

# A Walk to Remember: Mark

## Introduction

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Welcome to the next step in your journey of spiritual growth and self-discovery through *A Walk to Remember*. The task before you is pretty straightforward—to read through the four Gospels of Jesus Christ (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) in one calendar year. To help walk you through this process, you'll be provided with four different *guidebooks*: one for each book of the Bible. The *guidebooks* are each broken into days; with each day providing a selection to read from the Bible, reflections on the reading, questions to consider, and room to respond. Hopefully, you've had the opportunity to work through the Matthew *guidebook*. If not, Mark, the *guidebook* you now hold in your hand, is a great place to start!

Along the way, I hope you will continue to get to know Jesus better. You'll discover who He is and what He is about, with the ultimate goal that you'll be able to follow Him more closely. You'll notice pretty quickly that the ponderings and questions will be less about the context, the geography, or the history, and much more about what each passage reveals about Jesus our Savior.

Let me encourage you to find a quiet place and a consistent time each day to take this journey. Ultimately, I pray that you will discover Jesus in a deeper way and learn what He is truly about. Happy reading! Now, let's get started!

## Day 1

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**Read:** Mark 1:1-45

### **Going Deeper:**

One thing you'll notice pretty quickly as you read through the book of Mark is how quickly Mark moves from event to event. While the author of the previous Gospel, Matthew, shares the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and other important background, and in the next Gospel we'll see Luke take time to share many important details, Mark wants to get right after it. In fact, one of Mark's most often-used words is the Greek word "euthys", which is translated into English as "immediately", or "at once". In fact, Mark uses "euthys" 47 times in his brief Gospel. Bottom line- getting to the heart of the matter, and the heart of the Savior, was that important to him.

### **Apply:**

As you read through this Gospel, we'll be looking to go deeper not only into the words of the Scriptures, but also to your own personal spiritual health. As we today begin fresh a new Gospel journey, it's time again to get a spiritual baseline. As you read and reflect today, how would you describe your relationship with the Lord? Oftentimes, we go through life like Mark—moving at a rapid pace, doing everything "euthys", immediately. This journey, meanwhile, is designed to slow . . . you . . . down. So pull back for a moment, and reflect—what does Jesus mean to you? What are you hoping to get out of this journey?

### **Reflect:**

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## Day 2

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**Read:** Mark 2:1-28

### **Going Deeper:**

The narrative sandwiched in the middle of Mark chapter 2 is one of my favorites, and is one of the most encouraging scenes in the ministry of Jesus. While journeying and teaching, Jesus encounters Levi, whom we know as Matthew, author of the first Gospel. Matthew was among the despised tax collectors, yet Jesus invites him to become a disciple, a trusted follower. Next thing you know, Jesus finds himself at a table with tax collectors and other sinners, “for there were many who follow him” (2:15). You can imagine this makes the self-righteous and seemingly spiritually healthy Jewish leadership very unhappy. A good teacher like Jesus isn’t supposed to hang out with the tax collectors; He’s supposed to hang with us good folk . . .

### **Apply:**

Friends, take careful note of with whom Jesus spends time, and who He doesn’t...

So often we falsely think we need to “clean ourselves up” before we can have a relationship with Jesus, but this narrative, and so many others like it, reveals that the exact opposite is true. Jesus didn’t come for “the righteous, but sinners” (2:17). I’ve heard it said this way—the church, those gathered around to grow in Jesus, you and me, is not meant as a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners. So don’t hold back from God. Don’t try to hide your sin or brokenness from God. He can take it; He can forgive it. It’s what He came for.

So for just a moment, lay bare what especially plagues you. Whatever it is—pride, lust, greed, anger, fear, self-reliance- Jesus can take it.

### **Reflect:**

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## Day 3

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**Read:** Mark 3:1-35

**Going Deeper:**

A common theme that runs through much of Mark chapter 3 is that of spiritual warfare; namely the battle that exists between the Lord God and Satan. We see it in the evil spirits that come out to see Jesus by the lake, as well as in the accusation made by those in Jewish leadership that Jesus was demon-possessed.

Mistakenly, we often picture the battle between Jesus and Satan as a clash of titans, a battle of equals, with ultimate victory hanging in the balance. In some ways, this is understandable—a quick look at culture and current events reveals that perhaps Satan is indeed winning.

Yet Mark 3 sets us straight. While Satan and his angels have power and sway on Earth, their threat is contained and Jesus has the power and authority to silence them. It's what we see Jesus do to those demonic forces that came out to Him by the lake. Mark 3 reveals that rather than hanging in the balance, the victor is clear—it's Jesus.

**Apply:**

Jesus is in control. Yet survey the grip fear and anxiety have on so many, and you'd never know it. The world and its worries have a way of consuming us, so much so that Jesus almost seems incapable of helping. Can you relate? Pause and reflect on this, in light of Mark 3: What are you trying to control? What has you worried, afraid, and anxious, probably because you so desire to fix it? How's that desire-to-control thing going? If you're like many, you are struggling...

People of God, what would it look like to hand over control to Him who actually has the power and authority to guide, direct, and control? In the space below, identify what you are tempted to control, and allow yourself to pass the baton...

**Reflect:**

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## Day 4

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**Read:** Mark 4:1-41

### **Going Deeper:**

God is working, all the time. Forget the notion of God, high on a throne, letting the events of Earth play out. Instead, “carefully consider what you hear” (4:24) Mark chapter 4 to be revealing about the work of God:

- He’s busy like a sower, spreading seed (i.e. working) all over—on the path, in rocky places, among thorns, with some landing on good soil (4:1-20).
- He’s busy like seed that grows “night and day, whether (the man) sleeps or gets up” (4:26-29).
- He’s busy like a mustard seed, “which is the smallest seed . . . yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all” (4:30-32).

God is busy, His Kingdom is advancing, whether we are aware of it or not.

### **Apply:**

Sometimes it’s clear to see God busy at work in our lives—providing, blessing, growing . . . Other times, it’s not so clear. In fact, the challenges and trials of life make it seem that sometimes God is nowhere to be found . . .

Let this chapter of Mark soak in for a bit, and may it confirm for you the presence and workings of God. Take a quick inventory in the space below: where do you see God at work, busy, in places you’d expect Him to be? Also consider this: How might God be working in an unexpected way?

### **Reflect:**

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## Day 5

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**Read:** Mark 5:1-43

**Going Deeper:**

Here we see Jesus meet a celebrity; only it's not the type of celebrity you and I would want to meet. It's a demon-possessed man, and the community knew him as the man they tried to bind with chains but could not. They knew him as the man who lived among the tombs and who would cry out and cut himself.

Again, it's not the type of celebrity you and I would want to encounter, but he's right up Jesus' alley. Remember, Jesus has not come for the healthy, but for the sick (2:17), and He does an absolute miracle in this man's life. He expels the demons, sending them to live within pigs. Immediately, the man once possessed is "dressed and in his right mind" (5:15). Then Jesus shares these words with the healed man: "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you". Imagine what it was like for that family, to see their son and brother back home, healthy . . .

**Apply:**

Jesus does transformations, which means He is busy changing you. You may not have the experience of evil spirits fleeing you in a dramatic fashion, yet make no mistake—Jesus is seeking a powerful conversion of your soul.

Allow me to ask the tough question: What is Jesus transforming within you these days? How is your life fundamentally different because you are a converted follower of Jesus Christ?

**Reflect:**

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## Day 6

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**Read:** Mark 6:1-56

### **Going Deeper:**

Mark chapter 6 is a very busy section. Think about it: Jesus is rejected in His hometown; He sends out His disciples as Apostles, teachers and healers; His forerunner, John the Baptist, is beheaded; He feeds five thousand people; and He walks on water. All in one chapter . . .

So busy, in fact, is chapter 6 that you probably didn't catch one seemingly insignificant footnote in verses 51 and 52: "They were completely amazed (when He walked on water), for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened." Don't miss what Mark just told us. When Jesus took five loaves of bread and two fish and feed five thousand people, the disciples, those closest to Him, didn't understand it. They couldn't, because "their hearts were hardened" (6:52). After seeing Jesus walk on water, they get it, and they begin trusting Him anew.

### **Apply:**

The hardening of human hearts is one of the most complex parts of understanding the Bible. From Pharaoh in the book of Exodus to Romans chapter 1, hardened hearts prevent people from seeing, believing, and advancing the will of God. This example is no different—the disciples fail to see the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand for what it truly was.

This chapter is a poignant reminder to be busy praying for our hearts to ever soften. From the testimony of the scriptures, it seems the only way to prevent a hardened heart is to continually avail ourselves of Jesus' message, and that's exactly what you're doing with this journey. So let's take time to be in prayer today for soft hearts, that we might see the work and miracles of Jesus even more!

### **Reflect:**

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## Day 7

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**Read:** Mark 7:1-37

### **Going Deeper:**

Jesus' conflict with the Jewish leadership is beginning to intensify. In fact, Mark chapter 7 reveals the sharpest confrontation to date between the two parties. The issue? The failure of Jesus' disciples to follow the man-made, ceremonial traditions that Jewish leaders held to so strongly. Their desires were in some ways noble—to avoid being contaminated and swayed by sin and thus remaining pure before God. Yet in their desire for external purity, they had missed perhaps the most important point of all—“Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ . . . Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean’” (7:15). Said a different way—external actions are considerably less critical to spiritual health than what lies underneath it all . . .

### **Apply:**

This is an important point we don't want to miss, one that requires considerable prayerful reflection and examination. In our effort to pursue righteousness, doing good, and pleasing God, are we so focused on the external actions that we end up missing what's most important—God's work of rehabbing our soul, from inside out? No spiritual practice, whether it's worship, prayer, or even journeying through *A Walk to Remember*, should be done as a pursuit of the external action as an end in itself. That was the mistake of the Jewish leadership. Every spiritual practice should be practiced with one aim in mind—changing our hearts.

Take a quick checkup—are you pursuing spiritual habits as ends in themselves, or are you employing them as windows into greater spiritual transformation?

### **Reflect:**

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## Day 8

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**Read:** Mark 8:1-38

**Going Deeper:**

Have you ever had a really amazing moment, and a really challenging moment, both in the same day? That's what happens to Peter in our reading for today. In a high point, he nails the identity of Jesus: "You are the Christ" (8:29). Way to go Peter! Yet moments later, when Jesus reveals that being the Christ means a crucifixion, Peter rebukes him, and tries to talk him out of it. In that moment, Peter hits rock bottom. "Get behind me, Satan", Jesus replies. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (8:33).

What Jesus says next represents perhaps the most challenging words He speaks to His followers in the entire New Testament. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (8:34-35).

**Apply:**

Like Peter, we have our high moments with God, and we have the spiritual moments we'd like to forget. Sometimes those moments are even in the same day! Yet as Jesus teaches His followers, we need not be swayed by the highs and lows of our spiritual climate. Instead, by the power of the Gospel, we continually seek to "lose our lives" (8:35); knowing that in doing so, we will experience "life to the full" (John 10:10).

We are all hanging onto something in this life. Whether it's a sin we don't want to let go, pain or anger from the past (or the present), wrestling with our identity in Christ, or desiring control over it all (see day 3!) What do you hear God inviting you to let go of today?

**Reflect:**

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## Day 9

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**Read:** Mark 9:1-50

### **Going Deeper:**

Mark chapter 9 is a challenging collection of narratives and teachings. Beginning with the mountaintop moment of the Transfiguration, continuing to Jesus' teachings on servant-hood, and culminating in His call to take sin seriously (verses 42-47), this is one tough chapter. If you're like me, it can almost inspire more questions than answers . . .

It's appropriate, then, that the conversation between Jesus and the father of the demon-possessed boy takes place in the heart of the chapter. It's a conversation that speaks to the honest human emotions of faith and doubt. The Father's request of Jesus for healing sounds like something we would say: "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us" (9:22). Jesus' memorable reply: "If you can? Anything is possible for him who believes" (9:23). You can almost hear the emotion in the response of the Dad: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (9:24). What an honest reply!

### **Apply:**

The life of every follower of Jesus Christ is marked by mountain-top moments of faith and trust, but also real-life moments of doubt and fear. We can all identify with the refrain of the father in this story; it's appropriate even to adopt his prayer as our own: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (9:24).

The Good news? As always, what we need, God provides. God indeed strengthens our faith through His word, conversation with other Christians, prayer, worship, the Lord's Supper—even taking this *A Walk to Remember* journey. All of us, at different times, echo the request of the boy's father. In the space below, reflect on what area of your life has you most in need of a "faith infusion," and take a moment to pray and ask for it. Remember—what we need, God provides!

### **Reflect:**

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## Day 10

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**Read:** Mark 10:1-52

### **Going Deeper:**

The story of Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler in 10:17-22 has often confused and perplexed Christians. It doesn't seem very—well—Jesus-like. When a wealthy leader comes to Jesus asking what he must do to be saved, Jesus challenges him to become obedient to the commands of God, even going so far as to give away his riches to the poor. It's basically a challenge to someone incredibly self-reliant to be completely reliant on God. Devastated at the thought of having to give it all away, the man goes away dejected. We hear the story and wonder: Isn't Jesus supposed to be nice to everybody, ever patient, never closing doors?

This passage reveals that sometimes Jesus has challenging words for us. While we like to focus on the easy words, and make coffee cups, t-shirts and songs out of the Jesus statements we like, He is continually challenging His people to go deeper in their walk with God. Sometimes it takes tough words to get the message across.

### **Apply:**

You know it: sometimes God doesn't give us the answer we expect. Sometimes His ways are mysterious, even hidden. Perhaps as you read this you have something you are praying for and hoping God does, but He remains elusive and seemingly unwilling to grant your request. Perhaps it's physical healing, restoration of a conflict, or conquering of a sin. Whatever it is, let me encourage you to be persistent in prayer. The teachings of Jesus reveal that persistence has power. For a few moments, lay before God what seems especially elusive these days. Even if you, like the rich ruler, don't get the answer you are hoping for, trust God and His will to eventually break through . . .

### **Reflect:**

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## Day 11

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**Read:** Mark 11:1-33

**Going Deeper:**

The beginning of Mark chapter 11 records the event that has become known and celebrated as Palm Sunday: the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem. One thing that makes Palm Sunday such a favorite day for so many is that for at least one day, Jesus is received as the king He truly was. A prepared road . . . garments and palm branches to make the way smooth . . . shouts of Hosanna and praise . . .

Yet once in Jerusalem, Jesus has work to do. Of course his ultimate work will be accomplished on the cross, but that is still days away. First, and it takes places the very first day after His arrival in Jerusalem, Jesus must do the work of clearing the Temple. God's house had become an economic hub, with trading and profits to boot. Well Jesus wants no part of it, and Mark tells us that Jesus overturns the tables with strong emotion.

**Apply:**

The work of Jesus here is not meant to be merely another historical event in the life and ministry of Jesus. What happens in Jerusalem should have ripples in our lives as well. Allow me to ask the hard question: What needs to be “overturned” in us? What is preventing you from living “life to the full” (John 10:10) in Jesus? There are things, different things, in all of us, yet they all equally need the light of Christ to shine down upon. The first step is acknowledging their weight before God. Use the space below for some honest confession time with God, and let’s continue His work in you!

**Reflect:**

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## Day 12

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**Read:** Mark 12:1-44

### **Going Deeper:**

Reading through the Gospel of Mark, or really any of the four accounts of the life of Christ, you can begin to get the idea that the events that make up these books are random. It appears, seemingly, that there is no rhyme or reason why certain events or conversations happen when they do. Let me tell you—nothing could be further from the truth. God is orchestrating each and every event recorded in these Gospels, and they are ordered and connected like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

Take for instance the conclusion to chapter 12. Following a series of sharp exchanges with the ruling Jewish leadership comes a seemingly random observation of a widow and her offering. A deeper look, however, reveals more is at play here. God has ordained this narrative to happen and be recorded here to serve as a contrast with what we see in the Jewish leadership. After a chapter full of arrogance, pride, and haughtiness, we are introduced to sheer thankfulness, humility, and obedience.

### **Apply:**

Don't let the story of the widow and her offering merely be a teaching point on offerings and stewardship. Frankly, it runs much deeper than that. Deep within all of us lies not only a bit of the mentality of the Jewish leadership, but also, by the power of the Holy Spirit, some of the widow's best attributes. Take a moment and reflect below on what you see in yourself—how are you plagued by what hamstring the ruling 1<sup>st</sup> Century authorities? i.e., in what parts of your life are pride and haughtiness festering? Finally, reflect on and give thanks for the work of the spirit within you—how are you reflecting thankfulness and humility?

### **Reflect:**

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## Day 13

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**Read:** Mark 13:1-37

### **Going Deeper:**

The streets of 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jerusalem must have been quite a sight, especially for someone not from the city. The buildings, the temple, and the signs of prosperity—it must have been pretty impressive. In fact, we hear a follower of Jesus say just as much. In the first few verses of chapter 13, one of the disciples comments: “Look, teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!” (13:1). It’s perhaps similar to what you’d hear today when taking someone to Michigan Avenue in Chicago or Times Square in New York City.

However, Jesus quickly responds, “Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down” (13:2). As best as we can piece together, Jesus is speaking of two future events—the fall of Rome in 70 A.D. and the end of times when the world is completely renewed. Now, what happened in 70 A.D and what will happen at the end of times brings many questions, some the Bible doesn’t give us clear answers for. Yet Jesus’ fundamental point here is worth heeding: don’t get so caught up in the temporary that you begin to ignore the eternal.

### **Apply:**

It’s a common mistake, and I think it impacts all of us at one time or another. The demands of the temporal can so powerfully draw us in that it seems like what is only temporary is all there is. Jesus, meanwhile, recalibrates our thinking. The world, and all its trials and temptations, are not going to last forever.

Ponder the “great buildings” and “stones” in your life. Things like your job, status, popularity, and success—things that won’t matter one day. Are such things getting all your focus, so much so that they are blinding you from seeing the eternal?

### **Reflect:**

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## Day 14

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**Read:** Mark 14:1-72

### **Going Deeper:**

It's Passion Week for Jesus, the days leading up to His crucifixion and Resurrection. It's a busy week, comparable to tax time for an accountant or finals week for a student. So what is Jesus doing? Studying? Cramming? Busy with preparations? Try again. He's dining with lepers (14:1-11). It's here, in the hours before He shares the Lord's Supper with His disciples, that Jesus is anointed with the expensive alabaster jar of oil. Even though He, no doubt, had so much on His mind, here He is, dining with lepers. And in doing so, He is teaching us that sometimes what appears as not that important is in fact just the opposite . . .

### **Apply:**

We are all busy. In fact, "I'm busy" is probably the most common response to the question: "How are you?" We're busy during the week, we're busy on the weekends, and we're even busy while on vacation!

We're so busy that I'm afraid we miss seeing what the Lord wants us to see. It's like the driver who is so preoccupied with the business call on his cell phone that he misses the rainbow gracing the sky.

If anyone had an excuse not to dine with the lepers, it was Jesus during Holy Week, yet He accepts the invitation. In your busyness, what might you be missing? What is the Lord inviting to experience, but you are responding with, "I'm too busy"?

### **Reflect:**

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## Day 15

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**Read:** Mark 15:1-47

### **Going Deeper:**

The narrative of the last few hours in the life of Jesus reveals a great contrast. It's the stark difference between the faithfulness of Christ and the unfaithfulness of those around Him. Who will be faithful here? Will the disciples keep watch and pray with Jesus in the garden? No, unfortunately, we find them sleeping. Will Judas be faithful and obedient to Jesus? No, he sells out for mere silver coins. Will Peter be faithful in acknowledging he knows Jesus? No, instead it's "woman, I don't know what you are talking about" (14:68). Will Pilate faithfully abide by Roman law? No, he'll cave to intense peer pressure. There is just so much unfaithfulness in this narrative.

Meanwhile, will Jesus be faithful? The answer is a resounding "Yes"! He will faithfully, obediently, endure it all. The beatings, the mocking, and the crucifixion—all endured to faithfully accomplish the purpose for which He was sent- "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10)

### **Apply:**

The longer you live life as a Christian, the more tempting it will become to build your relationship with God around your own faithfulness. The devil's most secretly successful strategy is to slowly build pride within us for worship attendance, acts of love, generosity, even finishing book 2 of *A Walk to Remember!* Mark 15 demonstrates what we can truly build on—the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. For a few moments of Sabbath and worship, consider the ways Christ has exhibited faithfulness for you—both during his Passion, and now.

### **Reflect:**

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## Day 16

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**Read:** Mark 16:1-20

### **Going Deeper:**

It's just two words; two simple words that capture the power and truth of the Resurrection. So entrenched are they in the Resurrection story that it's easy to blow by them. The words? "And Peter", as in, "He has risen! He is not here . . . But go, tell his disciples **and Peter**" (16:6-7). Why are these two words so powerful? Consider where we last saw Peter—denying Jesus, seeing Jesus off in the distance, and fleeing. But now, some of the very first words spoken in the empty tomb are words of care, concern, and, most importantly, forgiveness for Peter. After promising He would never deny Jesus (14:31), He did; but now, the Resurrection is an invitation to Peter to join in the new day that has dawned.

### **Apply:**

What a beautiful ending to Mark's Gospel. Those words, "and Peter," are a powerful closing exclamation point on the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ and the Gospel of Mark itself. Be assured of this: the invitation is extended to us as well. In a way, we're all Peters—we lie, deny, steal, bear false witness, and more. Yet Christ comes and shines light and forgiveness into our dark places.

Finally, I love how the Gospel concludes. After Jesus ascends to heaven, we get these words: "Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them . . ." (16:20) The same people who received forgiveness now go and tell the story. And the beauty is—it's left open-ended. You and I are a part of what those first disciples received and shared, and today we continue what they started.

So to conclude our journey—what is that continuation going to look like for you? You are not only a recipient of forgiveness, you share it with others; but where, and with whom?

### **Reflect:**

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## Dedication

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This labor of love is dedicated to the people of Lord of Glory, with whom I am so thankful to take this spiritual journey; to my wife, my parents, and my family, who are an earthly manifestation of the unconditional love of Jesus Christ; and ultimately to the Glory of God, that I and others may press even further into knowing Him.

I'd also like to give thanks to God for Tammy Griffin, who designed the cover art; Lorelee Campbell, who served as the editor on this project; Cindy Benzinger, who worked on final formatting, and Glenn Minarcik of Sterling Graphics in Lake Bluff, IL, for generously printing these guidebooks. "Your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (I Corinthians 15:58).

To God be the Glory!

Pastor Brian Davies

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*Lord of Glory*

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