

Dear friend,

Welcome to the book of Mark. I'm so glad that you are being intentional about connecting with God on a regular basis through reading your Bible. The focus for the summer will be on the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which tell the story of Jesus' life.

As you read each chapter, you will be asked to consider doing the following:

- **Speak & Write:** Read the chapter out-loud, use the 6 devotional methods of Bible Study and write down your questions, thoughts and insights. The devotional methods are taken from the 40 Days in the Word Study by Rick Warren and include:
 - **Pronounce it!** Read a verse over and over, emphasizing each word in the verse, one at a time.
 - **Picture it!** Use this method with narratives and stories. Picture yourself as an active participant in the story. What does the setting look like, what smells and sounds are there? Imagine the emotions of each character, putting yourself in their shoes.
 - **Probe it!** Ask yourself the S.P.A.C.E.P.E.T.S questions
 - Is there a Sin to confess?
 - Is there a Promise to claim?
 - Is there an Attitude to change?
 - Is there a Command to obey?
 - Is there an Example to follow?
 - Is there a Prayer to pray?
 - Is there an Error to avoid?
 - Is there a Truth to Believe?
 - Is there Something to praise God for?
 - **Paraphrase it!** Put the Bible verse into your own words
 - **Personalize it!** Put your name in the place of nouns and pronouns used
 - **Pray it!** Turn the verse into a prayer and pray it back to God.
- **Read:** Read the devotional content.
- **Apply:** Actively put what you are learning into practice.

The devotional content was written out of my own personal time with God and highlights what He was teaching me. As you speak and write, you may discover that you gain insights that are much different from mine, which is wonderful. The Holy Spirit will speak into your life in ways that are personal for you.

I hope you experience God as you seek to connect with Him each day.

Sincerely,

Cherie VanderEnde
Connections Director

Mark 1

Welcome to the book of Mark. The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John describe the life of Jesus from four different perspectives. To learn more about who may have written the book of Mark, take a look at blueletterbible.org. It can be very helpful to know a little about the author when reading a book of the Bible.

Take the time to read Mark 1 out-loud. What caught your attention. Be sure to write it down in a journal or share your insights with others on the Summer Reading Facebook Page.

Devotional:

Mark 1:35-38 "Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. Later Simon and others went out to find him. When they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you." But Jesus replied, "We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them too. That is why I came."

Jesus was the Son of God, and took time out each morning to meet with God alone. The disciples had an agenda. There were people looking for Jesus, most likely wanting to be healed or helped in some way. However, after spending time alone praying, Jesus determined that they were to go to other towns. His agenda was set by intentionally connecting with God and doing His will instead of doing what everyone else thought He should do.

Application:

Choose a regular and consistent time and place to spend time with God each day. Ask Him to direct your path. Rick Warren, the pastor of Saddleback church in CA has written some wonderful articles about how to have a quiet time.

- [How to have a quiet time](#)
- [How to apply the Bible to your life](#)
- The 40 Days in the Word Study (contact the church office at connect@hiddenv.com for information on how to take this study on-line).

Mark 2

Read Mark 2 out-loud. Did anything stand out? Did the story of the healing of the paralyzed man sound familiar? Read Mark 2:3-12 and then read Matthew 9:1-8. Any new details? Any new insights as you compared the two accounts?

Devotional:

The story of the paralytic is a story about relationships. Four friends, caring enough about their paralyzed friend to figure out a way to get him to Jesus. What kind of man could the paralytic have been? Was he kind, compassionate, a good listener? What was it about him that caused His friends to go to great lengths to get him to Jesus.

We were created for relationship. Relationship with God and relationship with other people. Relationships can be messy, but choosing to allow safe people into your life, and being a safe person for others is totally worth it.

Application:

Are you the paralytic in need of help? Are you a friend who is helping another? Choose to be intentional about building relationships with others. Start or join a small group that meets weekly to encourage each other. It can be centered around a shared hobby or activity, be a time where you discuss a book you are reading together or doing a Bible study. For more information on how to start or join a life group, contact us at connect@hiddenv.com.

Mark 3

Read Mark 3 out-loud. Put yourself in the position of the man whose hand was healed by Jesus. Close your eyes and picture the scene, try to feel the emotions, and imagine what you see, hear, smell and touch. Write down your observations, insights and questions.

Devotional:

The man with the shriveled hand took a risk. Jesus had commanded him to come forward and stand in front of everyone. He must have known about the rules concerning the sabbath, maybe heard the grumblings made by religious leaders against Jesus and possibly briefly thought through the consequences of following Jesus' command. The man had a decision to make, was he going to follow Jesus? Or choose to remain as he was.

Choosing to follow Jesus is not always easy. It may involve facing a fear and taking a risk, but the reward of obedience is always worth it.

Application:

Is there something God is asking you to do? Are you letting fear stop you from embracing what He has for you next? Pray, ask Him to give you the courage you need. Invite other people in your life to help you take the steps you need to take in order to follow God's call.

Mark 4

Read Mark 4 out-loud. Which parable stood out to you most? Why? Write it down and consider sharing your thoughts on the Summer Reading Facebook page.

Devotional:

The parable of the sower describes four different types of soil and what results to expect when seeds are planted there.

- Hard, packed down soil = no chance to grow, immediately taken out of the soil.
- Rocky soil = grows up quickly, but shallow roots result in a shaky foundation when the challenges of life come.
- Weedy soil = plant is choked out by worry, desire for other things, the thoughts and reactions of others, money.

- Good soil = Listen to the Word, accept it, apply it. The measure with which it is applied is the measure with which a crop is grown. Some have large crops and some have small.

Keeping the ground of our hearts soft and receptive to God's Word takes work and determination. It doesn't just happen. You have to cultivate the soil, keep it free from weeds and rocks, keep it tilled and ready to accept the life-giving seeds found in God's Word.

Application:

What steps do you need to take to have a heart filled with good soil? Are there rocks and weeds that need to be removed? Pray and ask for God's help in cultivating the soil of your heart so you can allow His word to take root, grow and produce a healthy crop. Ask trusted friends who are strong in their faith to encourage you and help you on your journey.

Mark 5

Read Mark 5 out-loud. Was there a situation or individual mentioned that you could identify with? Why? Consider sharing this on the Summer Reading Facebook Page.

Devotional:

A man possessed by a demon and a dead young girl were both healed. The demon possessed man was instructed to tell people what God had done for him. The family of the girl was told to keep quiet.

Why Jesus gave two completely different sets of instructions after healing each one is a bit of a mystery. His plan for each one was different, and crafted uniquely for them.

Your journey is your journey. We are all different. It is easy to fall into the comparison trap, and look at others and either wish you could do/have what they have or be glad it isn't you. It is important to connect to God and ask what He wants of you, and not compare your path to that of another.

Application:

Choose to focus on your journey. Are you spending time reading the Bible and talking to God in prayer? Have you asked him to guide you in what He wants you to do next? Pray and ask for His help.

Mark 6

Read Mark 6 out-loud. Choose a story to picture in your head. What stood out to you? Can you use the SPACEPETS method of devotional Bible study to gain insights? If you don't remember the SPACEPETS questions, refer to the opening letter on the first page.

Devotional:

Have you ever made an emotional decision you later regretted? King Herod did. He became so caught up watching a young woman dance that he made a rash promise and ended up putting someone he respected, admired and enjoyed talking with to death.

Often, decisions made when emotions are running high, whether they be difficult or enjoyable may be ones that you will later regret. It is important to take time to think and pray before making decisions.

To pause and invite God into the decision making process through prayer and Bible reading can save you a lot of pain and heartache.

Application:

Is there a decision you are facing that is emotionally charged? Take time to pray and ask for God's help and direction.

Mark 7

Read Mark 7 out-loud. Was there a verse that made you stop and think? Why? Try reading those verses in 4-5 different translations of the Bible. Biblegateway.com is a great resource as the Bible is available in many different translations for free.

Devotional:

"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God. For you ignore God's law and substitute your own tradition." - NLT Version

"These people make a big show of saying the right thing, but their heart isn't in it. They act like they are worshipping me, but they don't mean it. They just use me as a cover for teaching whatever suits their fancy, ditching God's command and taking up the latest fads." - The Message

"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions." - NIV Version

"These people, says God, honour me with their words, but their heart is really far away from me. It is no use for them to worship me, because they teach human rules as though they were God's laws. You put aside God's command and obey human teachings." - Good News Translation

Each version has a different way of expressing the same idea. God cares about our hearts and motivations. Mark 7:10-12 gives us an example of what the motivations behind the choices the Pharisees were making was. In the Bible we are commanded to respect our father and mother. The religious leaders were teaching that if you could help your parents, but said, "this belongs to God" you could excuse yourself from your responsibilities. Jesus pointed out that this was a man-made idea, and didn't reflect God's laws.

Application:

Are you able to distinguish the difference between a law, rule or ritual made up by man, and one that was given by God? Test it against the Bible. What does the Bible say? If you have a question about this concept, please feel free to contact someone on staff at HVCC and we will do our best to help you.

Mark 8

Read Mark 8 out-loud. Pick a Bible Study method to use to try and dig deeper into the verses that stood out to you.

- Picture It
- Paraphrase it
- Pray it
- Personalize it
- Probe It (using SPACEPETS)
- Pronounce it.

Devotional:

“Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of the religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead. As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter, “Get away from me Satan!” he said. “You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.” - Mark 8:31-33

Jesus has his eye on the goal. He came to live a perfect life, the life we should have lived, and then allow himself to be tortured, crucified and die in our place, so that we could have a relationship with Him. He was aware of God’s overall plan, and willing to do what it took to follow it. It was worth the pain.

Peter may have had good intentions and just didn’t want Jesus to suffer. Perhaps well-meaning, but most certainly not helpful and not a part of God’s Plan. Jesus reminded Peter that God’s perspective is what is important...not man’s.

Application:

If you are a follower of God, sometimes the journey leads you through deep and painful waters. In that moment you have a choice to make. Are you going to trust God or not? Are you going to demand your own way or choose to follow God’s way? Are you going to listen to those who tell you that it can’t be God’s will if it is hard? Or keep going, knowing it is God’s plan. Choosing to trust can be difficult, but it is well worth it.

Mark 9

Read Mark 9 out-loud. What stood out to you. Did you have any questions? Spend sometime picturing yourself as a character in one of the events described.

Devotional:

Mark 9:28-29 "...When Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, "Why couldn't we cast out that evil spirit?" Jesus replied, "This kind can be cast out only by prayer."

Take a moment and ask yourself, “Am I doing things FOR God? Or WITH God? Am I running ahead of God, hoping God blesses my actions and efforts, or walking beside God praying and following His direction? The disciples couldn’t understand why they were unable to cast the demon out of the

young boy. Jesus' responded and let them know that prayer was needed. God wanted to be invited into what they were doing.

It is easy to go through life and and forget to include God in your plans. Prayer turns your attention back to the one who is able to do more than you could ask or imagine. Our abilities are limited, His are not. Prayer keeps you connected to the source of unlimited strength, wisdom and guidance. Where you are weak, He is strong. Prayer calms your heart, and allows your mind to be opened to the gentle guiding whispers of the Holy Spirit. Prayer keeps you connected to God, the one able to give you all you need no matter the situation.

Application:

Prayer does not have to occur in a certain place, in a certain position or at a certain time. It is simply talking to God as you would talk to a good friend. Here are some ways to incorporate prayer into your daily life.

- Before getting out of bed, ask God to give you what you need to face what the day holds. Thank him that he has given you another day.
- Before going to sleep, thank God for 10 things and talk to him about the struggles you may have had.
- Before eating, thank God for providing food, taste buds and variety.
- Before making an important phone call, ask for wisdom and help.
- When making decisions, pray and ask God for wisdom and guidance

You can literally breathe a quiet, short prayer at anytime for anything.

Mark 10

Read Mark 10 out-loud. Did anything stand out? Be sure to write it down, take time to think about it during the day. Consider sharing it on the Summer Reading Facebook page.

Devotional:

"...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:43-45

Our world's way of thinking is not God's. Our world says to be important, you must be the best at something, have people admire you, serve you, want to be you. Jesus came to establish a kingdom that did the opposite, to instead of seeing yourself as someone to be served, seeing yourself as a servant.

Application:

Pray and ask God to help you look at every interaction with another person as an opportunity to serve. Ask him to use you to help others. Choose to do small acts of service such as open a door for someone, or let someone go ahead of you in line. Follow through on promptings to help those around you.

Mark 11

Read Mark 11 outloud. What stood out to you? Which devotional method of Bible Study could you use? What insights did you gain? Do you have any questions? Write these things down, and if you feel comfortable, please share what you are learning on the Summer Bible Reading Facebook Page.

Devotional:

Mark 11:22-26 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea and do not doubt in your heart but believe that what you say will happen, it will be done for you.'"

This is the famous passage people often quote alongside the phrase, "You just didn't have enough faith." or "if you have enough faith...then...you will get what you want."

It is important to look at this phrase in light of the verses before and after it. The whole speech about how faith can move mountains is prefaced with "Have faith in God." That is the key. Faith is moment by moment living, seeking to stay in tune with God in everything you do. This allows you to hear his gentle promptings and whispers, and keeps your desires, wants and dreams aligned with His.

It is easy to cling to a goal, a preferred future or a desire and then pursue that, without including God. We easily shift our faith to ourselves, and our ability to know what is best for us and those around us. This often results in anger, frustration, anxiety, worry, fear and a host of other negative emotions.

Faith in God holds everything loosely and understands that tomorrow is not promised. It believes that God is in control - that your job is to have faith and trust in God, and His job is everything else.

This doesn't mean you don't have goals or desires - it just means you hold them lightly, give them to God and realize that God knows best. Your job is to keep your eyes on the Master, because He is all knowing, and is aware of things you do not yet know. His plans are so far above yours. Don't miss out on what God has for you because you are so consumed with your own wants, desires, dreams and preferred outcomes.

When you choose faith in God over faith in self and others, you will experience the supernatural peace and joy that God has promised.

Application:

Philippians 4:6-7 "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Take time to put your name in this verse and personalize it.

___rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice! Let _____ gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. _____do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard _____heart and _____ mind in Christ Jesus."

Pray this verse back to God

“Father. Thank you for being near to me. Thank you that I do not need to be anxious about anything. Thank you that I can talk to you about everything, and ask you for what I need. Even though I don’t understand why, I choose to give thanks for this situation. This is what I need from you today God _____. Thank you for your peace. Please help it to stand watch and keep me safe today as I focus on you in all things.”

Pronounce this verse. Emphasizing one word at a time. Can you feel God speaking to you?

Take time to put this verse into your own words and paraphrase it.

Picture what life would be like if you turned everything over to the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving and perfect God and allowed Him to lead and control your life.

Mark 12

Read Mark 12 out-loud. What made you stop and think? Write down your thoughts and questions. Consider sharing them on the Summer Reading Facebook page.

Devotional:

Imagine you had a beautiful piece of property, it was yours but you were allowing someone else to enjoy it as a rental. You had made the house pristine, the gardens flourishing, it was beautiful. One day you send a friend to check on the property because you are out of town, you want to be sure it is being well cared for. But when your friend arrives to inspect the place, those renting it beat him up and send a message indicating that the property is no longer the concern of the owner. You send a couple more friends, but the same thing happens. Finally, you send your only child. The renters think to themselves that if they can just get this child out of the way, the rental property will be theirs, and so they murder him.

Before time, God existed. The world and all it contains was created by Him. Man chose to go his own way, to choose to live life apart from God and act like what was created for him to use and enjoy was now owned by him. Our relationship with the owner/creator of the world was broken. Jesus came, to save man. We have a choice, to accept or reject Him.

Application:

Thank God for the gift of His Son Jesus. Thank God for entrusting you as a temporary caretaker of what you possess, and ask for His help in managing it wisely and using it to honor Him.

Mark 13

Read Mark 13 out-loud. Do you have any questions? Observations? Is there something that stood out to you that you can apply to your life today?

Devotional:

“No one knows, however, when that day or hour will come—neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son; only the Father knows. Be on watch, be alert, for you do not know when the time will come. It will be like a man who goes away from home on a trip and leaves his servants in charge, after giving to each one his own work to do and after telling the doorkeeper to keep watch. Watch, then, because

you do not know when the master of the house is coming—it might be in the evening or at midnight or before dawn or at sunrise. If he comes suddenly, he must not find you asleep.” Mark 13:32-36

When Jesus left to return to heaven, he told his disciples that he would one day return. There are many people today who have spent lots of time trying to calculate the exact moment or possible moments Jesus could return. However, the Bible tells us that no-one knows, or can find out.

If you are a follower of God, you have been commanded to use your talents, time, money, abilities, relationships in ways that please and honor him. Don't be lulled into a sense of complacency, thinking you have time. At any moment, Jesus could return, or you could be transitioned from earth to eternity. Tomorrow is not guaranteed.

Application:

Don't put off what you know you need to do today, until tomorrow. Pray and ask God to give you courage, strength or whatever else you need to do what He has asked you to do. Invite a trusted friend to hold you accountable and help you, or start, or join, a life group with others who desire to pursue the life God has for them.

Mark 14

Read Mark 14 out-loud. Jesus was human, and experienced emotion and pain. Put yourself in His shoes. How might you have responded to what happened? What feelings and thoughts might you have had?

Devotional:

Mark 14:34-36 "I feel bad enough right now to die. Stay here and keep vigil with me." Going a little ahead he fell to the ground and prayed for a way out: " Papa, Father, you can - can't you? Get me out of this. Take this cup away from me. But please, not what I want - what do YOU want?"

We are given a glimpse into what Jesus was feeling. He was so overcome with emotion he wanted to die and begged that God find a different way. Yet, even in the midst of it all, his attitude was one of surrender, and a willingness to do whatever the Father asked of Him. He kept his eyes firmly fixed on His Father, and the joy that would be His once this task was completed.

When your dreams are shattered, your hopes dashed and it seems nothing in life makes sense or is fair, turn your eyes to God. It is in the difficulties of life that you experience God in ways you never could otherwise. You can have faith, and trust that He knows the end of the story, and is at work behind the scenes and able to bring good out of any circumstance.

Jesus is our example. When life's circumstances seem overwhelming, choose faith and trust. Our only job is to trust, and His job is everything else. God is at work, in the tiniest of details. Choose to see - look for the smallest evidence of Him at work. There is always light to be found.

Application:

If you are in pain today, cry out to God and tell him how you feel. Choose to set aside your plan and allow Him to show you His. Live in the present moment, knowing He will give you exactly what you need at the perfect time. Choose to write down each time you get a glimpse of God at work in your situation, no matter how small.

Mark 15

Read Mark 15 out-loud. Did anything catch your attention or make you pause and think? Write it down.

Devotional:

Jesus knew who he was and what he came to do. At anytime he could have answered the accusations and defended himself. He could have had angels rescue him. He could have quit. But instead, he followed the path His Father had laid out for him, knowing the pain, agony, torture, loneliness, rejection and ridicule would be worth enduring.

Hebrews 12:2 says, "... keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.[a]Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame."

Jesus, even though he was mocked, abused and told to climb off the cross to prove who he was, knew he had nothing to prove. His purpose was to be faithful to God, and in the end the truth would be revealed. Because Jesus chose to obey God's call, we all have the opportunity to accept the gift of forgiveness and eternal life.

Application:

Pray and thank God for enduring to the end, for not giving in to the temptation to quit.

Hebrews 12:3 says, "Think of all the hostility he [Jesus] endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up."

Pray and ask God to give you what you need to endure whatever you may be facing. To help you to not give in to the temptation to quit something God has called you to finish.

Mark 16

Read Mark 16 out-loud. Put yourself in the shoes of those who saw Jesus alive after watching Him die. What thoughts and feelings can you imagine them having? Write it down and consider sharing these on the Summer Reading Facebook page.

Devotional:

Mark 16:7 "Now go and tell his disciples, including Peter..."

It's hard to begin to imagine the depths of despair Peter must have endured those three long days after Jesus died. He had denied knowing Jesus after passionately stating he would never do so. Peter was probably overcome by shame, fear and a deep sadness - and perhaps had even isolated himself from the other disciples.

The kindness of God seems so evident, when he specifically asked that Peter be told that Jesus had risen from the dead. The God we serve is filled with unconditional love, kindness, gentleness and whose forgiveness is readily available when we mess up, and as humans, we mess up a lot. God is passionate about you, is pursuing a relationship with you and is for you, never against you. He understands your weaknesses, and knows you are fragile.

Application:

As followers of Jesus, we do not live under condemnation and shame. Jesus took all that when he died on the cross in your place. Take a moment to thank Jesus for this gift. If you have something you need to confess, tell Him, and ask for his forgiveness and grace. It will be freely given.