Tell the Truth." In the show, a person of notoriety and two imposters tried to match wits with a panel of four celebrities. The object of the game was to fool the celebrities into voting for the two impostors. There was only one who told the truth about their real identity. Jesus played a little game with the disciples, asking them to reveal Jesus' real identity. He asked the question, "Who do people say that I am?" (Mark 8:27) And Peter won the game!

The answer... "You are the Christ." Now Peter didn't win a trip to Hawaii or a brand new car, but He did win the admiration of His leader, Jesus. And he did win "keys" (Matthew 16:19). And it was for something far greater than a car, it was for the kingdom of heaven. Keys represent authority. People in authority have keys. And Peter, along with the other disciples would be given authority when Jesus went back to heaven, to impact the world for the kingdom of God. They would establish the early church, which is covered in the book of Acts.

This crew of men sure didn't seem like good nominees to be world-changers when you look at their lives in the gospels. They didn't realize who Jesus fully was or why He did or taught certain things. They argued and bickered among themselves. And yet these men would be used mightily of God, and here we are today still talking about them. Now,

they didn't own the keys; Jesus did. Just like if you have teenage kids. They don't own the car but they have the authority to drive the car when you give it to them.

Despite the disciples weaknesses, the reason they impacted lives for the kingdom of God is because they went in the authority and power of Jesus Christ. It's the same today with us. We certainly don't feel up to the task. Sometimes our faith is small and we bicker and fight when we should be loving and serving. Our lives can look a bit like the disciples. But Jesus still wants to use us. He has given us "keys," the authority of His name to impact lives.

Don't you just love the way Jesus put it in Matthew 16:18? "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." There is nothing Satan can do to stop the movement of God when the church moves out on mission for Jesus, in the name of Jesus, with the power of Jesus! Each of the disciples made a lasting impact.

Here's what the disciples did after Jesus went back to heaven, according to tradition. Andrew brought the gospel to Bulgaria. Bartholomew was a missionary to India. James (Son of Alphaeus) stayed and served in Jerusalem and James (son of Zebedee) served in Judea, and was the first disciple martyred for the faith. John was banished to Patmos because of the gospel, but wrote the book of Revelation while there.

Matthew became a missionary in Parthia (modern day Iran) and Peter led the early establishment of the church and would go on to serve in other lands including Italy and Asia. Philip took the gospel to Turkey. Simon the Zealot served the church in Jerusalem, Judas son of James was a missionary to Edessa the surrounding areas of modern day Iraq, and Syria. And Thomas went from doubting the resurrection of Jesus to spreading the gospel in Iran, Afghanistan and India.

These men went on to impact the world because “the gates of hell shall not prevail.” God still wants to use His people to impact lives around the world. What has God called you too? Our perfect God delights in using imperfect people. Will you offer your life in service to the Savior? Hell can’t stop you if you do!

Pray for one opportunity this week to step out by faith and share the hope of Jesus with someone in need. Take time praying about a possible ministry where God could use you.

FRIDAY

// Mark 8:31-38

A powerful true story is found in the book “Leadership” (Bill Hybels)... “All he ever really wanted in life was more. He wanted more money, so he parlayed inherited wealth into a billion-dollar pile of assets. He wanted more fame, so he broke into the Hollywood scene and soon became a filmmaker and star.

He wanted more sensual pleasures, so he paid handsome sums to indulge his every sexual urge. He wanted more thrills, so he designed, built, and piloted the fastest aircraft in the world. He wanted more power, so he secretly dealt political favors so skillfully that two U.S. presidents became his pawns. All he ever wanted was more.

He was absolutely convinced that more would bring him true satisfaction. Unfortunately, history shows otherwise. He concluded his life emaciated; colorless; sunken chest; fingernails in grotesque, inches-long corkscrews; rotting, black teeth; tumors; innumerable needle marks from his drug addiction. Howard Hughes died believing the myth of more. He died a billionaire junkie, insane by all reasonable standards.”

Jesus had a whole different idea of what brings real meaning, purpose, and joy in life. In fact, it’s the opposite of what Howard Hughes thought. In vs. 35-37, Jesus said, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?”

Live for yourself and you die to a life of eternal value. Die to yourself, and live for Jesus and His mission and you have found a life worth living and an eternity that’s been secured. But what does that really mean to “die to self”? Or as Jesus put it, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross

and follow me” (v. 34).

To die to self, or “take up his cross,” means that it’s Jesus’ values, goals, and priorities that guide what we say and do. It’s living to advance the kingdom of God not our own kingdom. It’s making much of His name not our own. It’s pursuing relationships with a selfless spirit like the Savior instead of a self-absorbed one like the world teaches. It truly is a counter-cultural life we’ve been called to.

It’s worth the sacrifice because we will never sacrifice more than Christ did. He gave His life on the Cross to pay for our sins yet He rose from the dead to give us the power over sin, Satan and death. His life brings life to us. And that’s a message the world needs to hear. That’s the hope that no amount of money, fame or pleasure could give. Imagine if Hughes has found Jesus? The joy he could have had. The things he could have done with all that money to advance the gospel. Live your life for self and you lose it. Lose yourself for the Savior and you find it. What would it look like to lose your life, to die to yourself, for the sake of Jesus?

Take time reading in the gospels about the death and resurrection of Jesus. Think of ways you need to die to self in order to live for the kingdom. Ask God for the courage to do so. Take time thanking Jesus for His incredible sacrifice on our behalf.

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