

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS

Discipleship and Evangelism Commission

Following Jesus

“Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark”: Bible Study.

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS
WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA
DISCIPLESHIP AND EVANGELISM COMMISSION

“Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark” : Bible Study

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How to use this Bible study

You have in your hands, or on your computer screen, the second Bible study booklet sponsored by the Assembly of Confessing Congregations. The hope is that you will use this study in a small group to go deeper into the scriptures, gain insight into discipleship, and renew your passion to follow Jesus today. The small group of your local church is a fantastic setting for the Holy Spirit to minister to you, the transforming power of the gospel, as you journey together through the Gospel of Mark.

This Bible study guide is written in a straightforward, practical and thoughtful style. To get everyone involved in your discussions, encourage participants to prepare by reading ahead.

ICON KEY		About the icons
	Open It	Each lesson divides into four easy-to-follow sections. The icon key provides an easy reference for you to follow through the study.
	Explore It	
	Get It	The section called “Open It” introduces your group to a specific life experience touched by each lesson. The “Open It” question is an opportunity for the leader to ‘break the ice’ and open up good discussion in preparation for the Bible study questions.
	Apply It	

“Explore It” is designed to assist people to comprehend the scriptural passage together so that everyone is starting with the same level of familiarity with the text. Some groups move quickly through this section because everyone has read ahead and prepared well.

“Get It” brings into focus the biblical principles to be learned with questions or a special insight.

“Apply It” helps you make connections with your own situation and the needs of your community around you. The questions are designed to help you find areas in your life where you can apply the biblical truths. The **“Get It”** and **“Apply It”** sections are where most of your fruitful discussion will take place.

The **“Pray It”** section is an encouragement to begin and end each study with prayer, asking for the Holy Spirit’s guidance, direction, and wisdom. At the conclusion of your Bible study, pray for your local church and for the spread of the truth of the gospel in your community.

FOLLOWING JESUS

The suggested time allotments for each section of the Bible study meeting are listed below. Always leave time for informal conversation and Holy Spirit filled fellowship:

Bible Study section	60 minute Bible Study	75 minute Bible Study
Open It	5 minutes	10 minutes
Explore It	10 minutes	10 minutes
Get It	15 minutes	20 minutes
Apply It	15 minutes	15 minutes
Pray It	15 minutes	20 minutes

“Able to make you wise for salvation”

“As for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

2 Tim 3:14-17

Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

“The Gospel of Mark is a gospel of action.” **Background**

Mark writes his Gospel in an era when the storm clouds of persecution were gathering over the young Christian church. A great fire had devastated seventy percent of the city of Rome in 64 AD. The fires, fanned by summer winds, quickly spread through the dry wooden structures of the city and raged unchecked for a week. The rumour spread that the Emperor Nero had started the blaze to begin a massive rebuilding project that had earlier been rejected. To divert blame from himself, Nero pointed his finger at the Christians. It is in this tense environment where Christians are being arrested, imprisoned and executed (also see Peter's first letter) that Mark writes. The Gospel had to be written quickly before those who had known Jesus personally had lost their lives in the great persecution.

The Gospel

The Gospel of Mark is a gospel of action. It is the earliest Gospel written, giving a brief and direct account of Jesus Christ. Mark's gospel has been described as a "passion narrative with an introduction" because eight of the sixteen chapters are concerned with the events of the last period of Jesus' earthly ministry. Peter's confession of "You are the Christ" (Mark 8:27-30) is a defining moment in the story of Jesus. Everything in the Gospel leading up to Peter's confession has been moving the reader of the Gospel to this recognition. From Caesarea Philippi the road leads straight to the cross, as Jesus begins to teach that "the Son of Man must suffer many things... and that he must be killed..." (Mark 8:31). The defining moment of the second half of the Gospel happens, when the Roman Centurion utters the profound words, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39).

Following Jesus

Mark's aim is to tell the compelling story of Jesus, and to answer the question "Who is this man?" This is the most important question anyone can ask in his or her life. Mark's Gospel gives us an exciting answer to this burning question; a gripping portrait of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As the readers of the Gospel have their own defining moments, they hear the call to follow Him in discipleship that is characterised by giving themselves to a costly, self-denying, faith-filled 'kingdom of God' mission.

So let us use Mark's Gospel as our guide to following Jesus today. Let the great adventure begin.

Week One:

Following Jesus: the Cost and Conflict

Key verse: “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” Mark 1:15

Preparation before the Bible study: Read Chapter One.

Read in the group: Mark 1:14 - 28

God’s special time had come. Jesus’ message was direct and compelling. Such a message demanded a response. Four fishermen who were prepared to pay the cost of following Jesus dropped everything. In the second half of the reading Mark gives us a summary of what may have been a typical day in the early part of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee (21-39). As Jesus began teaching “with authority” there was an immediate conflict with evil.



OPEN IT

1. What does it take to get your full attention and an immediate response, at home, with friends or at work?

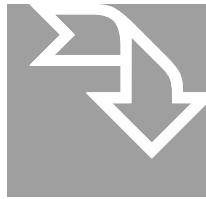


EXPLORE IT

2. How did Jesus want people to respond to the fact that the kingdom of God was near? (1:15)

FOLLOWING JESUS

3. How did Jesus get people to follow Him? What does it mean to be "fishers of men"? (1:17)
4. What sacrifice did James and John make to follow Jesus? (1:20)
5. What do the evil spirit's words tell us about Christ? (1:24)
6. How did Jesus respond to the man possessed by the evil spirit? (1:25-26)



GET IT

7. What does Jesus ask all of us to do?
8. What does it mean for a person to sacrifice personal achievements, friends, or even family for the sake of Christ? What prevents you from following Jesus wholeheartedly?
9. What did Jesus believe about evil spirits? What does this story tell us about evil spirits and Jesus' power? Is demon possession a reality today?
10. Jesus' authority is clearly demonstrated in this passage. Where does Jesus' authority in your life cause conflict today?



APPLY IT

11. What is one way you can show submission to Christ's authority in your life throughout this week?

PRAY IT

For what personal need or issue will you ask Jesus, through prayer, for help or healing this week?

Week Two:

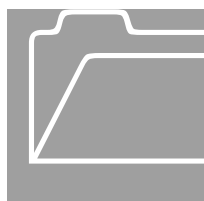
Following Jesus: Called In and Sent Out

Key verse: "He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach." Mark 3:14-15

Preparation before the bible study: Read Chapter Three.

Read in the group: Mark 3:7-35

In contrast to the rejection of the religious leaders, Jesus is welcomed by the ordinary people of Galilee. From them he chooses the twelve and prepares them to be sent out. Time and time again Jesus goes to the heart of the issue and presents a clear choice for his followers and opponents. He does not avoid opposition even when it comes from family and friends.



OPEN IT

1. What is it like to be lost in a huge crowd (such as in a store, airport, or stadium)?



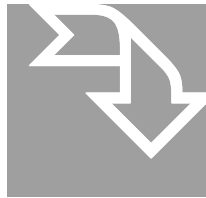
EXPLORE IT

2. What do the details of this story tell us about Jesus' priorities? (3:7-12)
3. What did Jesus want His apostles to do with their time? (3:14-15)
Note: Jesus sent out after a period of training, the group of twelve

FOLLOWING JESUS

disciples. These were given authority to heal and to cast out demons. This training task was a foretaste of the task set by Jesus on His ascension; to go out into the entire world and to teach the good news. An Apostle is one who is a witness to the resurrection who has been commissioned by Christ to spread His good news. The word apostle literally means one who is sent. In Ephesians 2:20 Paul considers the Apostles to be a major building block of the Church.

4. Besides Jesus' own family, who else found fault with Him? (3:22)
5. How did Jesus refute His opponents' accusation that He was possessed by the devil? (3:23-27)
6. What did Jesus' family think of Him? (3:21) How did Jesus respond to the request by His mother and brothers? (3:33-35)



GET IT

7. What do you learn from this passage about Jesus' attitude toward His ministry?
8. What criteria do you think Jesus used to choose His apostles? What does the fact that Jesus chose as apostles both Simon the Zealot, a political extremist, and Matthew the tax collector, a traitor working for the occupying government; tell us about the kingdom of God?
9. How do you think Jesus' mother and brothers responded to His actions in this story? When, if ever, have you been thought of as "out of your mind" by family members or other people because of your efforts to live a Christian life?
10. Why is it important for us to place even our families under the rule and place of Christ?



APPLY IT

11. What difference does it make in your life to know that Jesus has authority over all the evil powers of this world?

PRAY IT

Following Jesus sometimes conflicts with the interests of your own family. Pray for your extended family members that do not understand your desire to follow Him.

Week Three:

Following Jesus: Faith and Mission

Key verse: "These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money in your belts." Mark 6:8

Preparation before the bible study: Read Chapter Six.

Read in the group: Mark 6:1-13

Jesus returns to his home town but gets a very cool reception. This prevents Him from doing all He would have liked to have done. In the next part of the story Jesus commissions his disciples and gives them guidelines for the mission ahead. His initial call was "Come follow me... and I will send you out to fish for people" (1:17). This developed into a two-fold purpose, "that they might be with him" and "that he might send them out" (3:15). This is the pattern of discipleship i.e. call, purpose and equipping, and sending out to be the representatives of Jesus.



OPEN IT

1. What is one piece of advice your parents gave you that you ignored growing up?

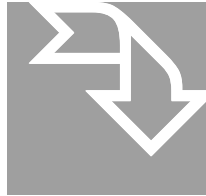


EXPLORE IT

2. Why did the people of Nazareth react negatively to Jesus' visit? (6:2-3)
3. What prevented Jesus from doing more than a few miracles in Nazareth? At what was Jesus amazed? (6:5-6)

FOLLOWING JESUS

4. How did Jesus equip the disciples for their job? (6:7-11)
5. What specific instructions did Jesus give the Twelve? (6:8-11)
6. What was the central focus of the mission of the Twelve? (6:7, 13)



GET IT

7. What can we learn from this story about the cost of following Christ?
8. What can we do to prevent ourselves from having the same lack of faith that the people in Nazareth had?
9. Why do you think Jesus told His men to pack lightly?
10. How could your local church step out in faith, believing that the Lord rewards those who trust Him?



APPLY IT

11. In what way could you share the message of Christ with a family member or friend this week?

PRAY IT

Pray for all those who minister full or part-time in the life of your church. How can you show your practical support this week?

Week Four:

Following Jesus: Human Concerns and Denying Self

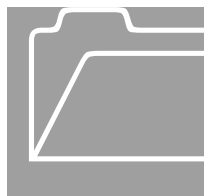
Key verse: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Mark 8:34

Preparation before the bible study: Read Chapter Eight.

Read in the group: Mark 8:27-38

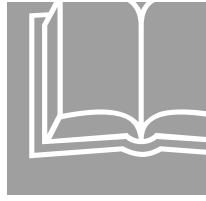
Jesus gives his disciples a challenge by asking a pointed question. Have they really comprehended his true identity? Peter puts it into words for the first time and makes his great confession. Now that Peter has understood the real identity of Jesus, he now has to understand why He has come. Jesus immediately begins to talk about the cross, his own cross, a cross for his disciples, and the cross for all who would follow Him.

Note: The term "disciple" means follower, believer, supporter, student, pupil or learner.



OPEN IT

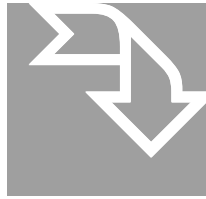
1. When have you ever given in to group pressure when you knew you should not have?



(8:27-28)

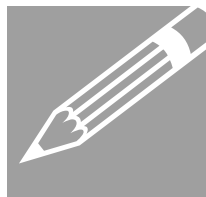
EXPLORE IT

2. What did Jesus ask His disciples? What did people speculate about Jesus? How had people connected Jesus with Elijah, John the Baptist, and other prophets?
3. What was Peter's confession of faith? (8:29)
4. How did Jesus speak about what would happen to Him? Why did Peter rebuke Jesus? (8:32)
5. In what way did Peter have in mind the "things of man" as opposed to the "things of God"? (8:33)
6. Why did Jesus say, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"? (8:34-38)



GET IT

7. Why do you think Jesus asked about His identity at this particular point?
8. In verse 29 Peter gets it wonderfully right. In verse 32 he gets it disastrously wrong! What can we learn from Peter's example?
9. Why does Christ ask us to "deny yourself, take up our cross, and follow Him"? What does it mean to deny yourself?
10. In what way can a person both save his life and lose it at the same time?



APPLY IT

11. How do you usually respond to the Lord's correction or discipline in your life?
12. How can we make sure we "have in mind the things of God"?

PRAY IT

The great religions of the world accept Jesus as a 'prophet' or a 'good teacher' but Jesus thought this was inadequate. Pray for the true revelation of Jesus to spread throughout the world.



Week Five:

Following Jesus: the Trial and Denial

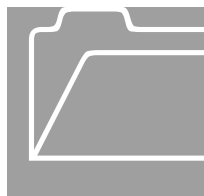
Key verses: “Again the High Priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” “I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Mark 14:61-62

Preparation before the bible study: Read Chapter Fourteen.

Read in the group: Mark 14:43-72

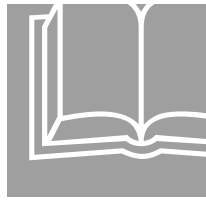
This chapter in the Gospel of Mark provides the ultimate test for the disciples. Led by Judas, the authorities arrest Jesus. The disciples desert Him and Jesus is left alone before the Sanhedrin. Jesus’ case is given a hearing before the Sanhedrin but the outcome is a foregone conclusion. Then with simple honesty Mark records Peter’s denial of Jesus. In spite of Jesus forewarning, Peter fails to own his Lord.

Note: The Sanhedrin was the supreme Jewish judicial, ecclesiastical, and administrative council in ancient Jerusalem before AD70, having 71 members from the nobility and presided over by the high priest



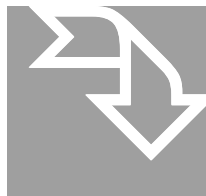
OPEN IT

1. When have you ever been blamed for something you did not do? What does it feel like to be wrongly accused?



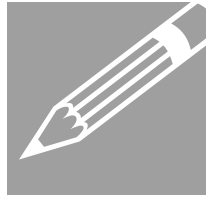
EXPLORE IT

2. How did Judas greet Jesus? In what ways were Judas's actions contradictory? (14:44-45)
3. What is significant about the fact that all of Jesus' followers deserted Him? (14:50-52)
4. When did Jesus choose to speak? What did Jesus tell the Sanhedrin? (14:62) Note: Jesus uses the term "Son of Man" to refer to Himself. It is one of the most common titles of Jesus in the gospels. In its simplest form it can refer to a human being, a 'son of Adam' (e.g. Numbers 23:19 and Psalm 8:4). In Daniel 7:13-14, the Son of Man title was given to a heavenly figure that was entrusted by God with great power and authority. In Jesus' day it was another way of referring to the Messiah or translated into Greek "the Christ".
5. What was Peter doing at this critical time? What was the servant girl's opinion of Jesus? (14:66-69)
6. Who else besides the servant girl confronted Peter? Why? (14:70)
7. How did Peter respond to the third question about whether he was a follower of Christ? (14:71)



GET IT

8. Why do you think Jesus chose to remain silent throughout the initial testimony against Him?
9. How does Jesus' perseverance in this situation encourage you to endure your difficult circumstances?
10. What do Peter's actions tell us about his character and his understanding of who Jesus was?
11. How do other people's attitudes toward Christ affect your willingness to talk about your Christian faith? What can we learn about the cost of being Christ's disciple from this passage?



APPLY IT

12. In what situation or context will you consciously identify with Christ publicly this week?

PRAY IT

Pray for people whose dedication to Christ is tested at home, at work, or around neighbours. Pray for the persecuted church around the world.

Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia

At the national meeting of members of the Reforming Alliance within the Uniting Church and Evangelical Members within the Uniting Church, on 12th July 2006, it was resolved to establish *The Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia*.

The Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia shall be committed to:

1. ensuring that matters of doctrine are determined according to the teachings of Scripture within the reformed, evangelical and orthodox tradition of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church;
2. providing orthodox leadership in doctrine, theology, ethics, worship, pastoral care, social responsibility, mission and evangelism;
3. restoring and maintaining ecumenical relations;
4. engaging the Gospel of Jesus Christ with Australia's multi-cultural and pluralist society;
5. establishing national and state bodies to implement the following objectives:
 - a. encourage the provision of reformed, evangelical and orthodox ministry of Word, sacrament and pastoral care in Confessing Congregations;
 - b. encourage reformed, evangelical and orthodox Christian Education for leaders and lay people;
 - c. bring a vigorous biblical perspective to contemporary public issues in a society that is increasingly ignorant about or hostile to orthodox Christianity;
 - d. foster relationships of reconciliation and cooperation with members of indigenous congregations;
 - e. foster relationships of cooperation and partnership with members of migrant ethnic congregations;
 - f. provide lines of communication with members of the National Council of Churches in Australia, Partner Churches in Pacific and Asian Region, and encourage local inter-church cooperation;

FOLLOWING JESUS

- g. create an association of Confessing Ministry Workers and assist in the placement of suitable ministry agents in Confessing Congregations;
- h. assist and encourage the establishment of new Confessing Congregations;
- i. develop a simple administrative structure which serves to liberate the congregations to fulfil Christ's mission.
- j. distribute a regular publication for communication, education and encouragement;
- k. be a faithful steward of the resources entrusted to it from the Confessing Congregations.

We take this action as a means to express our sole loyalty and obedience to Jesus Christ, and adherence to *The Basis of Union*.

Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia Inc.

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There are more resources at the Assembly of Confessing Congregations website: www.confessingcongregations.com

About the Author

Rev Dr Phil Marshall is married to Lyn and has four adult daughters. He is the pastor of Tea Tree Gully Uniting Church located in the north east of Adelaide, SA. Previously he has pastored churches in the inner city of Sydney, regional Queensland, and rural South Australia. He has worked as the Evangelism Consultant for the Uniting Church NSW Synod, and lectured in Evangelism at Wesley Institute (Sydney). He has served on the National Executive of the Reforming Alliance and now convenes the Discipleship and Evangelism Commission of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations. His Doctorate of Ministry (Fuller) study, was in the area of church growth and evangelism.

Assembly of Confessing Congregations: Bible Studies Order Form

Study 1 “Galatians: the Freedom Walk” Six Bible studies.

Study 2 “Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark” Five Bible studies.

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Please send mecopies of **Study 2 “Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark”** Bible study books.

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