

HUMAN FLOURISHING

LEADERS NOTES



INTRODUCTION

Here is a fresh idea from the Bible Society: some material to help you open up the Bible with a friend or neighbour, and go on a one month journey toward greater flourishing.

The commitment is just one hour, once a week, for one month. The outcomes will be eternal!

Jesus said that he came to earth to give us life, and life to the full (John 10:10). What does that full life look like? Is it something we can only achieve in heaven, after we die?

Is it simply a spiritual experience?

For a long time, I thought the full life Jesus spoke about was a spiritual flourishing I would only experience in heaven. However, the more I learn about Jesus and his mission, I see that he came to model a flourishing life on earth, that continues into eternity. Christianity is not merely a set of beliefs, or even just a set of behaviours based on beliefs. It is a way of life, but more than that, it is a way of **becoming**.

In this set of four studies, we will examine key passages from the Gospel of Mark, to see how Jesus shows us what it means to become a flourishing human being. The important thing to realise is that we do not become flourishing human beings on our own, it always happens in community. We need others, and they need us.

These studies are a companion to a 14 day Daily Bible Series, which you can find online here: bible.com.au.

These studies will go deeper into four key texts, stretching our understanding, and challenging us to begin living a flourishing life.

AUTHOR:

Kara Martin is the author of *Workship: How to Use your Work to Worship God*, and *Workship 2: How to Flourish at Work* and was co-editor of *Transforming Vocation: Connecting Theology, Church, and the Workplace for a Flourishing World*. She is a lecturer with Alphacrucis College, and Adjunct Professor with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston. She is also on the Board of the Karam Fellowship (US).

STUDY 1

HOW JESUS IS THE MODEL FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING

OPENING QUESTION:

Do you think of Jesus as more God, or more man?
Give a reason for your answer.

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:5–11 TM

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mind-set as Christ Jesus:

⁶ who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death –
even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

DISCUSS:

What do you notice from this
description about Jesus being
both God and man?

INTRODUCTION

This passage helps us understand that Jesus was both fully God and fully human. It reveals to us that Jesus came in human form to be born, live, die, and rise again, to enable us to be restored in relationship with God. Since Jesus was without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), he is the one and only true human. He shows us what it means to be human in all its glory, to be a flourishing human.

In these four Bible Studies, we will look at some of the key aspects of Jesus' teaching and behaviour which demonstrate what it means to live life to the full. Notice what it says in verse 5: "In your relationships with one another..." All that we learn in these studies only makes sense lived out in community, in all the messy relationships around us, including with our neighbours.

Let's start with who wrote the Gospel of Mark. Mark is identified widely as John Mark (mentioned in Acts 12–15), who met Peter as he came out of prison, and accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys. He is believed to be Mark, cousin of Barnabas, affirmed by Paul (Colossians 4:10 and 2 Timothy 4:11), and commended by Peter (1 Peter 5:13). Although he was not an eyewitness of Jesus' life, it is accepted that Mark is capturing Peter's account of Jesus, and of course, Peter was one of Jesus' inner circle of disciples.

To live a flourishing life, the first thing we need to learn about is repentance.

READ MARK 1:1–15 TM

¹The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ²as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

'I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way' –

³'a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
"Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him."

⁴And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. ⁶John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and

he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And this was his message: 'After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

The baptism and testing of Jesus

⁹At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

¹²At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³and he was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Jesus announces the good news

¹⁴After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

CONTEXT

Firstly, note the titles for Jesus that Mark uses: "Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God". He leaves no doubt that the man Jesus he is talking about is also God. In fact, Jesus is the promised Messiah, the anointed One, spoken about by the prophets. Under his reign, there is to be flourishing on earth (you can read more in Isaiah 61).

DISCUSS

**What are the key messages of John the Baptist and Jesus?
How would you define the word 'repent'?**

When I first became a Christian, I was taught that repent means 'turning back'. The idea was that we should recognise that we had done wrong (sinned, fallen short of God's expectations), ask for forgiveness, and then turn back from sin to God.

There are some helpful thoughts there, but what I came to learn later is a richer definition of repentance. The New Testament was written in Greek, and the word for repentance is *metanoia*, which means "a new way of looking at the world". Literally it means "a changed mind and heart". It is a fundamentally different way of understanding God, yourself, other people, and the world.

With this new way of looking, we realise that our everyday lives are biased away from God, like a lawn bowl on a bowling green going away from the little white jack (ball). We need forgiveness now, and to embrace a new way of living, aligned with God. No wonder the immediate response to repentance was baptism, with the whole body washed clean.

What do you think Jesus meant when he said, "the kingdom of God has come near" (v.15)?

We often think of the kingdom of God as a future event, something that will be established when Jesus returns. However, Jesus seems to be speaking in the present tense: this kingdom "has come near".

The better way of seeing it is that King Jesus has come, and wherever he goes, the kingdom is being established on earth. This kingdom is not geographical, it is made up of people who acknowledge that Jesus is king.

So, Jesus is ushering in a new era which changes our way of seeing our relationship with God, and with the world. It is a new way of understanding how our story is linked with God's big story of creation, fall, Jesus' coming, looking forward to the new creation.

It helps us see all those around us—our neighbours, our friends, our family, work colleagues—in fresh ways.

When Jesus says, "believe in the good news" (v.15), what does this look like?

As well as repenting, Jesus tells us to believe, but this is not merely saying "yes" in your head.

Jesus is inviting us into a new relationship with God. With all relationships, belief is linked to trust. If your parent says to you, "I believe in you", this is a significant statement. It means "I trust you", "I believe you will be consistent in your behaviour" and "I will act as if you are being your best self". In the same way, we are to say to Jesus: "I believe in you. I trust you with my whole life."

APPLICATION

- Does faith change the way you see everything?
- What areas of your life have changed since you became a Christian?
- Does faith change the way you see working? Money? Rest? Eating? Parenting? Your relationship with neighbours? ...
- Are you trusting Jesus with every area of your life?
- Do you pray about different areas of your life?
- Do you see Jesus as king of all you have and do?
- What have you been challenged by in this study?

PRAYER

Start by praying for each other, particularly about the areas of challenge.

Dear God,

Thank you for sending John the Baptist who prepared the way for King Jesus to come and establish his kingdom on earth.

Thank you for the invitation to see everything differently, through the frame of faith.

Help us to be washed clean of everything that might distract us in our relationship with you. Help us to focus our hearts on loving you in every area of our lives.

Amen.

STUDY 2

HUMAN FLOURISHING IS MARKED BY ABUNDANT HOSPITALITY

OPENING QUESTION:

**Describe a time when you experienced wonderful hospitality: a hotel, visiting people, a meal...
How did that make you feel?**

READ MARK 6:30–44 NIV TM

³⁰ The apostles gathered round Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'

³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

³⁵ By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. 'This is a remote place,' they said, 'and it's already very late. ³⁶ Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.'

³⁷ But he answered, 'You give them something to eat.' They said to him, 'That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?'

³⁸ 'How many loaves do you have?' he asked. 'Go and see.'

When they found out, they said, 'Five – and two fish.'

³⁹ Then Jesus told them to make all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³ and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴ The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

CONTEXT

Jesus has sent out the 12 disciples (Mark 6:6b–13), and they have been travelling around in pairs preaching, driving out demons and healing people. King Herod has heard about this and mistakenly assumes that Jesus is John the Baptist resurrected. This reaction is probably driven by guilt since Herod was responsible for John's beheading (you can read about that in verses 14–29).

In verse 30 we read that the disciples have all gathered to debrief with Jesus, but they are being overwhelmed by crowds of people. Jesus expresses a desire to get away with them so that they can get some rest and he can finish the debriefing.

DISCUSS:

What do verses 30–31 tell you about Jesus and his relationship with his disciples? What clues do we get for thinking about Jesus as a model for Christian leadership?

In spite of Jesus' plan, they get interrupted. Even in this solitary place, the crowds gather. As in Mark chapter 5, Jesus allows himself to be interrupted.

What is Jesus' motivation?

Note: compassion literally means to “suffer with”—not just meeting physical needs—but meeting their spiritual, emotional and mental needs.

What is the significance of Jesus seeing them as “sheep without a shepherd”? What other Bible references come to mind?

READ JEREMIAH 50:1, 6–7 NIV™

This is the word the Lord spoke through Jeremiah the prophet concerning Babylon and the land of the Babylonians:

⁶ ‘My people have been lost sheep;
their shepherds have led them astray
and caused them to roam on the mountains.

They wandered over mountain and hill
and forgot their own resting place.

⁷ Whoever found them devoured them;
their enemies said, “We are not guilty,
for they sinned against the Lord, their verdant pasture,
the Lord, the hope of their ancestors.”

God is speaking through the prophet Jeremiah to his people who have been carried away into captivity by Babylon.

DISCUSS

Who might the shepherds be?

Who is responsible for the situation God's people find themselves in?

The shepherds in this case are the leaders of Israel: the

priests and kings who have led them astray. However, all the people are guilty of not recognising who God is. In our Mark 6 reading, we see that the people are hungry for the teaching of Jesus, but they are also physically hungry.

Jesus is teaching the people, it is late, and they are far from shops or homes. The disciples want to send the people away, but Jesus, continuing in his training mode, challenges them to solve the problem. However, the thinking of the disciples is controlled by the material world around them, rather than kingdom imagination: “That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?” (v.37)

We now move onto the well-known miracle: the feeding of the 5,000. Sometimes our familiarity with this story might hide some important learning.

What stands out in a fresh way in your reading of Jesus' miraculous feeding of the people (vv.38–44)?

Jesus takes charge and gathers the food available: two fish and five loaves of bread. He gives thanks God to for the food. Jesus doing this is significant, because we see him doing it again later at the Last Supper. Then, the food is distributed, and there is abundance for all.

The number of excess baskets is significant: 12 tribes of Israel, 12 disciples... The number 12 signifies wholeness, and it also speaks to the generosity of God. He feeds us beyond what we need. There is an abundance here which is indicative of the kingdom.

What difference does it make knowing that Christians worship a God characterised by abundant hospitality? How do you see this mirrored in churches or Christian organisations that you are familiar with?

Rosaria Butterfield (who wrote *The Gospel Comes With a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World*) takes this biblical pattern of abundant hospitality and challenges us to apply it in our own settings. She calls it “radical ordinary hospitality” which she defines as: “Using your Christian home in a

daily way that seeks to make strangers neighbours, and neighbours family of God...When our Christian homes are open, we make transparent to a watching world what Christ is doing with our bodies, our families, and our world."Her passion for hospitality comes from her own experience of being befriended, welcomed into a Christian home, and finding out who Jesus is in a welcoming surrounding.

In his book *Reaching Out*, Henri Nouwen talks about hospitality in this way:

Hospitality is not to change people but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbour to a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories, and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit.

APPLICATION

- Do you practice abundant hospitality in your life?
- What inspires or stops you?
- Rosaria Butterfield says radical ordinary hospitality begins with cooking more than you need for dinner and being ready to invite people to your table. Is that something you could try with your neighbours?
- What have you been challenged by in this study?

PRAYER

Start by praying for each other, particularly about the areas of challenge.

*Thank you, Jesus, for showing these people compassion.
Thank you for demonstrating to us the abundance of the kingdom, where we receive what we need to be satisfied, but still there is more.*

*Help us to show others what the kingdom is like.
Help us to practice radical ordinary hospitality in our home, our neighbourhood, our workplace and in church.*

Amen.

STUDY 3

HUMAN FLOURISHING IS MARKED BY ABUNDANT SACRIFICE

OPENING QUESTION:

How would you describe Jesus to a non-Christian neighbour in one sentence?

How would you describe Jesus to a Christian friend?

READ MARK 6:30–44 NIV™

Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, 'Who do people say I am?'

²⁸ They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.'

²⁹ 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah.'

³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus predicts his death

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'

The way of the cross

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.'

CONTEXT

This is the turning point of the Gospel of Mark. Although Mark starts the Gospel by declaring Jesus as the Messiah—the anointed one—everyone keeps wondering, "who is Jesus"? The disciples aren't sure, the crowds aren't sure, King Herod is speculating, and the religious leaders don't really want to know.

Then Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah, and from this moment, Jesus starts heading towards Jerusalem for his final showdown with the religious authorities and his dying and rising.

DISCUSS:

Peter declares Jesus is the Messiah, then immediately says something which earns a very stern rebuke from Jesus (v.33). How could Peter get it so wrong?

In the first study I pointed out that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the anointed One, spoken about by the prophets. Under his reign, there is to be flourishing on earth. However, by the time of Jesus, there were many views about who the Messiah was, and what he would do. Some thought he would be a great leader, descended from King David, as Jeremiah promised (Jeremiah 23:5). Many thought he would be a political leader, as Isaiah promised.

READ ISAIAH 9:6–7 NIV™

6 For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and for ever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.

DISCUSS

What are characteristics of the Messiah described by Isaiah?

Meanwhile the Zealots were a group of people who believed the Messiah would overthrow the Roman rulers, and one of the disciples (Simon) was a Zealot. So, there were many ideas about who the Messiah was and what he would do, but at the least they expected him to be a warrior leader.

How does Jesus describe what he is going to do as Messiah (Mark 6:31)?

You can understand Peter's concerns at this point. They cannot understand a Messiah who is going to suffer and be killed.

Jesus uses their confusion to teach them an important element about what it means to live a flourishing life with God: there will be sacrifice.

What have you ever sacrificed for the sake of the Gospel? What have you given up for God?

I think this passage is often misunderstood. We read it with individualistic and dualistic eyes. Through the book of Mark, Jesus has been saying that God is interested in our whole heart being reoriented toward God. We need the new way of seeing (repentance) with Jesus at the centre of everything we do and say. This means reorienting our loves and desires around God. Jesus understands there will be a cost involved; he empathises more than we ever could, because he paid the ultimate cost—he sacrificed his life.

Ironically, by holding onto worldly desires and concerns we will not experience life to the full (John 10:10) on this earth or the next; but reorienting our hearts around Jesus will mean that we will become the true humans we were meant to be (Ephesians 2:10). This may or may not mean material gain; the important thing is not pursuing material gain, but pursuing Jesus.

The trouble Jesus highlights is that the people of God are not worshipping God with their bodies, hearts, minds, and souls, and not loving their neighbours as themselves. We need to beware reducing 'adulterous and sinful generation' to a statement of moral behaviour; it is first and foremost a spiritual issue: hearts that are not oriented around worship of God.

So work, riches, even practices of worship, are good things that become evil in the eyes of God when they are an end in themselves for us—if we take pride in them. However, it is possible to worship God through each of those things by surrendering them to God and doing them with a heart that seeks to honour God.

APPLICATION

- Do you really believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God?
- How does knowing that challenge the way you speak, act and live?
- Are your desires and loves centred on Jesus?
- Are you loving your neighbour as you love yourself?
- What needs to change?
- What have you been challenged by in this study?

PRAYER

Start by praying for each other, particularly about the areas of challenge.

Dear God,

Forgive us for those things we have loved more than we love you.

*Thank you that Jesus denied himself and took up his cross.
Help us also to deny those things that keep us from flourishing in you.*

Teach us how to help our neighbours flourish.

Amen.

STUDY 4

HUMAN FLOURISHING MEANS **LOOKING OUT** **FOR THE VULNERABLE**

OPENING QUESTION:

**Who are the most vulnerable people in our society?
Do you know anyone personally who is vulnerable?**

Jesus demonstrates God's heart for the poor, the vulnerable, the outcasts of society. Already in Mark he has cast out evil spirits from those who were possessed, healed people who are shunned, stopped to talk to beggars, eaten with 'sinners and tax collectors', and conversed with Gentiles—all of whom were considered outside the kingdom.

In this study we will look at other ways he demonstrates a bias for the vulnerable.

READ MARK 10:13–16 NIV™

The little children and Jesus

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

CONTEXT

Jesus takes a child into his arms, literally a person with no status, one of the most vulnerable people in society. Jesus' culture did not revere children as we do. They were considered non-human beings until they were pubescent.

With this one simple action, Jesus started to raise the status of children. He started a revolution that would challenge the way the vulnerable were valued.

DISCUSS

What surprises you in this passage?

What do you think it means when Jesus says, "anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it"?

What are some of the characteristics of being a child?

Kent Hughes from Westminster Theological Seminary has pointed out that children are "helplessly dependent". They have nothing to offer, and cannot survive in their own. He points out four qualities for receiving the kingdom like a child: trust—for every area of life, humility—no pride or self-righteousness, receptivity—willingness to receive whatever comes from the Father, and unconditional love.

Jonathan Parnell describes it like this:

You can't come to Jesus with your arms full of everything you think makes you good. Your having it together, your best efforts—that is not the interest of Jesus. His welcome is a welcome to those who lack what the world considers premium. His welcome is a welcome of needs, of smallness, of those who don't know how to feed themselves or tie their shoes or wipe their noses. He wants you to come like a kid, like a little kid who might need carrying.

READ MARK 11:15–17 NIV™

¹⁵ On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷ And as he taught them, he said, 'Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it "a den of robbers"'.

CONTEXT

Jesus is on the inevitable path to the cross. He has arrived in Jerusalem, the place where he will be arrested, tried, sentenced, and put to death.

The first place Jesus goes to is the great temple in Jerusalem, one of the marvels of the ancient world. No-one appears ready for what occurs next. Jesus is incensed by what he sees. He makes a whip and drives out the stall holders and their customers. He overturns tables, and he loudly recites Scripture.

DISCUSS

Why do you think Jesus drove out the stallholders?

Are you comfortable with this image of Jesus being angry?

What is happening here is often misunderstood.

Sometimes this scene is portrayed as evidence for the need of separation of sacred space and marketplace. However, it is much more likely to be about justice and inclusion.

Where does this action take place?

In v.17 Jesus quotes from Isaiah 56:7. In that passage, God through Isaiah is prophesying that the Temple will be open

to eunuchs, foreigners, and outcasts; that is, that those people normally excluded, will be allowed to approach God in worship.

The stall keepers have set up shop in the courts where Gentiles and women could gather for worship. Instead of inviting people to worship God, the Temple leaders are seeking to make dollars.

Why are the stallholders described by Jesus as robbers (v.17)?

Jesus here is quoting from Jeremiah 7:11, where God's people are being criticised as hypocrites. They live immoral lives but gather in the Temple to get cleansed. However, there is also a literal way that the stallholders are being robbers.

The stall holders and religious leaders are robbers because they are taking a piece of the Law, the selling of doves, which was a concession for poor people to access forgiveness; and they were making money out of it.

Leviticus 5:11 says, "Anyone who cannot afford a lamb is to bring two doves or two young pigeons to the Lord as a penalty for their sin – one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering."

Jesus drives the stallholders out, and makes room so that the vulnerable can be welcomed in, to worship. In this way, he models cleansing and restoring the Temple to what it was intended to be—a place for communion between God and his people.

Of course, his death and resurrection ensure that there need never be any barrier between us and God. There are no complicated sacrifices and rituals, no places where we can and cannot go, no rules about being ceremonially clean or healthy or whole.

Everyone is welcomed by Jesus. Our only responsibility is to receive his offer of relationship, like little children.

This is good news to share with our neighbours, friends, family and work colleagues.

APPLICATION

- How conscious and caring are you for the economically, socially, mentally, physically, or spiritually vulnerable?
- In what ways are you intentional about caring for them?
- Do you have neighbours who are vulnerable?
- In what ways could you be more proactive in demonstrating Jesus' love for them?
- What have you been challenged by in this study?

PRAYER

Start by praying for each other, particularly about the areas of challenge.

Dear God,

Thank you for what we can learn from children.

Help us to approach you like children, helplessly dependent.

May we be trusting, humble, receptive and love you unconditionally, as you love us.

Thank you that Jesus cleared the way for all people to worship you.

Help me to be more aware of the vulnerable, and to show the same fierce compassion that Jesus does.

Open my eyes to my vulnerable neighbours today.

Amen.

CONCLUSION

This brings us to the end of these Bible studies, but we encourage you to continue this habit of opening the Bible with a friend.

We also urge you to continue to seek ways to love your neighbour and helping them to live a flourishing life by:

- Sharing the good news of Jesus
- Being abundantly hospitable toward them
- Sacrificially loving them
- Particularly noticing those who are vulnerable: children, the elderly, those with disabilities, refugees, new immigrants, the poor, or those who are escaping from violence or injustice.

Lastly, if you have a passion to Open The Bible with your local and global neighbours then please consider supporting Bible Society's Winter Appeal.

As we continue to Open The Bible here in Australia, our Bible Society Australia family are excited to also come alongside our neighbours in the Pacific. The Bible Societies of Australia, South Pacific and Papua New Guinea have formed the Oceania Alliance to enable greater collaboration and sharing of resources.

Dedicated to helping others Open The Bible in their heart language, our goal is to support and resource the local teams as they share God's word with their communities. The teams based in our neighbouring nations have an inspiring commitment to Opening The Bible through translation, production and distribution, along with essential literacy programs enabling local communities to read the word together.

We have the opportunity to enable them to increase their capacity and reach people in even the hardest to reach communities.

Will you help us share God's word across the Pacific? Together, we can Open The Bible to even more people throughout our region.

Please consider making a donation today at:
biblesociety.org.au/neighbour

HUMAN FLOURISHING

PARTICIPANTS NOTES



INTRODUCTION

Here is a fresh idea from the Bible Society: some material to help you open up the Bible with a friend or neighbour, and go on a one month journey toward greater flourishing.

The commitment is just one hour, once a week, for one month. The outcomes will be eternal!

Jesus said that he came to earth to give us life, and life to the full (John 10:10). What does that full life look like? Is it something we can only achieve in heaven, after we die?

Is it simply a spiritual experience?

For a long time, I thought the full life Jesus spoke about was a spiritual flourishing I would only experience in heaven. However, the more I learn about Jesus and his mission, I see that he came to model a flourishing life on earth, that continues into eternity. Christianity is not merely a set of beliefs, or even just a set of behaviours based on beliefs. It is a way of life, but more than that, it is a way of **becoming**.

In this set of four studies, we will examine key passages from the Gospel of Mark, to see how Jesus shows us what it means to become a flourishing human being. The important thing to realise is that we do not become flourishing human beings on our own, it always happens in community. We need others, and they need us.

These studies are a companion to a 14 day Daily Bible Series, which you can find online here: bible.com.au.

These studies will go deeper into four key texts, stretching our understanding, and challenging us to begin living a flourishing life.

AUTHOR:

Kara Martin is the author of *Workship: How to Use your Work to Worship God*, and *Workship 2: How to Flourish at Work* and was co-editor of *Transforming Vocation: Connecting Theology, Church, and the Workplace for a Flourishing World*. She is a lecturer with Alphacrucis College, and Adjunct Professor with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston. She is also on the Board of the Karam Fellowship (US).

STUDY 1

HOW JESUS IS THE MODEL FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING

OPENING QUESTION:

Do you think of Jesus as more God, or more man?
Give a reason for your answer.

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:5–11 TM

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mind-set as Christ Jesus:

⁶ who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death –
even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

DISCUSS:

What do you notice from this
description about Jesus being
both God and man?

INTRODUCTION

This passage helps us understand that Jesus was both fully God and fully human. It reveals to us that Jesus came in human form to be born, live, die, and rise again, to enable us to be restored in relationship with God. Since Jesus was without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), he is the one and only true human. He shows us what it means to be human in all its glory, to be a flourishing human.

In these four Bible Studies, we will look at some of the key aspects of Jesus' teaching and behaviour which demonstrate what it means to live life to the full. Notice what it says in verse 5: "In your relationships with one another..." All that we learn in these studies only makes sense lived out in community, in all the messy relationships around us, including with our neighbours.

Let's start with who wrote the Gospel of Mark. Mark is identified widely as John Mark (mentioned in Acts 12–15), who met Peter as he came out of prison, and accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys. He is believed to be Mark, cousin of Barnabas, affirmed by Paul (Colossians 4:10 and 2 Timothy 4:11), and commended by Peter (1 Peter 5:13). Although he was not an eyewitness of Jesus' life, it is accepted that Mark is capturing Peter's account of Jesus, and of course, Peter was one of Jesus' inner circle of disciples.

To live a flourishing life, the first thing we need to learn about is repentance.

READ MARK 1:1–15 TM

¹The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ²as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

'I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way' –

³'a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
"Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him."

⁴And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. ⁶John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and

he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And this was his message: 'After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

The baptism and testing of Jesus

⁹At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

¹²At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³and he was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Jesus announces the good news

¹⁴After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

CONTEXT

Firstly, note the titles for Jesus that Mark uses: "Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God". He leaves no doubt that the man Jesus he is talking about is also God. In fact, Jesus is the promised Messiah, the anointed One, spoken about by the prophets. Under his reign, there is to be flourishing on earth (you can read more in Isaiah 61).

DISCUSS

What are the key messages of John the Baptist and Jesus?
How would you define the word 'repent'?

What do you think Jesus meant when he said, "the kingdom of God has come near" (v.15)?

When Jesus says, "believe in the good news" (v.15), what does this look like?

APPLICATION

- Does faith change the way you see everything?
- What areas of your life have changed since you became a Christian?
- Does faith change the way you see working? Money? Rest? Eating? Parenting? Your relationship with neighbours? ...
- Are you trusting Jesus with every area of your life?
- Do you pray about different areas of your life?
- Do you see Jesus as king of all you have and do?
- What have you been challenged by in this study?

PRAYER

Start by praying for each other, particularly about the areas of challenge.

*Dear God,
Thank you for sending John the Baptist who prepared the way for King Jesus to come and establish his kingdom on earth.*

Thank you for the invitation to see everything differently, through the frame of faith.

Help us to be washed clean of everything that might distract us in our relationship with you. Help us to focus our hearts on loving you in every area of our lives.

Amen.

STUDY 2

HUMAN FLOURISHING IS MARKED BY ABUNDANT HOSPITALITY

OPENING QUESTION:

**Describe a time when you experienced wonderful hospitality: a hotel, visiting people, a meal...
How did that make you feel?**

READ MARK 6:30–44 NIV TM

³⁰ The apostles gathered round Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'

³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

³⁵ By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. 'This is a remote place,' they said, 'and it's already very late. ³⁶ Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.'

³⁷ But he answered, 'You give them something to eat.' They said to him, 'That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?'

³⁸ 'How many loaves do you have?' he asked. 'Go and see.'

When they found out, they said, 'Five – and two fish.'

³⁹ Then Jesus told them to make all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³ and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴ The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

CONTEXT

Jesus has sent out the 12 disciples (Mark 6:6b–13), and they have been travelling around in pairs preaching, driving out demons and healing people. King Herod has heard about this and mistakenly assumes that Jesus is John the Baptist resurrected. This reaction is probably driven by guilt since Herod was responsible for John's beheading (you can read about that in verses 14–29).

In verse 30 we read that the disciples have all gathered to debrief with Jesus, but they are being overwhelmed by crowds of people. Jesus expresses a desire to get away with them so that they can get some rest and he can finish the debriefing.

DISCUSS:

What do verses 30–31 tell you about Jesus and his relationship with his disciples? What clues do we get for thinking about Jesus as a model for Christian leadership?

What is Jesus' motivation?

What is the significance of Jesus seeing them as “sheep without a shepherd”? What other Bible references come to mind?

READ JEREMIAH 50:1, 6–7 NIV™

This is the word the Lord spoke through Jeremiah the prophet concerning Babylon and the land of the Babylonians:

⁶ ‘My people have been lost sheep;
their shepherds have led them astray
and caused them to roam on the mountains.

They wandered over mountain and hill
and forgot their own resting place.

⁷ Whoever found them devoured them;
their enemies said, “We are not guilty,
for they sinned against the Lord, their verdant pasture,
the Lord, the hope of their ancestors.”

God is speaking through the prophet Jeremiah to his people who have been carried away into captivity by Babylon.

Who might the shepherds be?

Who is responsible for the situation God's people find themselves in?

We now move onto the well-known miracle: the feeding of the 5,000. Sometimes our familiarity with this story might hide some important learning.

What stands out in a fresh way in your reading of Jesus' miraculous feeding of the people (vv.38–44)?

What difference does it make knowing that Christians worship a God characterised by abundant hospitality? How do you see this mirrored in churches or Christian organisations that you are familiar with?

APPLICATION

- Do you practice abundant hospitality in your life?
- What inspires or stops you?
- Rosaria Butterfield says radical ordinary hospitality begins with cooking more than you need for dinner and being ready to invite people to your table. Is that something you could try with your neighbours?
- What have you been challenged by in this study?

PRAYER

Start by praying for each other, particularly about the areas of challenge.

*Thank you, Jesus, for showing these people compassion.
Thank you for demonstrating to us the abundance of the kingdom, where we receive what we need to be satisfied, but still there is more.*

*Help us to show others what the kingdom is like.
Help us to practice radical ordinary hospitality in our home, our neighbourhood, our workplace and in church.*

Amen.

STUDY 3

HUMAN FLOURISHING IS MARKED BY ABUNDANT SACRIFICE

OPENING QUESTION:

How would you describe Jesus to a non-Christian neighbour in one sentence?

How would you describe Jesus to a Christian friend?

READ MARK 6:30–44 NIV™

Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, 'Who do people say I am?'

²⁸ They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.'

²⁹ 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah.'

³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus predicts his death

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'

The way of the cross

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.'

CONTEXT

This is the turning point of the Gospel of Mark. Although Mark starts the Gospel by declaring Jesus as the Messiah—the anointed one—everyone keeps wondering, "who is Jesus"? The disciples aren't sure, the crowds aren't sure, King Herod is speculating, and the religious leaders don't really want to know.

Then Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah, and from this moment, Jesus starts heading towards Jerusalem for his final showdown with the religious authorities and his dying and rising.

DISCUSS:

Peter declares Jesus is the Messiah, then immediately says something which earns a very stern rebuke from Jesus (v.33). How could Peter get it so wrong?

READ ISAIAH 9:6–7 NIV™

6 For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and for ever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.

What are characteristics of the Messiah described by Isaiah?

How does Jesus describe what he is going to do as Messiah (Mark 6:31)?

**What have you ever sacrificed for the sake of the Gospel?
What have you given up for God?**

APPLICATION

- Do you really believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God?
- How does knowing that challenge the way you speak, act and live?
- Are your desires and loves centred on Jesus?
- Are you loving your neighbour as you love yourself?
- What needs to change?
- What have you been challenged by in this study?



PRAYER

Start by praying for each other, particularly about the areas of challenge.

Dear God,

Forgive us for those things we have loved more than we love you.

*Thank you that Jesus denied himself and took up his cross.
Help us also to deny those things that keep us from flourishing in you.*

Teach us how to help our neighbours flourish.

Amen.

STUDY 4

HUMAN FLOURISHING MEANS **LOOKING OUT FOR THE VULNERABLE**

OPENING QUESTION:

Who are the most vulnerable people in our society?
Do you know anyone personally who is vulnerable?

READ MARK 10:13–16 NIV™

The little children and Jesus

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

CONTEXT

Jesus takes a child into his arms, literally a person with no status, one of the most vulnerable people in society. Jesus' culture did not revere children as we do. They were considered non-human beings until they were pubescent.

With this one simple action, Jesus started to raise the status of children. He started a revolution that would challenge the way the vulnerable were valued.

DISCUSS

What surprises you in this passage?

What do you think it means when Jesus says, "anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it"?

What are some of the characteristics of being a child?

Where does this action take place?

READ MARK 11:15–17 NIV™

¹⁵ On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷ And as he taught them, he said, 'Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it "a den of robbers"'.

CONTEXT

Jesus is on the inevitable path to the cross. He has arrived in Jerusalem, the place where he will be arrested, tried, sentenced, and put to death.

The first place Jesus goes to is the great temple in Jerusalem, one of the marvels of the ancient world. No-one appears ready for what occurs next. Jesus is incensed by what he sees. He makes a whip and drives out the stall holders and their customers. He overturns tables, and he loudly recites Scripture.

DISCUSS

Why do you think Jesus drove out the stallholders?

Are you comfortable with this image of Jesus being angry?

Why are the stallholders described by Jesus as robbers (v.17)?

APPLICATION

- How conscious and caring are you for the economically, socially, mentally, physically, or spiritually vulnerable?
- In what ways are you intentional about caring for them?
- Do you have neighbours who are vulnerable?
- In what ways could you be more proactive in demonstrating Jesus' love for them?
- What have you been challenged by in this study?

PRAYER

Start by praying for each other, particularly about the areas of challenge.

*Dear God,
Thank you for what we can learn from children.*

*Help us to approach you like children, helplessly dependent.
May we be trusting, humble, receptive and love you
unconditionally, as you love us.*

*Thank you that Jesus cleared the way for all people to
worship you.*

*Help me to be more aware of the vulnerable, and to show the
same fierce compassion that Jesus does.*

Open my eyes to my vulnerable neighbours today.

Amen.

CONCLUSION

This brings us to the end of these Bible studies, but we encourage you to continue this habit of opening the Bible with a friend.

We also urge you to continue to seek ways to love your neighbour and helping them to live a flourishing life by:

- Sharing the good news of Jesus
- Being abundantly hospitable toward them
- Sacrificially loving them
- Particularly noticing those who are vulnerable: children, the elderly, those with disabilities, refugees, new immigrants, the poor, or those who are escaping from violence or injustice.

Lastly, if you have a passion to Open The Bible with your local and global neighbours then please consider supporting Bible Society's Winter Appeal.

As we continue to Open The Bible here in Australia, our Bible Society Australia family are excited to also come alongside our neighbours in the Pacific. The Bible Societies of Australia, South Pacific and Papua New Guinea have formed the Oceania Alliance to enable greater collaboration and sharing of resources.

Dedicated to helping others Open The Bible in their heart language, our goal is to support and resource the local teams as they share God's word with their communities.

The teams based in our neighbouring nations have an inspiring commitment to Opening The Bible through translation, production and distribution, along with essential literacy programs enabling local communities to read the word together.

We have the opportunity to enable them to increase their capacity and reach people in even the hardest to reach communities.

Will you help us share God's word across the Pacific?
Together, we can Open The Bible to even more people throughout our region.

Please consider making a donation today at:
biblesociety.org.au/neighbour