

SICK of RELIGION?

Weekly Devotional

A ministry of Chapel Hill

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WEEK 6

This guide pairs with Mark 3:7-21, 31-35 and the sermon preached at Chapel Hill March 30-31.



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LifeGroup Guide

Review

How has Christ been at work in your life over the last week?

Story

Mark 3:7-21

Head

Jesus is experiencing serious opposition by this point in the gospel. What is his response? Look for how he “withdrew with his disciples”, “went up on the mountain”, “called to him...and appointed 12”.

Look on a Bible map at all the place names mentioned in this story, to get a picture of just how far word about Jesus had spread by this point in Jesus’ ministry.

What is the purpose of Jesus drawing his disciples to him? (See verse 14)

Heart

What is your natural response in times of conflict or opposition? Is there anything you need to learn from Jesus’ strategies for sustainable, effective continuation of his mission?

Who are your 12? Who are the people you lean into in times of trouble, and/or who you are equipping to be on mission with you, spreading the gospel together?

Jesus wants his disciples to “be with him” and be “sent out”. Who else is considered part of Jesus’ family and do you see yourself in that way? (See verse 35)

Hands

Where can you partner with Christ in mission and service? Consider a mission or service opportunity that your LifeGroup might do together this season. Being “on mission” together provides both the opportunity to be together and grow closer in relationship, and to be sent out in a purposeful way to help others.

DAY 1 – Monday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 3:7-8; Matthew 12:14-15; Mark 3:13-15; Matthew 6:6

Ask

Jesus is experiencing serious opposition by this point in the gospel. What is his response? Look for how he “withdrew with his disciples”, “went up on the mountain”, “called to him...and appointed 12”.

Reflect

We pick up Jesus’ story just after he and his disciples have left the synagogue in Capernaum. Matthew 12:15 adds that Jesus withdraws to the sea because he is aware of the plot to take his life.

Again and again, Mark returns to the pattern of Jesus involved in confrontation and opposition, followed by a retreat to solitude. We see Jesus retreat in order to pray and recharge when he faces opposition from the Jewish authorities. We see him retreat for quiet prayer after healing people. We see him pray in solitude following intense interactions with demonic spirits. This is a wonderful example to us that we shouldn’t miss: the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, makes it a point to find a quiet place where he can be completely alone with God before choosing the 12 apostles.

Spend some uninterrupted time today with God. Separate yourself from distractions (including your mobile device!) and give yourself completely to God. If this isn’t already part of your regular spiritual routine, I encourage you to try to do this at least once a week if possible. Schedule it on your calendar like an appointment. You may find these moments with God to be among the most meaningful and important parts of your day.

DAY 2 – Tuesday

Daily devotional

Read

Mark 3:7-8; Mark 7:24-30

Ask

Look on a Bible map at all the place names mentioned in this story, to get a picture of just how far word about Jesus had spread by this point in Jesus' ministry.

Reflect

I'm a communicator, so I love positive publicity, but competing messages make it harder than ever to get peoples' attention. That's why businesses and organizations often require a marketing machine to raise awareness and elicit a response. However, if the messenger and message are authentic and good, people often respond favorably. Jesus did not need a marketing machine; as his fame grew, more and more people were following Jesus.

Not only are the crowds following Jesus growing, but according to the places named in Mark 3:7-8, it's clear they are coming from a larger radius. Christianity, at its core, is a religion that wants to grow. In Alan Hirsch's book *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements*,¹ he tells a story about the underground church in China. When Mao Tse-tung took power and purged religion from society, the church there was estimated to be about two million strong. Missionaries were banished, buildings were closed, and church leaders were killed or imprisoned. In the early 1980s after Mao's reign ended and foreign missionaries were allowed back in the country, they expected a decimated religion. Instead they found there were about 60 million Christians! We follow a God who does more than we ask or imagine, a God of the seemingly impossible!

As you dwell on the character of God, and the nature of the powerful gospel message that continues to spread around the world, pray about someone you want to invite to church this weekend and go ahead and issue the invitation! Be sure to talk about what Jesus means to you personally, because while it's great to invite people to church because of the great music, coffee, and preaching, the most important thing is for people to encounter the magnificence of Jesus Christ and his desire to seek and save.

¹ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements*, 2nd edition (Brazos Press, 2016)

DAY 3 – Wednesday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 3:13-19

Ask

What is the purpose of Jesus drawing his disciples to him? (See verse 14)

Reflect

I was a journalism major in college. One summer, I and a number of my fellow students served as interns at the ABC TV affiliate in Houston, Texas. Accompanying reporters on stories was fun, but most of them saw interns like me as a nuisance. One day, however, I accompanied a reporter named Sylvan Rodriguez to the Houston Space Center for a story on the space shuttle program. He asked me about myself, encouraged me, showed me the tricks of the trade, introduced me to his sources, and explained how he crafted news stories. I remember him as a warm, caring, genuine man of integrity who had my best interests at heart and wanted to see me succeed. Today, even though I'm not a hard-news journalist, I'm a storyteller and the things Sylvan said remain with me; in a way, I am still representing his principles.

Verses 14-15 explain Jesus' two-fold purpose for calling the 12 to be his apostles. The first reason was to draw them closer to him ("so that they might be with him", Mark 3:14). They lived with Jesus, traveled with him, talked with him, and learned from him. The second reason was to send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. Both reasons were equally important. In order to learn the ways and heart of Jesus, his disciples had to bond with him; only by doing so could they clearly represent his teaching.

If we say we follow Jesus, we cannot adequately present and represent him to a hurting world unless we have marinated in his teachings. That means spending regular time in the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, learning from mentors and Christian teachers, and taking everything to God in prayer. Is there someone you have been trying to reach with the Good News of Jesus Christ but have found it difficult or impossible? Pray about it; ask God for help. He is waiting to use you as his instrument.

DAY 4 – Thursday

Daily devotional

Read

Matthew 5:11-12; 2 Timothy 3:12; Philippians 1:9

Ask

What is your natural response in times of conflict or opposition? Is there anything you need to learn from Jesus' strategies for sustainable, effective continuation of his mission?

Reflect

All of us face opposition at some point. When Cara and I were pregnant with our daughter Mercy, some people questioned our plan to give birth at home. "What happens if there is fetal distress?" one of my well-meaning friends in the medical profession asked. Nothing we said seemed to change their minds; they felt we were making a big mistake, and they let us know!

I could give you other examples all day: why did we choose public school over private school? Why did we rent a home for a season in our lives instead of buying? Why did I choose to work mostly in the not-for-profit world?

Following Jesus leads to opposition. The Bible assures us of this. In Matthew 5:11-12, Jesus himself says, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

But God uses us in our weakness and the apostle Paul encourages us to stand firm because Jesus will always be with us: "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

What conflict or opposition are you experiencing currently? Take it to the Lord in prayer, and share with a trusted friend if you haven't already done so for further prayer support.

DAY 5 – Friday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 3:13-19; John 15:14-16

Ask

Who are your 12? Who are the people you lean into in times of trouble, and/or who you are equipping to be on mission with you, spreading the gospel together?

Reflect

The words “disciple” and “apostle” are often used interchangeably, but they have different meanings. A disciple is a pupil, while an apostle is a commissioned representative or emissary. There were a great many people following Jesus, but he chose just 12 men to be his apostles. (The significance of the number 12 might be that the apostles are a reconstitution of the 12 tribes of Israel.)

Why and how did Jesus select these 12? Biblical scholars tell us the apostles were not members of the formal Jewish religious leadership system; they came from ordinary backgrounds and had rather common livelihoods. They also had shortcomings—and not just Judas! We see examples of the 12 misunderstanding Jesus’ teachings, being too wrapped up in their own egos, unintentionally misdirecting Jesus from his ultimate mission. Despite this, Jesus was patient and I believe he treasured his time with these men he loved (John 15:14-16). All of us who call ourselves Christian are the beneficiaries of the apostolic witness of the 12.

If you have a few trusted friends in whom you can confide, that you can equip, and with whom you can share God’s mission to spread the Good News, thank them for how much they mean to you and make every minute with them count for God’s glory. If you don’t, pray that God would bring someone into your life soon.

DAY 6 – Saturday

Daily devotional

Read

Mark 3:14-15; Mark 3:34-35; Romans 14:17; Ephesians 4-6

Ask

Jesus wants his disciples to “be with him” and be “sent out”. Who else is considered part of Jesus’ family and do you see yourself in that way? (See Mark 3:35)

Reflect

Jesus says that “Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:34-35). And in the third petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus instructs us to pray “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” But how can we know God’s will in order to do it?

One of my favorite books is J.I. Packer’s *Knowing God*.² In it, he lays out a case for how we can know God and his will.

1. God speaks to us through the Bible (therefore we should read it!).
2. God is Lord and King, ruling all things for his glory so we may worship and adore him.
3. God is Savior through Jesus Christ to rescue believers from guilt and sin, adopt them as his children, and bless them.
4. God is triune, working and acting together in salvation (the Father purposes redemption, the Son secures it, and the Spirit applies it).
5. Godliness (and this is the key) is responding to God’s revelation in trust and obedience, faith and worship, prayer and praise, and submission and service. This is true religion, Packer argues.

Today, meditate on how you can do God’s will and live in God’s Kingdom: be full of joy, hope, and peace as a child of God, citizen of heaven, and faithful disciple of Jesus Christ (Romans 14:17; Ephesians 4-6).

² J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 20th Anniversary edition (InterVarsity Press, 1993)

DAY 7 – Sunday

Daily devotional

Read

Mark 8:34-38; John 20:21; Matthew 9:37-38

Ask

Where can you partner with Christ in mission and service? Consider a mission or service opportunity that your LifeGroup might do together this season. Being “on mission” together provides both the opportunity to be together and grow closer in relationship, and to be sent out in a purposeful way to help others.

Reflect

Two of the best books I have read on living life in authentic mission and service are *Exiles*³ and *Surprise the World: The Five Habits of Highly Missional People*,⁴ both by Australian writer and seminary professor Michael Frost. The common theme of both books is how God wants us to be on mission with him in every aspect of our lives. In *Surprise the World*, Frost talks about ways we can cultivate missional habits to intentionally bless people (and not just your fellow church members!), eat with people (outside of your usual circle of friends), listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit, learn more about Jesus Christ, and keep a journal of the ways you alerted others to the universal reign of God through Christ. Frost loves to frame intentional missional living as being slightly subversive and undercover, so that it won’t turn off those who aren’t committed Christians or church-goers.

You can also partner with Christ in mission and service more formally through the ministries of Chapel Hill. If you haven’t checked out chapelhillpc.org/missions lately, you might be surprised at the options that are available. In fact, under “Ways to Engage”, there are great opportunities you and your LifeGroup can serve together.

As Frost says, if you want to be a generous, hospitable, Spirit-led, Christlike disciple, then foster the habits of missional Christianity every day. May you find fulfillment in knowing God is using you and your gifts to share the love of Jesus with others—and maybe even set them free!

³ Michael Frost, *Exiles* (Baker Books, 2006)

⁴ Michael Frost, *Surprise the World: The Five Habits of Highly Missional People* (NavPress, 2015)