

NOTES FOR LEADERS

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO MARK'S GOSPEL

1. *Mark was probably the first of the four Gospels to be written and was used by the other writers as a source for their respective Gospels. Second century sources point to Mark as the author, and all claim that he was an editor for the apostle Peter and that Peter was Mark's primary source. Mark would also have had access to oral and written accounts preserved by the early Church.*
2. *Earliest traditions indicate that Roman Christians were the targets of Mark's writings. His Gospel contains many terms that indicate Gentile readers.*
3. *The narrative is usually concise and focuses more on the action of Christ than on his teachings. A favourite word for Mark is "immediately" and carries the concept of the Christ of action.*
4. *The Christology is not as "high" as the other three Gospels. Jesus is designated as the "Son of God" in the opening verse of the Gospel but usually it is the demons or foreigners who see Jesus as divine rather than the disciples or critics (see Mark 5:7). There are implied but not direct statements in Mark about the pre-existence of Christ.*
5. *There is a strong focus on the humanity of Christ and the actions and healings of Christ rather than his teaching.*
5. *Much of the Gospel is built around conflict stories, usually between Jesus and the Pharisees.*
6. *There is a strong social Gospel emphasis as will become clearer in the studies.*
7. *The path of Mark is generally from conflict with the Jews to the Cross.*
8. *Most of the action occurs in Galilee.*
9. *According to Mark, Jesus is the secret Messiah who is not fully revealed until the resurrection. He encourages many of the people he healed to keep the healing a secret. (See Mark 1:43.4-5).*
10. *The stories and incidents are gathered around themes rather than presented in chronological order. (See the conflict stories in Mark 2-3).*
11. *At times there is a strong feeling of "eye witness" detail. The tradition that Peter was Mark's primary source is consistent with the observation that the greater details are found when Peter was present in the story (see Mark 5:1-20).*

STUDY 1. NOTES FOR LEADERS

In the calling of the Disciples, Mark gives the impression that this could have been the first encounter between the disciples and Jesus but this needs to be balanced with John 1:35-42 and Luke 5:1-11. Their calling is placed first in Mark's record as the four were seen to have a senior role in the disciple group. Archaeology has confirmed that there was an active fishing industry in the area in the first century.

1. a. Have you ever made an impulsive decision? What was it?
b. Did it turn out to be a good decision or do you wish you had decided otherwise?
2. **Read through Mark 1:16-20.**
 - a. What indications are there that the fishermen made impulsive decisions?
 - b. What does this passage imply about Jesus, his personality and character?

Mark is keen to present the "earthy" Christ and we can assume a charisma and manliness that would have appealed to these coarse fishermen. Note too that Jesus does the calling and takes the initiative which is fully consistent with the theology of 'covenant' as found in the scriptures.

3. **See John 1:35-42 and Luke 5:1-11.**
How do these passages modify our understanding of this story?

Luke and John present different traditions that imply that there was prior contact before the call in Mark's Gospel. Luke ties the story of the abundance of fish in the deeper water (perhaps a symbol of the universality of the Gospel) while John calls on a different tradition regarding the call of the Disciples and the renaming of Simon/Peter.

4. **See Mark 6:35-37, 8:31-34, 9:2-8, 9:33-37, 14:35-38, 14:66-72, 16:9-14**
 - a. What do these passages tell us about these men and the feelings that they expressed during the times of following Christ? Do these verse give you hope?
 - b. Do you ever feel inadequate to claim to be a follower of Christ? When do these feelings peak?
 - c. When do you find that your lack of understanding or lack of belief peaks? Is it when you are stressed, under challenge about your faith, or involved in conflict, etc?

All of these passages underline the humanity, lack of belief, or lack of understanding of the disciples, referred to as the "dark side" in the sermon. There was much growing to do! If your group is reasonably large divide the group into pairs and give them one passage to analyze and report back to the others in the group. The point of the questions is to stress that all of us carry our imperfections but Christ demonstrates a remarkable patience with us.

5. Why does Zebedee get a mention? Is he mentioned because:
 - a. It is an eye-witness detail?
 - b. The readers are being assured that the fishing business will be okay?
 - c. Zebedee represents the voice of reason and tradition... "Let the young ones do their own crazy thing."
6. a. What would you have said if you were Zebedee?
b. When you made your decision for Christ, or became involved in the church, was there anybody who urged you not to get involved? How did you meet their objection?

The sermon suggests that Zebedee would have been the voice of reason and reality. He would have told them to get back in the boat and get on with their job.

7. What clues are given to us about the fishing business by the mention of the hired servants? What does this tell us about the call of the fishermen?

This suggests that the business must have been quite affluent and that the early Disciples were being called from affluence to a situation of personal sacrifice.

8. **How would you react to the following?**

“I thought God was calling me to train either for ministry or missionary work. However I cannot afford to give up my job.”

9. Has Christ ever called you in any way to ministry, discipleship, Christian service of any type, or to new directions? How did you hear that call? How did you respond?