

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: The Beautiful Upset

WEEK 1 - And So It Begins...

INTRODUCTION: The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN: If you knew you only had one year left to live, what are some of the things you'd want to do in the time you had left?

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together: *Mark 1:1-20*

The gospel of Mark is all about action, and puts us right into the middle of it from the very beginning. It reads more fast-paced than the other gospels, but don't let it's fast-paced cause you to miss the critical details Mark puts in those stories for us to pay attention to as we read. Remember as well that Mark's primary audience was Gentiles, and his gospel was likely the first of the four, as both Matthew and Luke share content with Mark, and these three gospels are called the Synoptic (common views) gospels.

HEAD: Explore the Text

1. Share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts you received just from listening to the text, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead.
2. What was "Good News" about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God? What would you say to someone who had never heard?
3. How do you think John the Baptist came across to people? What was the attraction that drew so many?
4. If Jesus was without sin, why was he baptized?
5. Mark doesn't tell us as much detail about the temptation in the wilderness, but why do you think Jesus was sent there right after his baptism, by the Holy Spirit?
6. For Simon, Andrew, James, and John to be fishing with their father's at this age, meant that they had been passed up by the Jewish elite for further training in the Torah. So what do you think it meant for them to be chosen by another Rabbi?

HEART: Personal Reflection

1. We're told Jesus was around 27 when he began his public ministry. If you knew you only had a short time on earth to change the world, why would you spend so much time out of the spotlight of influence?
2. When you chose to get baptized, why did you and what did that experience mean to you? Any memories that have stuck with you about that moment?
3. John the Baptist knew who he was (the voice in the wilderness), and who he wasn't (the Messiah). When people are coming to you in droves, people who are hoping you're the Messiah, how do you stay focused on your call instead of trying to elevate yourself to a call that isn't yours?

4. Has the Spirit ever led you to places you didn't want to go (i.e. Jesus and the wilderness - a dry, hot land)?
5. Like the disciples, we are all called. What specific calling(s) do you find that Jesus has given you in your life?

HANDS: Practice This Week

Spiritual Practice: Getting in-tune with your calling

- Jesus calls each of us to follow him, to first be with him, then to go out for him. We each have a calling. Spend time this week, 5-10 mins each day, asking God to reveal the specific calling in your life. What has he gifted you to do? Where has he placed you and what opportunities are before you?
- At the end of your time, simply ask God, "What is your calling for me life?"
- Journal any words, thoughts, or ideas that come to mind.
- At the end of the week, review your journey and see if you gain any more clarity on your calling than you've had before, or at least than you've had in a while.

Invite the group to check in next week about their experience.

WORDS TO REMEMBER (2 Corinthians 5:20-21, NLT)

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: The Beautiful Upset WEEK 2 - Healings, Authority, Invitations

INTRODUCTION: The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN: Where in your religious and spiritual journey, have you seen people or organizations 'miss the point' of the gospel and that which matters most?

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together: *Mark 2:1-28, Mark 3:1-6*

Jesus taught with authority because he didn't have to reference other rabbi's in order to teach, he simply taught truth, wisdom, and insight that truly impacted hearts and lives, not to mention his authority over darkness. When we claim his name, we are under his authority and can walk courageously in his steps approaching the throne of grace with confidence.

HEAD: Explore the Text

1. Share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts you received just from listening to the text, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead.
2. Notice in Mark 2:5, it says “seeing their faith” Jesus forgave the man’s sins. Do you think it was “seeing the faith of his friends” or “seeing the faith of them all”? What does it say about
3. So the teachers of the law were upset when Jesus claimed to forgive sins, but “They were all amazed and praised God” when the man was healed. Why the difference?
4. What do you think the disciples thought when Jesus called Levi Matthew, a tax collector? The religious leaders saw the “sinners” Jesus was eating with “scum.” What people groups have we stopped seeing as people, as children of God, and simply labeled? What do labels do to our humanity?
5. How were the disciples “harvesting grain” by picking off the heads to eat? What experiences in your life have you seen the Sabbath abused or misunderstood?
6. Why do you think Jesus was angry and “deeply saddened” by the religious leaders concerning the man with the withered hand? And why were the Pharisees so determined to kill Jesus after this incident?

HEART: Personal Reflection

1. Where in your religious and spiritual journey, have you seen people or organizations ‘miss the point’ of the gospel and that which matters most?
2. Who are the people in your life right now that you’d metaphorically tear a hole in a roof if it meant getting them to Jesus? Who would do that for you?
3. Who are the people in our world that are the “scum” from the religious elite, the people that we should have around our tables and in our churches?
4. How do we keep from putting our understanding of Scripture, before Jesus and loving on people?

HANDS: Practice This Week

Spiritual Practice: how we start the day

- Knowing that the devil doesn’t care what we’re focused on, as long as it’s not Jesus, this week the challenge is to spend time each morning, even if just 5 or 10 minutes, focusing on Jesus before going out to your day. Here are a few ways to practice this concept:
 - Listen to an audio version of Jesus’ death and resurrection, like John 19-21
 - Memorize, then each day, recite John 3:16-17, imagining Jesus standing before you as you do
 - Just whisper his name in the morning, breathing in His love and spirit, and breathing out your worries and concerns
- At the end of the week, journal about your daily experience and if you were able to keep Jesus your main thing, even amidst the busyness of the world around you.

Invite the group to check in next week about their experience.

CLOSING PRAYER (The Shield of St Patrick)

Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: The Beautiful Upset WEEK 3 - The Kingdom

INTRODUCTION: The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN: What's a story or book you remember from growing up that you loved? What was it about that story that drew you in?

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together: *Mark 4:1-34*

Jesus was a master storyteller, and he obviously had observed enough of life, and got to know the people around him enough, that he could tell stories that they would understand. For some, it wouldn't be until the Spirit was poured out that they'd start to make the connections to what Jesus meant.

HEAD: Explore the Text

1. Share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts you received just from listening to the text, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead.
2. When you think about the seed scattered on the field, falling into one of four different places (the footpath, the shallow soil, among the thorns, and on fertile soil), which soil do you think represents our world right now? Our faith tradition?
3. Why do you think it was so hard for people to understand Jesus' parables?

4. Concerning the good soil, who produces the harvest; God or the person who received the seed onto good soil?
5. In Mark 4:21-25, Jesus puts a lot of emphasis on listening. Why? And how do you and I practice listening when it comes to Jesus? When it comes to each other?
6. What does the farmer and the mustard seed have to teach us about the kingdom of God?

HEART: Personal Reflection

1. Which of the soils (the footpath, the shallow soil, among the thorns, and on fertile soil), represents your own journey of faith at the moment? Which have you experienced in your life?
2. Can you think of any examples of a person or a movement who had a light, but hid that light from others? Why would one do this?
3. There are different kinds of light. Some light is blinding, other light isn't enough, while the right amount of light is an incredible blessing. What kind of light in the world of faith is often blinding right now, in a negative way? What might represent not enough light?
4. In the western world, we often put so much focus on what we produce, but these passages seem to be about putting ourselves in positions for God to produce something in us. What are those positions, those places and spaces that we put ourselves into that allow God to go to work, producing fruit, in us?

HANDS: Practice This Week

Spiritual Practice: learning to abide

- Read Luke 10:38-42. Reflect on the following questions in your time with Jesus this week:
 - Was what Martha was doing bad? If it wasn't, then what could have changed that would have allowed her to be filled instead of "worried and upset" in this moment?
 - What had Mary discovered that would "not be taken away from her"?
 - Do you think sitting at the feet of Jesus can lead to serving? Explain.
- Take time this week to simply sit at Jesus' feet and ask Him, "Lord Jesus, what would you have to say to me this week?"
- Journal your insights through this experience as you meditate on these truths this week.

Invite the group to check in next week about their experience.

WORDS TO REMEMBER (Hebrews 12:2-3, NLT)

Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: The Beautiful Upset

WEEK 4 - Good vs Evil

INTRODUCTION: The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN: Share with the group a time in your life when you were incredibly startled, whether by a friend, an animal or insect, or some other situation that made your soul leap from your body.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together: *Mark 5:1-42*

This chapter really emphasizes the power of Jesus over evil. The incident with the demoniac and the pigs is one of the only places where we hear dialogue between Jesus and the demons. Notice, there wasn't a question as to whether or not the demons had to do what Jesus said. There is power in the name of Jesus!

HEAD: Explore the Text

1. Share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts you received just from listening to the text, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead.
2. We don't know how long this demoniac has lived amongst the tombs and caves. Can you imagine how lonely, how much of a struggle, the demoniac man would have had up to this moment? Talk about what that must have been like.
3. Why would he cut himself? Was that the demons or him or both?
4. There were many demons in this man, but it only took "permission" from Jesus for them to come out. What does this say about Jesus' power of darkness?
5. What have you heard growing up about why Jesus let the demons go into the pigs?
6. This region Jesus traveled to was a Gentile part of the country. Nearby, it is rumored that the Roman's 10th Legion Army camped out. The mascot of this army, one of the deadliest and most powerful in history, was a boar (aka pig). So with that information - why do you think Jesus traveled to a Gentile region instead of a Jewish region? What might the casting of demons into the pigs who then ran to their death, communicated to the Gentiles about the power of Jesus?
7. Why do you think the people were afraid of the demoniac once he was sitting and clothed and in his right mind?
8. Usually, Jesus asks people he heals to keep quiet and not tell others, but this time, he's told to share with his family. He's given permission. Why the change?
9. What do you think the healing of the woman who had been bleeding, as well as the daughter of the synagogue ruler, communicated to the people about Jesus and his mission?

HEART: Personal Reflection

1. Have you ever been afraid of evil or felt personally attacked? If so, what did you do? What could you do?
2. How might we be able to tell the difference between someone having a mental issue, vs someone having a spiritual attack?
3. The woman who reached out for Jesus risked her life to get to him. Have you ever been desperate enough for Jesus that you'd do anything to get to him?

HANDS: Practice This Week

Spiritual Practice: reaching out for Jesus

- The woman who reached out for Jesus knew that if Jesus couldn't heal her, she was dead anyway. As she got close, she reached out for all she was worth, with all her strength.
- What needs healing, or the Master's touch, in your life right now?
- In your devotional time this week, sharing with Jesus what needs healing, and then imagine reaching out and touching the hem of his garment. As you take hold, where does his power go to in your life? What change takes place the more you practice this in your life?
- Journal your insights through this experience as you meditate on these truths this week.

Invite the group to check in next week about their experience.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I come to you with all I am

I know I can trust you, for you gave me all you are.

As I reach for you today, come in and touch the part of me that needs you most

Bring healing, bring wholeness, bring hope, bring restoration and reconciliation.

Then help me go forth into the world, and help clear the way so others may get to you.

In the precious, powerful, holy, resurrected name of Jesus I pray...Amen

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: The Beautiful Upset WEEK 5 - Critical Teachings

INTRODUCTION: The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN: Can you remember one of the best meals you've ever had? What was it, where was it, and what made it so good?

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together: *Mark 6:30-31,37,41, 47-50a, Mark 8:1-4, 14-17, 22-25*

HEAD: Explore the Text

1. Share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts you received just from listening to the text, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead.
2. Why do you think Jesus kept retreating with the disciples, away from the crowds, to quiet places for rest? Wasn't his time short? Didn't he have a lot to do? So why retreat just with this inner circle?
3. We know the amount of people Jesus told the disciples to "feed" was 5,000 PLUS women and children (more like 10-12,000). We know what they said, but what do you think they were thinking?
4. Who do you think gave them the five loaves and two fish? What do you think that person thought concerning this donation to the cause?
5. Why do you think Jesus intended to go past them?
6. When Jesus says don't be afraid, I am here, he uses the name of God. Do you think they realized all this in the moment, or did the real weight of what happen not hit until after the resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit?
7. After having seen Jesus feed the five thousand, why do you think the disciples doubted again when faced with another similar situation?
8. Concerning the blind man, we know that Jesus could heal from a distance just by saying the words. Why do you think he touched the man in this story? Why two touches when he could have done it in one?

HEART: Personal Reflection

1. Have you had any moments in your life with Jesus that have left you speechless? Miracles or experiences that you know could have come from no other source, couldn't have happened any other way, than from him?
2. What kind of "food" does Jesus provide you with and how does he do that for you?
3. Has Jesus ever come to you and whispered those words, "do not be afraid." If so, and you're willing, would you share that experience with the group?
4. When was the last time you retreated with Jesus to a quiet place where you got some rest? If it's been a while, what would it take for you to take that time in the next week?

HANDS: Practice This Week

Spiritual Practice: to a quiet place with Jesus

- Do you have any special spaces in your life that you go to (a prayer closet, a couch, a park, etc...), that you go to in order to spend time with Jesus? If not, consider choosing or creating one of those spaces.
- If somewhere in your house, think about what you could do to make that place special. Maybe it's hanging a picture or quote on the wall you can see as you spend time with Jesus. Maybe it's lighting a candle and silencing the other noise. Whatever it is, seek to create a space where the main thing you do in that space, is spend time with Jesus.

- Schedule an hour to be in that space with Jesus this week. Pray beforehand and ask Jesus to help clear your mind of the noises and distraction in your world, so that you may be with him.
- Then, simply be still and know that his is God, and he is with you.
- Journal your insights through this experience as you meditate on these truths this week.

Invite the group to check in next week about their experience.

WORDS TO REMEMBER (Psalm 18)

The following Psalm is a constant reminder that when we cry out to Jesus, he moves heaven and earth to be by our side, even in our worst moments:

6 But in my distress I cried out to the Lord; yes, I prayed to my God for help. He heard me from his sanctuary; my cry to him reached his ears.

7 Then the earth quaked and trembled. The foundations of the mountains shook; they quaked because of his anger.

8 Smoke poured from his nostrils; fierce flames leaped from his mouth. Glowing coals blazed forth from him.

9 He opened the heavens and came down;

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: The Beautiful Upset WEEK 6 - Who Is This Man?

INTRODUCTION: The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN: Have you ever met a celebrity; an actor, musician, athlete, author, etc...? If so, who, and what was the experience like? What were they like?

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together: *Mark 1:1, 11, 27, Mark 4:41, Mark 2:10-11, Mark 5:41-42, Mark 6:34, Mark 8:2, 22-26*

HEAD: Explore the Text

1. Share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts you received just from listening to the text, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead.
2. Knowing that Mark was writing largely to a Gentile audience, what does declaring Jesus as the Messiah, and the Son of God, mean to them? (keep in mind, Caesar referred to himself as the son of god, or even a god, as well)

3. God told Jesus he was “dearly loved” and brought him “great joy.” Why was this so important for Mark to state at the top of his gospel story? Have you ever heard God say these words to you?
4. Jesus taught unlike anyone before him. Everyone else had to state that their authority for teaching came from another Rabbi, but Jesus didn’t claim any authority but his own. Why is this important?
5. Why do you think the disciples were terrified after Jesus calmed the wind and waves? Don’t you think they just would have been relieved?
6. How do you think Jesus was able to stay on mission when he was here on earth? Wouldn’t it have been so easy to just keep healing people, casting out demons, feeding the hungry, etc...?

HEART: Personal Reflection

1. We see in the gospels, Jesus helping people in their worst pain and deepest grief. Why is it so hard for us to trust him in those moments, versus some of the more simple things in life like where are my keys?
2. What do you think we Christians do today that hurts Jesus’ heart?
3. What is happening in our world that you think Jesus’ heart goes out to and wants us to address?
4. What does it look like for us, today, to take up our cross, daily, and follow him?

HANDS: Practice This Week

Spiritual Practice: leaning on his everlasting love

- Some have said that the most important question you can ever answer in life is answering the question the disciples asked themselves after Jesus calmed the storm, “Who is this man?” What would your answer to that question be? Try to really unpack it. For example, you can say “Lord of my life,” but what does that really mean?
- Journal your insights through this experience as you meditate on these truths this week.

Invite the group to check in next week about their experience.

CLOSING PRAYER (Psalm 51)

Take time this week to pray and meditate on each of the titles given here to Jesus.

6 For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.