

# MARK

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FAITH NOT FEAR

LEADER'S RESOURCE  
GUIDE

**SAMPLE**



LECTIO<sup>TM</sup>

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UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

TIM GRAY

*Nihil Obstat:* Currently under review.  
*Imprimatur:*

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Formed.org

Printed in the United States of America  
ISBN ISBN 978-1-7321146-3-0

# SESSION 1

## SAINT MARK THE EVANGELIST

### SESSION OVERVIEW

*Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.*

In this session, participants are given a general overview of the character of Saint Mark's Gospel. Some have dismissed the Gospel as rough and simplistic, but it is in fact a powerful testimony of Christ. By contrast to other gospel accounts, it is brief and action-packed, and could be described as the "Hollywood" or "action" Gospel, with a primary focus on the Passion of the Lord. Its author aims to inspire those who have already been catechized to live a Christian life, conformed to Christ's Cross.

Textually, at first glance, the Gospel appears less elegant than those of Saints Matthew, Luke, or John. However, this apparent weakness is consistent with the Gospel's goal of inspiring action. And its emphasis on the Passion of Christ is likewise fitting for a Gospel that teaches the cost of discipleship.

Tradition and Scripture indicate that after assisting Saints Paul and Barnabas, Mark was an assistant to Saint Peter, serving as his scribe and translator. Peter himself refers to Mark in endearing terms. Other passages regarding Mark (also known as John or John Mark) indicate that he was a well-educated and well-connected member of the early Church. The Gospel itself includes evidence that it was based upon Peter's eyewitness testimony and written for a Roman audience. In addition to the reoccurring small details consistent with the nature of eyewitness accounts, the Gospel uses many Latin terms. Finally, the heavy emphasis on the suffering of Christ is likewise indicative of being written for a persecuted audience, which the Roman Christians certainly were.



## CONNECT

*Introduce the group and explain the general format of the meetings. Ask if there are any questions before moving on to the Opening Prayer.*

*Begin this session by leading the **Opening Prayer**, and then read or summarize the **Introduction** for your group. Both can be found in the Study Guide on page 3.*

*This is a good time to introduce each member of the group and ask them to share a couple of facts about themselves. Then move on to the following discussion questions.*

It's all too easy to judge a book by its cover—to mistakenly set a person aside as uneducated or unrefined, only to later discover hidden depths. Has this ever happened to you? Can you think of examples from movies, history, literature, or Scripture where this takes place?

*Participants may draw from personal experiences. Historical examples might include those who called Saint Thomas Aquinas the “dumb ox,” an example of judging someone by externals. On the other hand, there are saints who were academically challenged, like Saint John Vianney, who were nonetheless enormously successful in their mission. Examples in literature include The Lord of the Rings’ characters Samwise Gamgee and the scatter-brained owner of the inn in Bree, who nonetheless can “see through a brick wall in time.” And in Scripture we find that our Lord himself was set aside as uneducated and even crazy by his contemporaries. Because of its brevity and use of language, Mark’s Gospel has sometimes been thought of as simplistic; but as we will see in this study, there is a depth even to this short Gospel.*

Are there people you have met who have an amazing ability to just get things done? What were they able to accomplish?

*Some people are extremely effective at getting the job done. Such individuals, and those they work with, have an impressive level of productivity. And if they involve others with different gifts, their effectiveness is often multiplied. It is important to honor the power of the Holy Spirit working in others, despite apparent defects. Such “defects” in fact point to God’s power: “My power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Saint Mark had an ability to work with others and accomplish much. We will see that he helped Saints Paul and Barnabas, and later Saint Peter.*

When have you learned about the same topic from several different sources? How did those additional sources change, or deepen, your initial understanding?

*One example to discuss is the study of history. We learn from a textbook, a biography, a movie, the poetry of the time, historical fiction, people’s letters, etc. A textbook might give us good general information, but as we add documentaries or personal correspondence from individuals, for example, our understanding is enriched. The four Gospels, written by different writers, give us additional insight into the events they recall.*



*Play the video segment, which will last for about 30 minutes. Encourage participants to follow along with the outline in their Study Guides on page 4 and take notes as key points are made during the video teachings. Then lead the discussion using the questions below.*



## DISCUSS

*Following each question are possible responses and comments to guide you in the group conversation. You can find the Discuss section on page 5.*

1. What was something that stood out or was new for you in the teaching?

*Possible answers might include the fact that Mark’s unpolished Greek is a result of using Hebrew constructions. The concept of Mark as the Gospel of action is another unusual (and very important) piece of information. The hypothesis that the house of John Mark’s mother was the place of the Last Supper is very intriguing as well.*

2. What are advantages of having multiple Gospels? What does Mark's Gospel offer in particular?

*Having multiple Gospels means we get a variety of viewpoints. Important events are reinforced. And each provides a unique focus on a certain important element of Christ's mission. Mark's Gospel gives us an emphasis on Jesus's Passion and on living a discipleship that "walks the walk."*

3. What does Mark's focus on the Passion suggest about Mark's audience?

*Mark's Gospel is a gospel of action. Not only is it about Christ's actions (with much less verbal teaching than, for example, Saint Matthew's Gospel), it is intended to inspire action in the reader. The focus on the Passion suggests that a key action of the disciple is to suffer with the suffering Christ, to trust and persevere with the perseverance of Christ. Given Mark's affiliation with Peter, it is plausible to think he may have written this Gospel especially for Christians who were living under Roman persecution.*

4. Have you ever shared Saint Augustine's opinion of Mark's Gospel as an abbreviated version of Matthew's Gospel? Have you been inclined to set aside the Gospel of Mark as too simplistic?

What is your goal in studying this Gospel now?

*Recall that Saint Augustine was a gifted rhetorician and therefore probably more attracted to the Gospels that display more literary beauty. Mark was an educated man and chosen to help translate for Peter; however, his writing is undeniably less polished than the other evangelists. We should remember, though, that "all that is gold does not glitter" (Tolkien). There is much to be gained from Mark, as we will see in this study. Additionally, it is not uncommon for different temperaments to be naturally attracted by different styles. Moreover, in each person's life there are different seasons, and a work that seems less attractive at one stage may speak volumes at another time. If we have set aside Mark's Gospel in the past, this study will give us a chance to reread it with fresh eyes.*

*Direct participants to this session's **Memory Verse** in their Study Guides, and read it together. Then lead the **Closing Prayer**. Encourage participants to do the **COMMIT** reflections on their own before you meet again as a group.*



## COMMIT

*Following are suggested answers to the questions participants will be asked in their daily COMMIT reflections.*



### DAY 1 – MARK THE EVANGELIST

*Participants will look at scripture passages related to Saint Mark, starting on page 7.*

Look up the following Scriptures. Who are the Levites? Where and how do the Levites serve?

*Numbers 1:48–53 After the golden calf, the Levites (the tribe of Levi) are chosen to take care of the Tabernacle and all its furnishings. As the Israelites wander in the desert, it is the Levites who carry the Tabernacle and its furnishings from place to place, setting it up and taking it down as the people move.*

*1 Chronicles 16:1–7 When God's people enter and take control of the Promised Land, David sets up the Tabernacle, the tent of meeting, in a more permanent location. Now that the Levites don't need to carry the Tabernacle from place to place, David gives them a new charge: to continually, night and day, minister before the Ark of the Lord, where his presence dwells in the tent of meeting, singing praises and thanksgiving to God.*

*Nehemiah 8:1–8 When God’s people return from their exile in Babylon, Ezra the priest instructs the Levites to teach the people so that they understand God’s laws. The Levites not only assist in the Temple, but they are also teachers of the people.*

Look up Acts 11:20–26; 12:25; and 2 Timothy 4:11. What are Paul and Barnabas taking Mark to do? What does the inclusion of Mark say about him?

*Paul and Barnabas have been establishing the church in Antioch. Presumably Mark is invited because he is helpful, useful, and can nurture the young Christian community.*

What significance do you find in Peter calling Mark “my son”? How do you imagine Mark must have treated Peter, for Peter to refer to Mark as his son?

*“My son” is a term of endearment, of closeness. It suggests a unity of mission, as shown in the passage of John, which participants will look at next. Mark must have treated Peter with reverence and honor, following the Fourth Commandment. At first glance, a well-educated Levite serving a humble fisherman might be surprising, except that Mark loves Christ and the Church he established. Therefore, Mark is a loving and dutiful son to Peter, whom Christ had set up as head of the Church.*

Look up John 5:17–20. What does this passage add to the notion of being a son?

*Jesus says that he and the Father are both at work. The Father and Son share a mission. So, too, Peter and Mark share a mission.*

Based on what you have been studying, what saintly virtues and acts do you see in Mark? Are there areas in your own life in which you feel the need of a friend who has these virtues? Write these down and ask Saint Mark to assist you with them.

*Mark is a believer, docile to the teaching of the Apostles. He is willing to assist in the preaching of the Gospel in difficult times. He is willing to humbly submit his abilities to the service of Peter. One great thing to ask Saint Mark to help with is in using the gifts God has given us to make Jesus known and loved.*



## DAY 2 – THE ACTION GOSPEL

*Participants will consider the reasons for having different gospel accounts, starting on page 9.*

Look up John 21:25–26. Does Saint John think it would be an easy thing to chronicle everything Jesus did? No. John writes: “But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).

Read Luke 1:1–4. If Luke is aware of other writings, why is he writing a Gospel?

*Luke is writing to transmit, in an orderly way, a summary of the testimony given regarding Jesus, particularly to present the testimony of those eyewitnesses he knows and who have delivered their testimony to him (i.e., Saint Paul). Luke specifically names Theophilis in his opening verses as the one to whom he is writing his gospel account.*

Look up the following verses in the first chapter of Mark’s Gospel. How many times does “immediately” appear in each of these sections? What is happening immediately in each?

Mark 1:10–12 2 times; the heavens open and the Spirit drives Jesus in the wilderness.

Mark 1:17–21 3 times; Jesus calls the disciples, they follow, and Jesus begins teaching.

Mark 1:23–28 1 time; there is someone in need of healing.

Mark 1:29–31 2 times; they leave the synagogue; Simon’s mother-in-law is in need of healing.

Look up the following verses. What is happening immediately in each?

Mark 14:43 *Judas comes to betray Jesus.*

Mark 14:72 *The cock crows with Peter's denial of Jesus*



## DAY 3 – LECTIO: A SHARE IN CHRIST'S SUFFERING

*Participants will engage in lectio divina on a passage from the First Epistle of Saint Peter, leading to a deeper appreciation for the joy to be found in suffering with Christ, starting on page 11.*

How does Saint Peter refer to those he is addressing?

*"Beloved..."*

What is happening to his readers?

*They are undergoing persecution, a "fiery ordeal."*

What does the author wish for the recipients of the letter?

*He wants them to respond with joy. Looking at the verbs will reveal several imperatives or command-type verbs.*

Read the passage again slowly and note the words and phrases that relate to trials/suffering, and those that relate to joy/glory. Use the table below.

<b>Trials/Suffering</b>	<b>Joy/Glory</b>
Fiery ordeal (v. 12)	Rejoice, rejoice, be glad (v. 13)
Reproached (v. 14)	Blessed by spirit of glory and of God (v. 14)
Suffer as a Christian (v. 16)	Glorify God (v. 16)

Do you realize that you are God's "beloved"? Explain.

*Jesus is our Bridegroom who laid down his life for us, his bride. He is our Bridegroom and we are his "beloved." When we read Peter's address, we should also hear Jesus speaking our name and calling us his "beloved." We, like John, are the disciples "whom Jesus loved" (see John 13:23).*

How does Saint Peter's exhortation to "not be surprised" by trials help us when we encounter suffering?

*All too often when we encounter suffering our first thought is that God has abandoned us. Peter's exhortation to "not be surprised" is a timely reminder that suffering is a part of following Our Lord, who was the Suffering Servant, and a reminder that we can draw even closer to Christ in the midst of our suffering because he does not abandon us, but accompanies us.*

What would you need to do to be aware of the "spirit of glory and of God" resting on you the next time you are suffering?

*In times of suffering it might be helpful to reread Scripture passages such as this section of 1 Peter that remind us of the joy to be found in suffering with Christ. Other Scripture passages might include: Philippians 2:5–11 and 4:10–13; James 1:2–4; Romans 5:3–5 and 8:18–21; Psalm 34:18–19, and, of course, the Gospel accounts of Jesus's agony in the garden and his Crucifixion.*



## DAY 4 – WRITTEN FROM ROME

*Participants will look at textual evidence pointing to Mark's Gospel being written for a Roman audience using the testimony of Peter, starting on page 14.*

Look at the following verses. What Roman terms are used?

Mark 5:9, 15—*Legion; a Roman army unit*

Mark 13:35—*Roman division of the night watches: evening, midnight, cockcrow, morning*

Mark 14:5—*Three hundred denarii; a denarii was an ancient Roman silver coin*

Mark 15:39, 44, 45—*Centurion; a Roman officer in charge of 100 (centus) soldiers*

Who is mentioned in Mark 15:21 besides Simone of Cyrene?

*Simone of Cyrene's sons, Rufus and Alexander, are mentioned.*

Look up Romans 16:13, where Saint Paul closes his Letter to the Romans by sending his greetings to numerous Christians living in Rome. How does Paul describe Rufus? And Rufus's mother?

*Paul describes Rufus as a notable member of the Christian community, "eminent in the Lord." Paul describes Rufus's mother as his own mother, implying that she was very dear to Paul.*

How would Mark's emphasis on Jesus's Passion and Death have been a help to the Christians in Rome facing persecution? How is it a help to us today in our own lives?

*Mark wants to provide comfort and encouragement, and it appears clear that the best way he feels he can do this is to remind the Christians in Rome, and us, of the love of their Savior, who was willing to suffer and die for them. And so he gives emphasis to this in his Gospel, showing our Lord as one who was also persecuted, and who called us to take up our cross and follow him.*



## DAY 5 – TRUTH AND BEAUTY

*Participants will reflect on the symbols of the four evangelists, starting on page 16.*

Look up the following verses. How are the "four living creatures" described?

Ezekiel 1:1–14—*"The four living creatures are described as having the form of men, but each with four faces: a man, lion, ox, and eagle. Each has four wings.*

*Revelation 4:1–11—The four living creatures each have six wings and are full of eyes all round. One creature is a lion, one an ox, one a man, and one an eagle.*

## NOTES

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