PART 1

CONNECT GUIDE



WALLACE MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH

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AS WE BEGIN
A READING PLAN

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WEEK 2

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WEEK 4

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WEEK ONE

DAY 1: MARK 1

UUPG Prayer Focus: Kazakh in Kyrgyzstan / Tajiks in Kyrgyzstan

Welcome to our study in the book of Mark. If you had to pick a place to begin studying the Gospels then Mark is a great place to begin. You'll find that in comparison to the other Gospels, Mark is written in a much more succinct fashion. That's because it was most likely the first Gospel of the four that was written. In the beginning days of the early church, most of the new converts did very little writing or record keeping because they thought Jesus would be back any day. As questions began to arise in new churches, the apostles began to respond in letters. When Roman persecution really ramped up, several believers of the time realized that their knowledge needed to be preserved because they might not make it.

That's when the book of Mark was written, most likely in the mid 60s AD when Emperor Nero began his campaign of persecution against the small but rapidly growing Christian movement. The book of Mark gives us first hand accounts about what Jesus taught, and how He lived among humans, in a way that no writing had before. Mark focuses on the authority of Jesus and His identity gives Him power and dominion over all things. This focus on the authority of Jesus was probably of great comfort to those being persecuted in

the early days of Christianity. In a tumultuous world, we can let that same authority of Jesus comfort us and guide us to the realization that no matter how difficult it gets along the way, Jesus determines the final situation and He is redeeming every circumstance for our ultimate good.

DAY 2: MATTHEW 3

UUPG Prayer Focus: Latin American Nikkei in Japan / Jerba in Tunisia

Throughout this study we will be cross referencing Matthew and Luke often. While Mark often gives us a concise description, Matthew and Luke will often give more detail and depth about the same stories of Jesus. This is because both Matthew and Luke used the book of Mark to inspire the way they organized their own account of Jesus' life. We call these three the "synoptic" Gospels because they see the narrative from a very similar point of view.

Both Mark 1 and Matthew 3 give us a view of Jesus' Baptism and John the Baptist's recognition of Jesus as the Messiah. John the Baptist was already recognized by many as a prophet, in these accounts we find out that he is the "voice of one crying out in the wilderness" who has been foretold to announce the long awaited coming of the messiah. These

verses are deeply important as they show Jesus' identity and station being confirmed by a prophet initially, and then also by the Father, and the Spirit in the description of the baptism. In just one passage we are able to have a valid witness of the Messiah's arrival and a clear view of the full Trinity. As we continue to read, don't miss these little details in Mark. It may be stated quickly, but every sentence holds great value.

DAY 3: LUKE 4

UUPG Prayer Focus: Jains in India / Eritreans in Germany

Mark 1 lets us know that Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days to be tempted. This is an incredibly important step in Jesus affirming His identity and rights. You see, literally everyone else who had ever come before Him had failed, and succumbed to the temptation of sin. By directly facing the temptation of Satan and resisting, Jesus validates His claim to the authority of being the messiah and the ruler of all things. Adam and Eve failed in the Garden. Abraham failed numerous times. Moses failed when he hit the rock. The nation of Israel failed every temptation that was put before them. Jesus however, proves that His intentions and actions remain pure regardless of the circumstances. He passes the test in His 40 days in the wilderness, that Israel couldn't pass a single time in their 40 years.

Luke gives us far more detail than does Mark. Luke also lets us know that Jesus was fasting and depending on God to sustain Him, just like Israel failed to do with their manna and quail. Luke lets us know that Jesus rejects worshipping other gods and remains faithful, unlike the Israelites who built a new idol every chance they got. Luke lets us know that Jesus would rather rely on Scripture than even physical sustenance because He knew that only God could keep Him strong. The temptation of Jesus shows us that He was perfect and worthy in every way that humans had failed. Jesus proves His right to authority, and validates His claim as the Messiah.

DAY 4: MATTHEW 4

UUPG Prayer Focus: Kararish in Sudan / Deaf Kyrgyzstanis in Kyrgyzstan

Mark 1 and Matthew 4 both give us an account of Jesus calling His first disciples and he began His ministry in Galilee. It can be quite shocking for us to see that these men who chose to follow Jesus just abandoned their jobs at that moment and chose to follow a teacher. Did they not have bills? Didn't they have families to worry about? After all, at this point Jesus is still pretty new on the scene.

This scenario, however, is not far-fetched for a first century Jewish person. It was actually common for young men to aspire to the priesthood, or become an apprentice of a rabbi.

Many of the men who became Jesus' disciples had probably sought this and been dismissed by other rabbis when they failed to become the most promising students. This story serves a much bigger purpose than just letting us know how Jesus acquired His disciples. It validates His authority as a teacher, and establishes Him and one who can call men out of the world and into the service of God. By choosing men who have already tried and been rejected He also proves that He came for the very purpose of redemption. Each detail of Mark and Matthew tells us something deeply important about who Jesus is and what He came to do.

DAY 5: LUKE 14:25-33

UUPG Prayer Focus: Azerbaijani in Turkmenistan / Serbs in France

This first chapter of Mark has shown us how Jesus establishes His authority over all things. He is affirmed by a prophet. He is supernaturally affirmed by the Father. He calls disciples with the authority of a teacher. He overcomes the temptation of Satan in a way that no human ever has before. Every action of Jesus and every detail of the story shows us how He uses history, the law, and supernatural divinity to establish Himself and the undisputed ruler of all things.

The final story in Mark 1 shows us that Jesus has authority over Creation itself. The man with leprosy shows us that Jesus doesn't require ingredients, medicine, time, or even an action.

His very will and ascent are enough to rewrite this man's physical nature and instantly cure him of a disease that was considered an unstoppable death sentence at the time. Jesus didn't have to apply cream, or even wave His hand. Jesus proves in one moment that He has authority over all created things as He simply wills a new reality into existence. Jesus is the one who binds and sustains all reality, and this proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that He is worthy of worship and obedience.

DISCUSSION GUIDE: NOVEMBER 22, 2026
WEEK ONE: MARK 1

This week we began our study in the book of Mark and began to understand the underlying theme of Jesus' authority. We also cross referenced Mark's account with Matthew and Luke to how the different writers of the Gospels added details in different ways to support their particular theme. Today, your campus pastor will walk you through understanding how the authority of Jesus compels us to follow Him as a church.

ACTION STEP

How will I live out the action step this week?

SERMON NOTES

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 1

- Have you ever been anxiously awaiting an arrival? Maybe it was a package from a special order? Perhaps a relative coming to visit? Even an email with big news? What sign did you look for to signal that arrival? Why was this particular wait so exciting?

- Jesus sought out John the Baptist to be baptized. We know Jesus had no need to repent or ask forgiveness so why did He seek out John the Baptist and go about this?

- Why did Jesus spend 40 days in the wilderness? What did this prove?

- Briefly scan each section of chapter 1. How do Jesus declare or prove His authority in each section?

- How can you embrace the authority of Jesus in your spiritual disciplines this week?

WEEK 2

DAY 1: MARK 2

UUPG Prayer Focus: Zenaga in Mauritania / Ga Mong in China

Although the first chapter of Mark offered numerous rapid fire claims to support the authority of Jesus, we don't simply move on to a new topic at the beginning of chapter 2. In fact Jesus begins this chapter by making one of the boldest claims to authority that we have seen yet. When a group of friends destroy the roof of the house to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus for healing, Jesus instead tells the guy "your sins are forgiven." The immediate objection of the scribes in attendance is that no one has the authority to forgive sins except God alone.

The objection of the scribes would have been valid... except for the fact that we've already established the divine authority of Jesus. Jesus can forgive sins precisely because He IS God. He isn't blaspheming, He's revealing Himself to anyone who is paying attention. The dissenters clearly miss this point though, so Jesus reminds them of who He is by commanding this paralyzed man to get up and carry his own mat home. This passage reminds us that we need a savior who can heal our body and our soul. We need a messiah who can call us to walk and tell us our sins are forgiven. We need God Himself, and Jesus proves He is that authority.

DAY 2: MATTHEW 8

UUPG Prayer Focus: Kabyle in Belgium / Budhan in India

In Matthew 8, we see Jesus heal the leper just like He did at the end of chapter 1 in Mark. This type of miracle would have had special significance to the Jewish people for a few different reasons. First, a skin disease like leprosy would have made this man ceremonially "unclean," and would have prevented him from worshipping God. Jesus gives us great insight into who He is by healing him in a way that also restores that potential for relationship. There was also no cure for leprosy, so Jesus' miracle proves that nothing is impossible for Him. Finally, based on the law, this man can now rejoin the people and will no longer be an outcast. Jesus is showing us that he redeems in every way possible.

Matthew also follows this healing up with another story that demonstrates the authority of Jesus. In the story of the leper we see the social order flipped because a man receives grace where his culture thought he had no hope, but in Matthew 8 we also see that a Roman Centurion humbles himself before Jesus and asks Him to heal a member of his household. As a Roman soldier this man would have had the might and sway of the world's most well trained and fearsome military behind him, but instead He chooses to recognize the greater power of Jesus' divine will. In these chapters Jesus proves over and over that He has all authority. Our choice is whether or not we

will be like the scribes and reject it, or like the centurion and humbly accept it.

DAY 3: LUKE 5

UUPG Prayer Focus: Northern Tati in Iran / Natua in India

In both Mark 2 and Luke 5 we see Jesus call Levi, a tax collector to be one of His disciples. It is difficult for a 21st century westerner like you and I to really grasp how controversial of a decision this was. True, no one likes paying taxes, but Levi and his coworkers would not have even been collecting taxes for their own government, but for the Roman government that was controlling Israel through military occupation. Levi's own people would have seen him as an immoral traitor. Most people would not have even spoken to a tax collector, and many of the Pharisees and Zealots may have even targeted them for assassination. Just imagine if your pastor walked on stage this Sunday and told you that the newest church staff member was a loan shark working for the Taliban, and you'll start to get a picture of how shocking this was.

Both Mark and Luke mention that the religious elites of the time were making quite a fuss about Jesus even associating with tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners. These men saw themselves as far too righteous and pure to ever share a meal with people like these. Jesus very directly reminds them that he came to rescue and redeem those who have strayed

from the light, and not to inflate the egos of those who pride themselves on their own righteousness. This reminder is for us as well. Jesus has little patience for our pedantic notions of what is proper. He has no time for performative morality that demeans those in difficult situations. To submit to the authority of Jesus we must reject our notions of suburban propriety and take His message to those who need redemption.

DAY 4: MATTHEW 12

UUPG Prayer Focus: Saudi Arabs in Oman / Iraqi Arabs in Syria

Mark 2 and Matthew 12 teach us that we can follow the law, and still completely miss the point. Many people throughout the centuries have come to the false conclusion that they can follow the law and establish themselves as perfect righteous individuals. By doing this, however, they simply exhibit their own arrogance and draw further away from God. The law was designed to show us how sinful we are, and how badly we need a savior. It was also designed to teach us who Jesus is and how He would operate. Most importantly for this passage though, is that the law was designed to show us the character of God. When we warp the law we distort the perception of who God really is, and that is something we can't allow.

The Scribes and the Pharisees wanted the law to be a checklist that validated their personal sacrifice, but Jesus points out

that He desires mercy and not sacrifice. THe sabbath was meant for rest, and yet as humans we always slide back into trying to justify ourselves through pointless business and calling it morality. God rested on the seventh day of creation, not because He was tired, but because rest is inherently good, and He wanted to set that example for us. Jesus reminds us that the Sabbath is a mercy for our enjoyment. It's not a catch up on work day. It's not an emotional metaphor for worship. It's a call to reject self justification through labor and simply enjoy existence as a gift from God. Let's not fall into the same trap as the Pharisees. Let's embrace the gift of Sabbath rest that God has granted us.

DAY 5: MARK 2

UUPG Prayer Focus: Toposa in Uganda / Macedonians in Italy

In this chapter we see that Jesus establishes Himself as the authority over spiritual matters. He can forgive sins. He can give a definitive interpretation of the law. He can heal. He can redeem. He can even decide when it is and isn't appropriate to engage in particular spiritual disciplines such as fasting. This exhibition of Jesus' authority forever changed His relationship with the religious establishment of the time. The Pharisees and the Scribes hated the authority of Jesus because it took away their power over people, and denied them the arrogant validation they so desperately wanted.

It is often difficult to accept the spiritual authority of Jesus. So

often we want our lists of rules and checklists of how to be a better person. Jesus, however, is not interested in our desire to be comparatively better than someone else. He will not pander to our notions of propriety and social norms. Mark 2 reminds us that Jesus alone determines the parameters of the mission and we have no room to negotiate. Our only options are to humbly submit and accept His spiritual authority or to go the way of the Pharisees and try to inflate our own egos through pathetic attempts as looking better than someone else. Let's not make that mistake. Let's follow Jesus as the authority over all things.

DISCUSSION GUIDE: NOVEMBER 29, 2026
WEEK TWO: MARK 2

This week we analyzed the stories found in Mark chapter 2. Once again we see that Jesus performed miracles, and established dominion to prove His authority. Specifically, He revealed His divine authority by forgiving the sins of the paralyzed man. This week your campus pastor will guide you through what this divine authority means for us as a church while we follow Jesus and share His message.

ACTION STEP _____

How will I live out the action step this week?

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SERMON NOTES

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 2

- What's the most outlandish or difficult favor you have ever done to help a friend? Why were you willing to go to such lengths to help this person?

- Why did the Scribes and Pharisees accuse Jesus of blasphemy instead of recognizing Him as the Messiah?

- When the religious elites harass Jesus for eating with "tax collectors and sinners," He rebukes them and reminds them that He came to save the lost. What groups of people does our culture seem to have a problem reaching? How can we rebuke cultural propriety to make sure we are sharing the Gospel with those who need it?

- In the second half of John 2, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for making the Sabbath about rules and oppression instead of honoring it as a gift. Are there any church customs or traditions in our culture that should be a gift instead of being twisted into a burden? How can we help people understand the proper intention of those traditions instead?

WEEK THREE

DAY 1: MARK 3

UUPG Prayer Focus: Pari in South Sudan / Lithuanians in Germany

We are all reminded of certain truths from time to time. One of the most painful truths that we get an unpleasant reminder of occasionally is that there are consequences to defying the rightful authorities. When we smart off to a teacher or a boss, we end up with reprimand. When we drive unsafely we see flashing blue lights in our rearview mirror. When we don't pay our bills, we get collectors calling and knocking at our door. When we challenge rightful and just authority there are always consequences.

In Mark 3 we see that Jesus has His authority, and its source, openly challenged. Because Jesus is also merciful we see one of the harshest rebukes found in the Gospels. In verses 28 and 29 we see Jesus explain to those accusing Him of demonic possession that the rejection of the Holy Spirit will not be tolerated. These men were seeing people called, seeing demons cast out, seeing the Holy Spirit at work, and they claimed it was evil. Jesus readily and happily forgave tax collectors, prostitutes, murders, and criminals, but He made sure the people knew that unless they submitted to and properly recognized the Spirit of God that they would be eternally punished. So as we study the authority of Jesus

in Mark, let's ask the Spirit to reveal Himself so we too can humbly submit to Him.

DAY 2: LUKE 6

UUPG Prayer Focus: Engenni in Nigeria / Malian Tamajeg in Niger

We don't get to give Jesus rules. Part of recognizing Jesus' authority is dealing with the fact that we don't make any decision about what is right and wrong, only He does that. We don't get to tell Jesus what is proper, or the socially acceptable way to go about something, because Jesus is above all our social structures. Yet, for some reason that is exactly what the Pharisees tried to do in Mark 3 and Luke 6.

When a disabled man came to Jesus in the synagogue did the Pharisees watch for a miracle? No, they watched so they could critique when and how Jesus healed someone so they could assault His character in a sad attempt to regain their personal clout. Jesus, knowing exactly what these guys were up to, called the man over and healed him, but before He did he made sure to publicly call out these hypocrites to remind them that they missed the point. Is it lawful to do good or harm? That was His question. We need to ask ourselves the same. If we see the poor being fed and housed and think "handouts," then we are the same type of hypocrites as the Pharisees. When people struggling with sin and hardship come to our churches

and we think "I'm better than that," then we are declaring ourselves enemies of Jesus just like the Pharisees. When we bring immigrants, other cultures, and new languages into our church and we meet them with expectations that they should conform to our ways, then we (like the Pharisees) are holding our nationalism over the mercy of Jesus.

So when we see compassion and mercy let's rejoice and the character of Jesus and not walk away angry like the Pharisees.

DAY 3: LUKE 5

UUPG Prayer Focus: Zanzibari in Oman / Mahra in Yemen

Mark 3 tells us that Jesus called twelve men up to the top of the mountain and appointed them with special authority to go out and preach. People crowded around to see what was happening and even Jesus' own family, at that point, thought He was crazy. One of the themes throughout the book of Mark is that many people failed to recognize Jesus' identity and therefore were slow to accept His authority.

Luke 5 tells us another story about how several of those men were originally called to follow Jesus. Simon (Peter), James, and John were allowing Jesus to teach from one of their boats. After He concluded, Jesus told them to go out and cast their nets in the deep water. Despite some skepticism, they eventually agreed. When their nets overflowed with fish they

quickly recognized that Jesus had performed a miracle and left everything to follow Him. Only minutes before that, a giant haul of fish would have been the best thing that could happen to them, but when they realized Jesus had the authority to do this at will they rearranged their priorities and followed immediately.

They didn't truly understand who Jesus was til later, but they recognized His authority over nature immediately. Many of our friends and neighbors may not yet understand who Jesus is, but just like Peter, James, and John they can take one small step of faith and see that Jesus is better than anything else they ever thought they wanted.

DAY 4: MATTHEW 12

UUPG Prayer Focus: Iraqi Arabs in United Arab Emirates / Mesengo in Ethiopia

The end of Matthew 12 and Mark 3 tell us the exact same story. Jesus' birth family arrives at the place He is teaching and expects to have special privileges. They expect that they will be ushered through the crowds and brought forward to speak with Jesus immediately. His response to the announcement of His mother and brothers might be somewhat startling to us. He asks "Who are they?" and then points out that the people sitting around Him are His true family because they have chosen to follow Him.

In our culture we are often told that our blood family is supposed to be the most important thing in the whole world to us, and this is where we may have trouble accepting the authority of Jesus as well. Jesus lets us know that our connection to Him and to our fellow believers supersedes and outweighs even our connection to our immediate family. If we truly believe that Jesus is the authority then we have to accept every priority rearrangement that He puts forward. No, I'm not saying abandon your family, but I am saying we cannot view the church (universal church, not just your place of attendance) as an optional group of acquaintances. Each believer that is truly following Jesus must be treated and a greater connection than even your own immediate family. It's a difficult teaching, but the lesson from Mark is clear: Jesus is the authority.

DAY 5: MARK 3

UUPG Prayer Focus: Karlar in India / Geser Gorom in Indonesia

This chapter gave us many difficult teachings. We learned that Jesus is the authority over all Spiritual matters, including things like demons, sin, consequences, the law, and even our thoughts and intentions. We saw Jesus perform miracles of healing and prosperity. We saw Him instantly rearrange the priorities of several disciples when they chose to follow Him. We saw Him challenge our notions of family and hierarchy. Most importantly we saw that we have no place to negotiate, amend, or reject the authority of Jesus and that if we don't

recognize and submit to the Holy Spirit we will be punished for all eternity.

We also need to see the stark contrast in how people reacted to Jesus' authority. Tax collectors, sinners, the disabled, and fishermen had the humility to recognize that Jesus was operating with divine power and therefore they received great blessing by submitting to Him. The Scribes and Pharisees only saw Him as a threat to their own power and control so they hated Jesus, hardened their hearts, and began plotting ways to kill Him. There is no such thing as neutrality when it comes to the authority of Jesus. We can either follow Him or follow our own sinful desires. There is no compromise.

DISCUSSION GUIDE: DECEMBER 6, 2026
WEEK THREE: MARK 3

This week in our study of Mark, we saw that many of the religious elites tried to challenge or reject the authority of Jesus and He offered them some very intense warnings. We also examined how the priorities of Jesus and His kingdom will be at odds with our own, unless we fully submit to Him. Today your campus pastor will break down some of these challenges to Jesus' authority and show us why it's always better to follow His priorities than our own.

ACTION STEP_____

How will I live out the action step this week?

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SERMON NOTES

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 3

- In the early parts of this chapter we see yet another conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees over Sabbath law. Why did Sabbath laws in particular become such a flash point between Jesus and the Pharisees? How were they twisting these laws? Why did that matter so much to Jesus?

- In Mark 3, Jesus officially calls and commissions the 12. This passage says He officially appointed them as Apostles. It is common for people to use the words "Disciple" and "Apostle" interchangeably, but they are not the same. What is the difference between a disciple and an apostle?

- When they accuse Him of demon possession, Jesus gives the crows a terrifying warning about blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. We see many stories even in Scripture about those who reject the Gospel and eventually come to belief. How is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit different?

- At the end of this chapter, Jesus' mother and brothers come to see Him, but He says that those who do the will of the Father are His true family. This would have been a massive priority shift for those who sought to follow Jesus? How can we honor this and treat fellow believers as a higher form of family? What other cultural priorities does Jesus often ask us to rearrange to follow Him?

WEEK FOUR

DAY 1: MARK 4

UUPG Prayer Focus: Lange Burun in Sudan / Susu in Senegal

The fourth chapter of Mark teaches us a valuable lesson on how the Gospels are written. In many cases we assume that each of the Gospels is a separate chronological biography about the ministry of Jesus. Because of this, many people point out that different tellings of each story contain different details and the stories themselves often appear in a different order between the Gospels. However, when we realize that each of these Gospels is not a biography or a chronicle, but a thematic arrangement we can begin to better grasp the intention of the author.

Mark 4 is an excellent example of this because the main theme (Jesus' authority) is so prevalent that we can see how the material is arranged to highlight the particular theme. It's not necessary that Jesus taught all the parables we see in Mark 4 back to back to back, because it's perfectly acceptable that Mark simply grouped several parables about the Kingdom, and the identity of Jesus together to make his point clear. The parable of the sower teaches us that "seed" is often a metaphor to describe the Word of God, and that Jesus used parables to obscure His message and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal their meaning to those who earnestly seek Him.

So as we continue through our study on the book of Mark,

remember, we don't have to follow this like a story, but we do have to pay close attention to the themes the author is highlighting.

DAY 2: MATTHEW 13

UUPG Prayer Focus: Southern Baloch in Qatar / Egyptian Arabs in Qatar

Mark 4 and Matthew 13 give us a number of parables that show how the Word of God comes into contact with and changes the lives of people. We are also lucky enough that the writers chose to include Jesus' explanation of this parable in the Gospel because understanding the meaning also allows us to interpret the other parables of the chapter. The first and most important symbolic meaning found in the Parable of the sower is that the seed which is sown represents the Word of God.

Jesus begins this parable by setting the expectation that the good news about the Kingdom of God will be spread throughout the world. Yes, He gives numerous possibilities detailing how it might be received, but He begins with the baseline assumption that His followers will emulate Him by continuously going about and telling others about who Jesus is and how to be saved.

We will examine the different types of soil the rest of the week, but I want us to take this opportunity and ask ourselves this question: Are we sowing the word of God? That is our call. In Matthew 28 Jesus tells us to go into ALL nations and even to the ends of the Earth. The good soil needs to receive the seed to produce the plant to produce the fruit. Jesus, as the authority, commands us to be sowers like the one in this passage. So let's take a few minutes and pray. Let's ask the Spirit to help rearrange our priorities so that sowing the seed will be the first thing on our minds wherever we go.

DAY 3: LUKE 8

UUPG Prayer Focus: Saudi Arabs in Qatar / Sudanese Arabs in Qatar

That's right, the parable of the sower is also in the book of Luke, and it remains consistent throughout each version of its telling. The first soil is a tragic tale. Satan snatches the word away from the hearer and it never grows. How does this happen in real life? It happens because many end up believing that voice of doubt in their heads is actually their own voice. Satan speaks to us, he tells us to doubt the authority, power, and intention of God just like he did to Eve in the garden. What can we do? Well when we sow the word we don't just walk away. We come back and sow it again. We answer questions and let our consistency banish the doubts that Satan casts.

Then there is the soil where the plant nerve thrives because it has no root. How does this one happen? It happens all too easily in our world today. Many people believe they are saved because they raised their hand and prayed a prayer. They hear the word, but think that they are Christians because they're Americans, or because they come from a Christian family. Without truly understanding who Jesus is through community, spiritual discipline, and the continuing revelation of the Holy Spirit that person will remain unrooted. This is why we must always follow up. This is why we have Connect groups, D groups, Bible studies, and reading plans. This is why we check in and hold each other accountable. We want our friends and new converts to grow, not burn away so we stick around with consistent long-term discipleship.

DAY 4: MATTHEW 13

UUPG Prayer Focus: Turks in Egypt / Nagekeo in Indonesia

Today we continue on examining the soils in the parable of the sower, and we reach a story that seems all too common. We see roots, and we see growth but the cares of the world rise up and choke the life out of the fledgling plant. How many times have we seen this with fellow church members? This isn't just simple enthusiasm fading, this is real life. The cares of the world are many. The tedium of work, the pain of loss, the tiredness of modern schedules, the fact that we all carry a tiny screen that gives us bad news every 4 seconds. It can be so

easy to simply get so distracted and depressed in our culture that we fall away and get choked out by the thorns.

That's why we need to be good gardeners for our friends and fellow church members. We need to remind them every day that God's Kingdom is bigger than even the worst troubles of this world. We need to encourage them, cry with them, provide for their needs, and help our brothers and sisters keep going. This is the call of Galatians when it tells us to bear one another's burdens. So ask yourself today: How can I encourage my fellow church members, and keep the cares of the world from choking their growth and stifling their faith? Then don't waste time. Call them immediately and put this into action.

DAY 5: MARK 4

UUPG Prayer Focus: Laven in Laos / Deaf Palestinian Arabs in Palestine

All throughout the parables in this chapter we keep hearing a phrase get repeated over and over. "Hear and obey." The good soil hears the word and obeys. In fact the word "listen" or "hear" in the original language means to understand and obey. Then at the end of many of the parables, Jesus says "Anyone who has ears, let him hear." Jesus claims that He speaks in parables so that only those who seek the revelation of the Spirit can HEAR. The parables all make it clear that hearing and obeying the word is how one enters the Kingdom of Heaven.

Then we come to the story that ends the chapter. Jesus is taking a nap when a huge storm threatens to wreck the ship. His disciples are terrified. They even ask Jesus whether or not He cares what happens. Jesus, confused, asks them why they have so little faith and simply tells the storm to "hush." The wind and the waves, the very forces of nature, hear and obey Jesus because He IS the Word of God. They recognize His authority in a way that the disciples haven't yet.

So let's take our cue from the wind and the waves. Let's really listen to these parables. Let's acknowledge the authority of Jesus and let His Word change our lives so that we may be the good soil and produce much fruit.

DISCUSSION GUIDE: DECEMBER 13, 2026
WEEK FOUR: MARK 4

This week we took a look at the parables in Mark 4. We learned that these parables and their arrangement are not necessarily chronological, but rather are reflective of the theme the author was choosing to highlight. In this chapter we saw that Jesus tells parables about the Word, and how we are changed through listening and obeying helped reveal His identity as the Word of God that created all things. Today your campus pastor will share how this identity and authority can give us great confidence as we follow Jesus.

ACTION STEP_____

How will I live out the action step this week?

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SERMON NOTES

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 4

- If Jesus came to share His kingdom with the world, then why do verse 10-12 of chapter 4 tell us that Jeus used parables to obscure His meaning? Wouldn't He want people to understand?

- Jesus describes the first group of hearers in this parable as the soil who had the Gospel snatched away by Satan. How does this happen in real life? What can we do to prevent it?

- Jesus describes the next group of hearers as "unrooted." Why do so many people in our culture end up unrooted? How can we invest in our younger generations as a church to make sure they have a rooted faith?

- Jesus also describes another group of hearers as being choked out by the cares of the world. How do all our struggles and problems end up choking out our faith? How can we encourage and help our fellow church members to make sure this doesn't happen?

- How are you going to act this week to help you fellow church members produce fruit?