

PREPARING THE WAY OF THE LORD

LISTENING FOR GOD THROUGH MARK 1:1-20



SUMMARY

The Boy Scout motto is simply “Be Prepared.” Preparation, it has been said, is the key to success in anything you really want to accomplish. So we prepare for everything from a test, term paper, and speech to a sporting event, band concert, and date. We build a solid foundation in the hope of achieving a good result. We prepare in order to have control—or at least influence—on what happens in the future.

We must also prepare ourselves for an encounter with Christ. In order to meet Christ, we must be prepared for His presence and calling upon our lives. It also means we avoid the temptation of trying to control our lives and its future.

Repentance (the act of confessing our sins to God and turning away from our life of sin), trust, and compassion are key elements in our preparation for meeting Jesus. When we follow Christ, our actions and their outcomes are under His control. That means we place ourselves in His hands. So getting ready

to meet Jesus is not a matter of preparing to do something, but of preparing to be faithful to His call. This means being ready to do whatever He asks.

PREPARATION FOCUS YOUR THOUGHTS

God has promised to come to us. As you think about Christ's coming into *your* life, what is your reaction? Does your heart beat faster? Do you feel anxiety or excitement?

READING HEAR THE WORD

In his opening chapter, Mark prepares his readers to hear the story of Jesus. He does this by telling of the ministry of John the Baptist, who has been called the forerunner of Christ. (A forerunner is one who goes ahead of another person, letting people know that the person is coming and giving them time to prepare for that person.) John's ministry was rooted in the message of the prophets of the Old Testament, which points to the saving work of God through the coming Messiah (Jesus). In describing John, Mark combines the words of one Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, with the visual image of another, Elijah.

John called Jews to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Jews regularly washed for ceremonial cleansing, but baptism was usually practiced only for Gentiles (non-Jews) who converted to Judaism. So John's call was a radical step, caus-

ing Jewish people to rethink their standing with God under the covenant (the agreement between God and His people).

Galilee was a surprising place for Jesus to begin His ministry. Jews from Galilee were the first to be exiled at the hands of the Babylonians several hundred years before the time of Christ, and inhabitants of the region had a reputation for unfaithfulness to the covenant. Galilee also had a significant Gentile population, and Jews in and around Jerusalem looked unfavorably at those from Galilee.

Read Mark 1:1-20 aloud, paying close attention to words or phrases that create a sense of urgency, making you want to read on.

MEDITATION ENGAGE THE WORD

Meditate on Mark 1:1-8

What do think about *repentance*? Do you find it inviting? challenging? unlikable? Why do you react as you do? Why do you think Mark begins his Gospel with a story about repentance?

Billy Graham says, “*Repentance means to change your way of living. It means to change your mind, you are going in one direction in your life, but then you turn and go in another direction.*”

How often do you think it is necessary to repent? Is repentance a one-time act, a continual process, or both? In what ways might a person's life change after repentance? What direction is your life going right now?

Mark says the Jews confessed their sins as they were baptized. What is confession?

That evil spirit will no longer be able to vex you, nor will that foul serpent [Satan] henceforth make his lurking place in you, as he has been dragged out into the light from the darkness by your life-giving confession.
—Abbot Serapion

Read the quote above. What does it mean that confession drags Satan into the light where he is exposed and condemned? Have you ever confessed a sin to someone else? How did you feel afterward? Did confession help in overcoming that sin? What is the relationship between confessing and repenting?

Meditate on Mark 1:9-13

Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. This signified the be-

ginning of His earthly ministry. This also signified His identification with the sinfulness of humanity and the acknowledgment by God as His Son and our Savior. Although He had never sinned, He identified himself with our sin. What lessons on the subject of sharing our faith might we get from this passage? What can you do to identify yourself with sinners, as Jesus did?

Read the quote below from George MacDonald. How does this statement relate to Jesus' command to "love your neighbor as yourself"? In what way is Jesus' baptism an example of that command?

There is no feeling in a human heart which exists in that heart alone—which is not, in some form or degree, in every heart. —George MacDonald

Meditate on Mark 1:14-20

When we prepare to meet Jesus, we must be prepared to follow Him. He gives a simple call: "Come, follow me" (Mark 1:17). To that call, Jesus adds a promise: "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." There is no promise of success. Jesus promises only a purpose, a mission. As we follow Jesus, trusting Him totally, we see His path unfold before

us. At first, however, we must decide whether we trust Him enough to follow Him.

Read the quote below from Mother Teresa. What have you dreamed of doing for God? When and how have you heard His call upon your heart and life? Were you afraid?

Let's do something beautiful for God.

—Mother Teresa

PRAYER ASK AND LISTEN

Seek the face of God. Ask, “Lord, what are you saying to us today?”

Confess and repent of your sins before God. Pray for the salvation of others. Ask God for the strength to follow Him wherever He leads.

CONTEMPLATION REFLECT AND YIELD

God has promised to come to us. Reaffirm your belief that He will come to you and ask you to follow Him.

What dream has God laid upon your heart? Do you trust Him enough to act upon that dream? Do you trust Jesus to make you who He wants you to be?

GROUP STUDY

- Why are some sins more difficult to confess and repent of than other sins?
- Why are confession and repentance important when it comes to following God?
- How do we recognize God's call on our lives?
- How hard is it to leave your comfort zone and follow God's call?
- Why is it difficult to trust God's plan, especially when we have no idea where it might lead?
- With a partner, discuss what you will do to act upon God's call on your life. Name the first action you will take this week on your journey with Jesus.

