

STUDY

Intro

Regular study of the Bible, as well as other resources and books that help to enliven its message, is a key way a disciple practices loving and following God. Study happens sometimes privately through personal bible study during a regular devotional time, but it can also happen corporately with your family, in a small group conversation like today, or even in a larger gathering like your youth group. Through reading and studying the scriptures, God's Word becomes active in our lives. For thousands of years the words of Jesus, the teachings of the prophets and apostles, and the stories of God's people have revealed God's heart and hope for us and for our world. So when we do this faith practice "study" we learn about God's vision for our world and are inspired to do His mission.

Today we are going to read the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of Mark. Mark was written after Jesus died, probably around 60 AD. Back then, Jews revolted against Rome. Jerusalem was destroyed and the Romans began to persecute followers of Jesus Christ. This is also when the Coliseum was built in Rome. Looking at what was happening when a book of the Bible was written helps us understand the writings as well as ask questions like: Who wrote the book? Why was the text written? Is this text similar to other stores in the Bible? This method is called historical reading.

Another way to look at the book is through literary reading. Think about your literature classes. When we look at how it's written - the story line, the characters, the plot - we can learn a lot as well. For example, in the book of Mark, action is emphasized. If you were to read it just looking for the action verbs you'd find: "See, I am sending," "Prepare the way," "As Jesus passed," "He got up!" Lots of action language. The other thing about Mark is that he strung the stories together from one to another. In the original Greek version of Mark, the word "and" is used to start 410 of the 678 verses.

The Book of Faith Initiative has a bookmark that includes questions to help you approach the bible (<http://www.bookoffaith.org/otherres.html>) The other two Book of Faith methods are called Devotional Reading and Lutheran Theological Reading. We're going to practice a little of both this morning in your small group.

Small Group Activities and Discussion

Let's begin by finding Mark 1:14-20 in our Bibles. Mark is one of our four Gospels. You can find Mark by opening your Bible to the center and then splitting the back half into half again. The 1 is our chapter number which will be in bolder print, 14-20 are the verses marked with the smaller numbers. I need two volunteers to read this text today.

[Invite the group to take a deep breath together and count backward slowly from 5 so that their attention is focused on the moment by the time they get to 1.] As _____ reads, I want you to listen for words or phrases that jump out at you or grab your attention. After the first reading, _____ will read it again.

Ask: Are any of you willing to share with our group the words or phrases that jumped out at you?

Ask: Can you think of other passages in the bible with a similar text?

Ask: In what ways does this passage point us to Jesus?

We've got another exercise we are going to do with this same scripture. I'm going to read it from a devotional book which is another way to study the bible. You can close your eyes if that helps you see and hear the story. Try to tune out the noise in the room and focus on my voice. Try and put yourself in the scripture.

(Read this passage SLOWLY)

An excerpt from a Friendship with Jesus: A way to pray the Gospel of Mark by David L Miller. 1999 Augsburg Fortress isbn 9780806638942

Jesus walks along a road that curves around a tiny cove on the lakeshore. To his right, grassy hills rise quickly. The afternoon sun forces travelers to seek shade and rest. Sit among them as Jesus joins the group and begins to teach. "The time is here," he begins. "God's kingdom is close to you. The Father's holy dream for you and all creation draws near. Repent and believe the good news. Change the way you see. Look not with your fears but trust that God's loving dream is coming true." Turning, he looks directly at you, speaking earnestly and directly to your heart and mind. What does his message stir in you? (pause)

Speak with him about the deep needs in your soul that you want him to touch. (pause)

Leaving that place, Jesus walks along the lake. Smoke rises from cooking fires; men repair nets; others haul fish and gear from their boats. Jesus watches silently, then walks up to Simon and Andres. "Follow me," he says, "and I will make you fish for people." What do you see in their faces as they look at each other? (pause)

Do you understand why they go with Jesus? (pause)

Walking farther, Jesus sees James and John working with their father. He calls, and they, too, follow. From the corner of his eye, Jesus sees you, watching. He already knows you want to speak with him and he asks "What do you want?" Talk with him about what you want. (pause)

Finally, Jesus says, "Come along," waving an arm toward you. Ask him why he wants you. (pause)

Walk down the road with Jesus and the others. What are they saying? (pause)

Talk with Jesus about what it's like to be with him and included among his disciples. (pause)

As you stop for the evening, you serve the others, bringing them food and drink. You bring the sick to be healed to Jesus' feet. You feel Jesus' eyes on you. What do those eyes say to you? (pause)

He says "thank you, my disciple." What are you feeling?

(give them 30 seconds of quietness to rest in the word).

Then ask: What was the most vivid image that appeared in the story?

Ask: How did it feel to be asked to "come along?"