

Walking in the Master's Steps

Mark 1:9-20

The **PURPOSE** of this Mark 1 lesson is to help us

1. learn from Jesus' example of what it fundamentally means to both be His disciple and to help make disciples of others; and
2. know a next step we can take with at least one person who can grow as a disciple who will one day make disciples

PRAYER

Ask Jesus, our Divine Teacher and model, and His Spirit to speak to your heart and open your mind to what it means to His follower.

Introduction to the Story

We know little of Jesus' childhood, though we can assume He grew up learning the Torah, much like many children of his time. What we do know is that when Jesus turned 30 and entered the world as a mature adult, that world would never be the same. John 3:16 is often used as the reason Christ came in the first place: to help us believe in Him. But is being a Christian simply believing in Jesus and acknowledging that Jesus is the Son of God? Clearly not, for the devil does that and he is not a Christian (James 2:19).

Some churches preach and model the message that being a Christian is primarily about being born again: we receive Christ as our Savior, are freed from sin and death so we can go to Heaven one day. Some

emphasize that our faith is about having a personal relationship with Jesus who will always love us, be with us and meet all our needs. Other churches communicate that being a Christian is mostly about being more kind, nice and ethical than if people didn't believe in Christ. While each view carries a seed of truth, these perceptions are all too small.

So just what does it mean to be a Christian, and is this the word we should call ourselves?

At the beginning of Mark's gospel (1:9-20) are four brief, core stories: Jesus' baptism, temptation, first sermon, and calling of the first disciples. In them we find that to be a "Christian²:" is to be both a disciple and a disciple maker for Jesus Christ.

¹ The word "Christian" only shows up once in the New Testament (Acts 11:26), and was a name given to believers by those outside the church.

² Christian literally means "little Christ," which is not far from the goal of a Jesus disciple. It was no accident that when Jesus started His ministry, He used a well-known word to identify those who would be loyal to him: disciple (or "learner, follower"). The word disciple and its derivatives are found in the gospels some 286 times.

Discipleship in Jesus' context was much more than knowing; the disciples' primary concern was to model their rabbi's lifestyle and habits. Learning from Jesus involved teachings that were focused on transforming the head and heart. The twelve lived with Jesus for three years. In the context of that intimate relationship, they observed and absorbed the Master's habits—how He prayed, listened, loved, healed, taught, and so much more.

Jesus' primary call is for our passionate commitment to first imitate and become like Him in every area of our life and to help others do the same. The four stories in today's lesson emphasize four areas of discipleship. First, Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:9-11) shows us that disciples first of all know their identity and purpose. Second, His wilderness experience (Mark 1:12-13) reminds us that we grow through times of struggle and testing.

Third, Jesus' first sermon makes it clear that if Jesus is King, then our lives center around His Kingdom;

this requires repentance, a total abandonment of our former loyalties that are in direct conflict with His nature and His design (Mark 1:15). God enlarges His Kingdom as His disciples submit to His reign in every area of their lives. It is no surprise that Jesus would use this image, the Kingdom of God, more than any other, to describe the reality and hope of seeing all of life come again under His Father's rule, as it had been in the Garden of Eden. In these twelve, God's Kingdom seeds would grow in and through, just like they do today for Jesus followers. These small seeds will one day become a tree with branches that cover the whole world, restoring the best of the Garden of Eden.

The fourth story in Mark 1 lifts up the other essential side of the discipleship coin: giving ourselves away to others, "making fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). Discipleship must go past the temptation to anchor at personal growth; making "fishers" of others, making disciples who make disciples.

Sharing Question

If being a Christian is synonymous with being a disciple of Christ, then our church programs and efforts should have some tangible outcomes as we see people become more like Jesus and actively begin making disciples of others. List 5-7 traits and habits you would expect to see growing in the lives of Jesus' disciples today.

In your opinion, what would be the two or three most important activities, relationships and experiences to help disciples grow into these traits, and help others to develop them as well? (Note how often these activities are happening in your life and the life of your church or organization)



Story in Context

Read and answer all that is below in order to orient yourself to this lesson's biblical story.

What Surrounds Our Story

Mark 1:4-8: John the Baptist's ministry is where Mark set the stage for Jesus' taking center stage. He connects John to Jesus through the continuity of baptism: John first baptized the people who come to repent and then he baptized Jesus—two similar and connected, but very different, experiences indeed.

Mark 1:21-3:22: Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom was at hand and by implication, that He was the King. In these stories, we see miracles, teaching and exorcisms as evidence that His message was true. Jesus even implied He is God when He pronounced forgiveness to the paralytic. In Him, the new wine has come.

Mark 3:1-13: After calling the first four disciples, Jesus here stepped back from his early ministry gatherings to choose the twelve who will be His close disciples and who will represent the new twelve tribes of Israel.³

Background to a Disciple

For the Old Testament Jews, following God, or being a "learner," first meant knowing the Torah deep in their hearts and minds, often by memory. However, right practice was even more important than right beliefs. In contrast, the Greeks in Jesus' time had made the interaction between teacher and disciple more of an intellectual process than one of behavior change. Wisdom was seen as merely rational. The teacher primarily transmitted ideas, not lifestyle transformation.

"Disciple" in Greek is *manthano*. As you read this background of the term "disciple," see if you can highlight

three to six enduring realities about the process and purpose of disciples.⁴

AMONG THE GREEKS BEFORE CHRIST'S TIME

Ordinary use: The basic meanings of this word for the Greeks were:

1. to direct one's mind to something,
2. to have accustomed oneself to something,
3. (to seek) to experience,
4. in dialogue, to express a willingness to follow thoughts of a questioner, and
5. to learn skills under instruction.

In all of these, there is a foundation of an intellectual process that leads to external effects. The disciple must show intellectual initiative for the relationship to work.

Philosophical uses:

1. Socrates/Plato: Under their influence, education for the first time became an indispensable prerequisite for independent moral judgment and virtuous action. Questions and the dialectic method were used by the teacher for the divine task of education (i.e., bringing a pupil from unconscious to conscious reality with the goal of better behavior). Both the teacher and the student were active in this process.
2. Intellectualizing of learning process in the philosophy schools: By the time of Aristotle, the mind (Gr., *nous*, not the soul, Gr. *psyche*) had been elevated to the status of immortality because it was active in the process of knowledge. With the separation of mind from the rest of the "mortal body," it became easier to compartmentalize knowledge from the will and practical behavior. Over time, mental knowledge and behavior became distanced from each other. Previously,

³ Note: Jesus also represented and fulfilled Israel's Exodus 14-18 story when He 1) crossed through the "sea" in His baptism and 2) thereafter traveled into the wilderness to be tested (Mark 1:9-13).

⁴ Notes taken and adapted from Kittel's Theological Dictionary

the ideal had been the ability to exercise the nous (mind and will) and not just the amassing of right information; over time the desire for pure knowledge became the stronger pursuit.

OLD TESTAMENT/JUDAISM

The fear of God was taught not as only as the foundation of wisdom (Prov. 1:7), but also for the obedience of the whole person to God and His will. Only a person who walked in the path of obedience to God had “learned.” All they needed to know about God’s will was in the Torah. The whole person was involved in the OT, not just the mind. During the intertestamental and Hellenistic periods, however, Greek rationalism encouraged the intellectualization of the Jewish faith. In Jesus’ era, the word had a cultural and secular meaning of “learning of a trade,” and getting information on something.

Rabbis developed and included Old Testament ideas: They knew the Torah and set to obey God and His will

through it. Their learning process was exacting; things were learned by heart. The rabbis purposed that all in the community would be versed in the Torah. Students started young. To read the Torah and follow it without extensive learning was looked down on. Even with a good heart, those unlearned in God’s law would, in the long run, be a burden to the community.

NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus: In Christ, God’s will was revealed. He fulfilled the Torah. Learning for Jesus Christ then, was to be built on trusting and accepting Him as Son of God and as the divine Rabbi. Matthew 11:29 was central: “Learn from Me.” Jesus was greater than the rabbis, whose claim was to rightly expound the Scriptures. Jesus uniquely did not point to another authority, but to Himself (yet He did point to the Father as well). Jesus was, in a sense, a disciple of His own Master and Father from a very young age.

CONNECTIONS

In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul admonishes Timothy, his disciple, to pass on what was given to him to other faithful disciples who will teach others. This verse parallels our Mark 1 passage and has inspired some to suggest that discipleship implies each of us needs someone in our lives like:

- Paul: a mentor who is discipling us
- Barnabas: a like-minded friend who is walking with us
- Timothy: a person we are helping to follow Jesus and then make disciples

What might happen if we all had these three roles in our life filled?



Studying the Story

Read each section below, ideally out loud and as if you were there. Then answer the questions.

The Baptism and a Disciple's Identity

⁹At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

MARK 1:9-11

Jesus received much at His baptism:

1. **IDENTITY.** In the voice and words that came from heaven, Jesus received two understandings of His identity:
 - "Whom I love." These words affirmed what had been true since eternity: Jesus was the Son of His heavenly Father, a relationship of intimacy and affection. Jesus then received the gift of knowing who He was at the core: His Father's child.
2. **MESSIAH:** The words regarding Jesus' second understanding of His identity come from three well-known Old Testament passages; they represent the three main leadership roles God used to reconcile His people: king, prophet and priest. The Messiah would fulfill all three roles. Look up the following verses; see if you can match each scripture with one of the three leadership roles.
 - Psalm 2:7⁵
 - Isaiah 42:1⁶
 - Genesis 22:2⁷
3. As Jesus' disciples of Jesus, we are to become like Jesus. Does this include, at least in part, His identities of God's Son and Messiah/Savior? How would this be true? Not true? Explain.

5 "You are my Son" (Psalm 2:7). This Psalm was originally read during the coronation of a king. In Jesus' time this Psalm and king's title of son came to mean the Messiah, who would come and reign as King. In Jesus' time, it was believed that the Messiah would be a king like David leading the heavenly armies against the Roman legions. Once they were defeated, Israel's rule over the world on her rightful worldwide throne would be reestablished.

6 "...whom I love" (Genesis 22:2): Genesis 22 is the story where Abraham, like a priest, is asked to sacrifice his son. God promised to swap Isaac with a lamb for Abraham's sacrifice, but provided a ram instead. Jesus would then act as a priest bringing people before His Father, and then become the lamb that God had originally promised to Abraham. The people of Jesus' time believed the Messiah would, like a priest, mediate a renewed covenant with Yahweh.

7 "...with you I am well pleased" (Isaiah 42:1). Isaiah the prophet had foretold of a special servant that would come and bring hope to his suffering people. The popular view in Jesus' time: their deliverer would come in the spirit of Elijah the prophet (see Malachi 4); this explains why they thought John the Baptist might have been the Messiah.

4. *Power*: The descending Spirit of God made the words from heaven real and empowered Jesus to do the works the Messiah must do. Think of Jesus stories you already know, or flip through the gospel of Mark quickly: write down several examples of Jesus clearly demonstrating God's power in His ministry.

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The Wilderness and a Disciple's Testing

¹²At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

MARK 1:12-13

1. The Holy Spirit "compelled" Jesus into the wilderness. The first thing the Father chooses to do is to send His beloved Son into the place where evil spirits preside. The purpose was similar to what it was for Israel's time in the wilderness: to strengthen and to test Him, to deepen His dependence on the Father (Deuteronomy 8:2-3).

2. It may not be surprising to you that the Spirit of God still sends His disciples into the wilderness; based on what you know, have experienced or witnessed in others, what is an example of someone who came out of "the wilderness" stronger?

3. What about someone who came out with more doubts, disappointment or distance from God?

4. What might have been the difference between these two experiences and outcomes?

5. If Satan tried to tempt Jesus away from the Father's mission in the wilderness, we can expect the enemy to continue doing so at other times in His ministry. How can you see the same scheme of the evil one directly or subtly at work in the following two stories? For each, note both the temptation and how Jesus responded.

MARK 8:27-33 (ESPECIALLY VV. 32-33): _____

MARK 14:32-36 _____

Jesus' Gospel: Disciples and the Kingdom (of God)

¹⁴After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

MARK 1:14-15

- Both Jesus' "good news" and radical invitation are grounded in two parallel and synonymous phrases: "The time has come" and "the kingdom of God has come near." What expectations of Jesus' identity would have risen for those original Jewish disciples when hearing "the time for God's kingdom to come on earth is now?"

- What kind of things would these oppressed people now hope and expect Jesus to do?

- How would you write verse 15 into modern day language to be meaningful to audiences today?

- Note the parallel commands repent and believe. They are the entry commands into being Jesus' disciples. Biblically, to repent requires a 180-degree change in one's thinking and life direction. Believing is more than mental assent; it's trusting and relying on Jesus for everything. It's leaning the weight of our life on the good news that is Christ Himself. Which of the following statements can you most relate to concerning repent and believe? Explain.

- I have learned more limited understandings of repent and believe.
- I have heard and experienced more about faith and believing but less about repentance.
- I have known about both of these but have had a harder time finding people modeling them and doing them in my own life.
- I have grown steadily into understanding and doing these two commands over my faith journey.

Jesus Calls Four to Fishers of Men

¹⁶As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ¹⁸At once they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

MARK 1:16-20

1. In both encounters with these young fishermen, Jesus first comes to them walking along the shore, then He sees who and where they are, and finally He calls out to them with a personal invitation to follow. What about your experience of becoming a disciple? Who first “saw” you and your potential and spent time with you, befriended or mentored you, as a Jesus disciple?

2. Capernaum was a small town in which many people existed hand-to-mouth. For a family business to lose two young sons to follow a rabbi with radical teachings was no small hardship. And they didn't even seem to ask their father's permission to leave; this was no small thing in a patriarchal culture. Still, being religiously unclean, fishermen were never invited to be disciples of any Jewish rabbi. Put yourself in the parents' shoes. What positive and negative emotions might you have had about your children's decision to immediately drop their nets and leave? What might have gone on in your mind?

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PLEASE STOP YOUR PREPARATION HERE



Experiencing the Story

EVIL

The enemy would want us to distort our understanding of what it means to believe in God, to be a Christian. He wants to keep us from the powerful yet simple commitment to be a disciple of Jesus.

1. Read Matthew 4:1-11 for the devil's three temptations of Jesus during His wilderness experience. All of them try to distort the truth that Jesus heard from heaven at His baptism. Rewrite these three temptations in your own modern words.
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2. With Jesus not giving in to his temptations, the devil would naturally turn toward the disciples Jesus called. If you were set on changing the young men's minds about following Jesus, what lie would you put into their hearts or their parents' hearts?

JESUS

Christ had lived for eternity in full fellowship of the Trinity's love; yet when Jesus came to earth, He became fully human. Before Jesus became the premier discipler of others, He grew up like us, experiencing everything a human disciple would—except sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Write in one thought and feeling you could imagine Jesus having in each of these first four events of His ministry life:

... Jesus' Baptism (vv. 9-11), where Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit, heard the voice of God call Him Son and received His Father's commission to be Messiah.

... Jesus' Testing in the Wilderness (vv. 12-13), where the Holy Spirit compels Jesus into a season of being tempted by Satan and tested by God: will He be a Messiah that obeys the call to suffering and the cross, or will He seek His own will first?

... *Jesus' First Preaching* (vv. 14-15), where Jesus proclaimed, "The Kingdom and the King/Messiah you have long awaited are here and in Me. So, change your mind completely about what the Messiah and God's kingdom are about, and put your trust fully in Me, the good news of God!"

... *Jesus' Calling of the First Disciples* (vv. 16-20), where Jesus went to where they were, saw them in their full weakness and potential, and invited these unclean fishermen to be His disciples and change-makers.

THE CROWDS WHO HEARD JESUS' FIRST SERMON (VV. 15)

The crowds who heard Jesus' claim to bring God's kingdom (Mark 1:15) are made up of common people under Roman oppression who long for the coming of their Savior Messiah. These would likely have been some of the same people who had ventured into the desert to hear John's preaching, and to repent, confess their sins and be baptized (Mark 1:3-8). Jesus also asked the people to repent, as John the Baptist did, but things are different:

1. Remember that the people expected Jesus to be primarily a rescuer from Rome, to be a conqueror like king David. Imagine yourself now as one in the crowd: what mix of thoughts or feelings might you have experienced when you heard, "the time has come, and the Kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15)? Remember, Jesus as yet had done no miracle to "prove" He was the awaited Messiah.

2. Put yourself in their shoes: what would you likely have said or done after hearing Jesus preach this first time?

PETER, JAMES, JOHN, AND ANDREW

In leaving their nets and their families, the fishermen ignored many cultural expectations. But they were also invited to be this new teacher's disciple, something "unclean" fishermen were not asked to do.

1. Mark omits the details of their longer conversation and personal encounter we can likely assume these four experienced with Jesus before He called them. We should also assume they had all heard Jesus preaching (Mark 1:14-15) at least once. Imagine you were them. What words, hopes, emotions or thoughts might you have experienced that would lead you to drop your nets and do something so radical?

2. The brothers left behind their nets and boats, their father and families, to begin following Jesus. What do these things represent to the young men?

3. What kinds of “nets” or other things might people today like you and me have to “leave behind” in order to follow Jesus?



Living the Story

The following questions are designed for discussion as well as personal reflection. They move us from who God is, to our personal story, and then to our place in the larger story of the world.

1. **GOD.** Jesus follows the Spirit's and Father's leading into the baptism and wilderness experiences (Mark 1:9-13). What do those experiences reveal about Jesus' character?

... *His Baptism*

... *The Wilderness*

Review Jesus' declarations and commands in His first preaching (vv. 14-15), and then His words of invitation to the first and unlikely disciples (vv.16-20). What can we learn from these two scenes about Jesus' heart for His future disciples?

2. **OUR STORY.** If we, too, are Jesus' disciples, then it's worth considering: what are one or two realities or actions of Jesus in the four stories that you need and want to experience?

What is one thing that would likely have to change in you and/or your church for this new reality to grow in you?

3. **OTHERS.** Imagine you are the lead pastor or the youth pastor of your church. You want to create a path-way(s) for people to grow as Jesus' disciples and then as disciple makers. Where would you start? Would you alter existing programs? Start new ones? Eliminate some? Elaborate.

4. **REFLECT.** *"God what have I been learning from you?"* How has your experience of this Mark 1 story helped you better understand what it means to both be His disciple and to help make disciples of others?

Respond

In Prayer

Thank Jesus for being our faithful and divine Master. Listen for and hold on to one area of Jesus' life in today's lesson that you long to imitate. Repent. Declare your belief that Jesus can make this change happen in you.

In Action

Pray about, the meet and talk with one person to explore the possibility of him/her walking with you as either a mentor or mentee, a Paul or a Timothy.

Looking Ahead

Jesus' opening sermon in Mark is "The time has come; the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" In Luke, Jesus' opening words shared in His hometown synagogue are quite different, complementing and expanding the words in Mark and revealing to us the full breadth of Jesus' purposes on earth.

Further Study

Background on the Book of Mark

BACKGROUND TO MARK THE AUTHOR

Mark was an evangelist who worked with Paul in his ministry. He was the cousin of Barnabas and a “spiritual son” of Peter. He grew up in the early church; his family’s house was used for assemblies of prayer and was where Peter came when he escaped from prison. Few people were in a better position than Mark to learn from and observe the life of Jesus. If his home was the site of the Last Supper, as history alleges, then Mark had firsthand knowledge of the last events of Jesus’ life. If his home was also the center of the Christian church, he was in contact with all the renowned figures of the Church.

Mark was clearly a good storyteller who masterfully weaves his details together. His style is colloquial and vivid.

BACKGROUND TO THE GOSPEL OF MARK

The book of Mark was written in 63-70 AD and is believed to have been written and published in Rome. Mark’s audience was the church in Rome, part of the Gentile mission. His gospel is filled with Jesus’ ministry at Galilee and the events of the Passion Week. Although Mark was not one of the original twelve, his gospel’s credibility came from Peter, a reliable eyewitness to Jesus’ life and ministry. The vivid portrayals indicate not only that they were derived from a witness, but also from one who possessed keen observational and communication skills. Mark’s written gospel was grounded and shaped by an oral tradition formed within the Christian communities.

MARK’S AUDIENCE

Mark’s audience was probably Christians suffering in Rome, a church community under threat. If this

was the case, then his emphasis on the suffering inherent in discipleship would have been a source of encouragement and hope. Mark’s gospel challenges its readers with a radical, costly discipleship, yet it also promises them future rewards. The church was young. In some circles, Jesus and Paul had been discredited because they had suffered and died for speaking the truth. The church in Rome needed a summons to discipleship and reassurance that their efforts would not be in vain.

THE CONTENT OF MARK’S GOSPEL

Mark is the most straightforward of all the gospels and delivers the clearest report of Jesus’ life. It contains no genealogy or birth story, which is what Matthew and Luke have in common⁸. This book was likely the first and shortest gospel to be written. Mark left out many of Jesus’ teachings and story details, preferring to keep his gospel pace swift.

Omitting the birth and childhood of Jesus, Mark begins and ends his gospel abruptly. His gospel concentrates on the three years of Jesus’ public ministry. A series of graphic incidents commence in Galilee and close tragically in Jerusalem.

Mark portrays Jesus as the Son of Man in action, a “doer of the word.” Jesus does not elicit faith by His teaching; those who believed His teaching already believed in Him. Faith was evoked by the presence of His person, as one who could be seen, heard, and felt. As Mark the storyteller accurately portrayed this intimate, caring, and compassionate Jesus, readers could also see and then choose to drop their own “nets” and follow.

Mark presents Jesus and the disciples with genuine exchanges that are both human and vulnerable.

8 The longer gospels of Matthew and Luke used Mark as a primary source but then added details that Mark overlooked.

Living with the human Jesus seems to keep the disciples from realizing the Rabbi's true identity. Over and over they are described as not perceiving, understanding, or believing Jesus was who He said He was, the Messiah. True, Peter did declare Jesus was the "Christ," the Messiah, but then immediately denied that the Christ would suffer, indirectly tempting Jesus with a false and secular version of His call (Mark 8:27-33). This episode is a springboard for Mark to clarify that God's Messiah would first suffer and die before being exalted. This truth is what the Jews refused to believe, and the disciples could not understand; a suffering savior was a stumbling block both to Jesus' first followers and also to the early church suffering in Rome. And it's still true today.

MARK'S CONCLUSION

Some readers experience dissatisfaction when they reach the conclusion of the book of Mark. There are

no post-resurrection stories in his Gospel. Readers are left wondering whether the promises Jesus made were ever fulfilled. (Note: Mark 16:9-20 is a later addition and not originally part of the gospel. The abruptness of his ending likely led scribes to add these verses to fill in Mark's "missing finish.")

One noteworthy suggestion is that Mark's abrupt ending was intentional. Mark's structuring of his gospel's ending leaves us hanging precisely because he wants his listeners to continue this Jesus story into their own worlds and lives. So, for Mark, the resurrection of Christ is not the end of the story but the beginning of a new creation; we are to pick up the story where Mark 16:9 leaves off. Our lives are to "write" the ending of Mark's gospel. Just as the story of the Church in Acts is the continuation of the story of Jesus in Luke, Mark's ending offers an implicit question: "Now what will you do to be a disciple and make disciples in Jesus' Kingdom?"