

Introduction

Week 1

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About this study

The goal of this study is to point you to Jesus. Who is he? What did he do? What did he say? What does it mean to follow him and why would I want to do that? To learn about Jesus we will be reading his biography from eye witnesses, discussing his life with the people closest to you and talking directly to Him.

This program is designed to develop five areas of your life. As a foundation we will be spending a lot of time **reading** about Jesus. We will ponder **topics** that reveal and explore the often surprising qualities of Jesus and his teaching.

Perspective includes articles that help to understand Jesus' way of living. Influence and Service will shape the way we interact with the people around us. **Influence** is a series of tasks focused on meeting the needs of the people around us. The **Service** series examines the way God has made you unique and how to develop a role based on what you do best.

Throughout this study, you can expect to be reading daily, engaging in weekly discussions with others, to become more involved in the lives of the people around you and to have plenty of questions. This study begins and ends with Jesus and ultimately all those things will point to him.

Day 1

The Life of Jesus

A summary of Mark's Biography

The book of Mark is the account of the life of Jesus we could call, "the gospel on the go." That's because unlike the other biographers, Mark rushes from one story to another, keeping each one short, pointed, and easy to read. We might even get the impression he meant to pen for a wide audience that could include the youngest hearers possible.

Written probably sometime shortly before AD 70, Mark presents Jesus as "Christ, the son of God." There are a lot of terms here that need some definition and discussion to wrap our minds around them: what is "Christ"? What does this phrase "son of God" mean, exactly? Everything Mark writes is written to address those questions precisely. As you read along, think about how each incident in the life of Christ Jesus demonstrates him to be "Christ" and "son of God."

Reading Today: Mark 1-3

20-30 minutes

Day 2

Reading the Bible

An entire college semester could be spent on the particulars of how to read the Bible. One might initially even remark, "I'm an educated person. I know how to read." When it comes to a book like the Bible, however—or really any work of antiquity—we do need to take pause and learn to read not simply at face value, but more so in literary, cultural, geographic, chronological, etc. contexts as well. This is what makes the difference between a high context work of literature and low context. Generally speaking, even when we've correctly understood the words, we might still read and have our understanding fall into one of three categories: 1) we read it and get it 2) we read it and some extra piece of information that wasn't available to us simply by reading the text sheds light and we get it or 3) we read it and no matter how much light is shed we won't get it because we simply didn't live in that context.

This study is founded on the Bible. The Bible was compiled over hundreds of years by different authors who had encounters with God and wrote about their experiences. It is a record of the interaction of God with parts of humanity. The first part of the Bible includes a reoccurring message things are not ultimately what they should be and that someone is coming who will put things right. The second part of the Bible identifies that Jesus has come and he is putting things right. This process is still going on today and you will be a part of God putting things right in the world.

It's natural at this point to ask questions like "How do you know God exists?" or "Why do you believe the Bible is reliable?" These are very valid and important questions and there are both academic and anecdotal answers for them. As we pursue getting to know Jesus

Day 2

Reading the Bible *continued*

through this study, you will likely encounter some of those answers for yourself. To get to know Jesus, this study focuses on the Bible because it is historically the most reliable source of information about Jesus. And in the interests of understanding Jesus, we presume the existence of God because Jesus himself lives in that belief.

The reading for the first part of the study will be the biography of Jesus written by a man named Mark. In the Bible, the table of contents at the beginning will tell you which page to turn for the section written by Mark. Look for it shortly after “The New Testament.” Mark is divided into 16 chapters. Each chapter is further divided into verses roughly one or two sentences in length. To reference a specific line we use a notation such as “Mark 5:1” which means chapter five, the first verse. “Mark 2:3-7” means chapter two verse three through seven. For this first week, we will read all 16 chapters of Mark. I recommend reading three chapters per day which should take between 20-40 minutes.

Reading Today: Mark 4-6

20-30 minutes

Day 3

Perspective

I recently went to see a chiropractor about a back pain I've been having. Apparently my spine was out of alignment and causing pain. Before going I tried fixing the problem myself. My technique just wasn't as effective as the chiropractor.

God designed me and knows me inside and out. He knows the deep issues that I'm not even aware of and He wants to see me healthy.

Life will change as you spend time in God's presence. You will fall in love. You will be amazed to see things the way God does. Sometimes it will hurt like an addict becoming sober.

Welcome to the life you are meant to live.

This section is called perspective because most of that change comes as a result of seeing things from God's perspective. When we understand what He does it and what he values, it changes the way we approach life. Many of the things we value are realized to be quite trivial compared to God's values. Part of gaining wisdom and living differently is aligning what we value to what God values.

Day 3

There's not a person on earth who really is satisfied with whom they are. Even the ones who taught a lot of the popular non-sense of self-acceptance don't do so on the basis of their own perfection, but on accepting themselves warts and all. And they don't even totally accept that, for they are just as prone to buy books on self-improvement. In fact, we tend to count them in danger who *don't* at some level work on improving their game—no matter what that game is. In the life of the believer, God has even higher callings and standards. This isn't an "earn salvation" type of deal, but rather the response of a grateful, devoted heart to Him who loved her and gave Himself up for her. He did what He did for us, and so because He loved us, we love one another and have to work on being transformed daily more and more into His image.

Reading Today: Mark 7-9

20-30 minutes

Day 4

Influence

The message of Jesus is often described as “good news.” Part of the process of believing the message is passing it on (who doesn’t want to pass on good news?). When one person believes the message of Jesus it is good. But when more people believe that good becomes great for each of them. It multiplies exponentially. Why keep something good for yourself when giving it to others takes your good to a whole new level?

The section on **Influence** will take you step by step as you become someone who can meet real needs and brings good news into the lives of people around you.

I interact with people is based on this one truth: God loves the people of this world. This is remarkable because He loves some of the most unlovable scoundrels imaginable. He loves the ones that I can’t love. But as I spend time with God, my capacity for love grows to include people who were once beyond me. As our love expands God also expands our influence.

Reading Today: Mark 10-12

20-30 minutes

Day 5

Service

Screwdrivers make very poor hammers. A keyboard is not a good substitute for a paintbrush. We are designed uniquely by God to do wonderful things, just not all the same things. I am not like you and you shouldn't try to be like me. In the service sections you will learn how you work, your strengths, weaknesses and God given talents so that you can be effective and satisfied as you work towards your life purpose.

In a company, there are many departments. They aren't all the same and don't all do the same thing, but each is essential to the functioning of the corporation (except, arguably, human resources. Don't believe me? Google "human resources is " and see what the top suggested completions are). God assigns us different tasks according to His desire. Nothing says we can't pursue or ask for certain tasks, but nothing promises we'll receive those requests if He has a plan that goes better with what He is trying to accomplish. No one can improve on perfection.

Remember that we're not the star of the show. He has the right to make us into whatever He wants when He wants. Ours is only to do the next good thing He sets before us. It can be difficult sometimes to simply do so, but we must never let ambition get in the way of accomplishing the small things He wants to do. And there's nothing bigger than the small things.

Reading Today: Mark 13-16

20-30 minutes