

Love Letters

Reading Through the Gospels



Reading Guide
Week #6

Mark 3-8



NEW HORIZON
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Love Letters Reading Guide for Week #6

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A Week in Review. Last week we read the stirring and powerful conclusion of the Book of Matthew. Jesus was born and died a King—victorious and compelling, and in view of all. He walked His talk, and calls His followers to join Him in the continuing work of God's Kingdom.

This Week's Reading. As we discovered last week, The Gospel of Mark takes off like a rocket and is up to full speed within the first chapter. Jesus was baptized and tempted, called His first disciples, and performed healing miracles. This week we'll walk with Jesus as He teaches and astounds the crowds. Soon He will send His disciples out to do the same—and they will return believing that Jesus is indeed the Christ.

○ MONDAY—MARK 3

Consider. Watch as people flock after Jesus—sinners, the sick, religious folk, family members, and people from neighboring regions and nations. As they gather, Jesus "*called to Himself those He wanted, and they came to Him*" (v.13). Then He chose people out of the crowd to be "with" Him (v.14b). We are among those He has called. How does it feel? Will we step out of the crowd and follow?

Read.

- Mark is known for noting Jesus' emotion. In v.5, Jesus "*looked around at them in anger...deeply distressed...*" How does the idea of an angry and distressed Savior strike you? Have you ever experienced this side of Jesus? If so, have you also experienced His love and care as you turn to Him in faith?
- Mark's intensity continues in v.21: "*When His family heard about this, they went to take charge of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind.'*" Harsh words from His family. Jesus causes a stir even among those closest to Him. How have you experienced faith-friction with friends and family?

Reflect. In v.22, the teachers of the law argue that Jesus drives out demons because He Himself is possessed by Beelzebub, the "prince of demons." They've mistaken the hand of God for

the hand of the wicked one. Have there been times when you've done the same?

○ TUESDAY—MARK 4

Consider. A theme is beginning in Mark; the disciples will never completely comprehend, while demons and outsiders quickly acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus is tough on His disciples, too; v.40 reads literally, "*Why are you such cowards?*" Mark keeps our interest—will the disciples ever fully grasp who Jesus is? Do we?

Read.

- Mark communicates meaning with his repeated use of particular geography. Today is Jesus' third trip to the *lakeside* (v.1). The "lakeside" signifies Jesus gathering and teaching His followers. This retreat setting prepares them to live out His teachings at home. When and where is your "lakeside" with Jesus?
- Notice a distinct difference between Mark and Matthew: Matthew speaks of "the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt. 13:11, 31, etc.), while Mark refers to "the Kingdom of God" (Mk. 4:11, 30, etc.). Matthew seems to emphasize the *vastness* of God's reign, while Mark emphasizes *Who* is reigning. What qualities does each description portray?

Reflect. The Gospel is supernatural—when it finds good soil it produces "*thirty, sixty, or even a hundred fold*" (v.8). Given that a bumper crop in Biblical times was twenty-fold, Jesus' hearers know that such a crop must be miraculous. In what ways has God's seed in the soil of your heart produced a harvest beyond anything you are capable of producing on your own?

○ WEDNESDAY—MARK 5

Consider. Today we see Mark's literary skill at work. The story of the Demoniac (vv.5-20) will have a distinctively Gentile (non-Jewish) flavor—*swine*, and a reference to the Gentile region of Decapolis. The story of the Dead Girl and Sick Woman (vv.21-42) will have Jewish overtones: Jairus a synagogue ruler, 12 years of bleeding & a 12 year old girl (12 is a significant number among Jews, denoting the 12 Tribes of Israel in

the Old Testament.) Mark makes his point; Jesus, Who ministers to both, is Savior to all.

Read.

- Today we see another of Mark's geographic references; the *sea* denotes the place where storms rage (4:37), into which demons are cast (5:13), and that which divides Jews and Gentiles (5:1). Jesus came to calm storms, cast out demons, and heal division. In what ways is Jesus mastering these "seas" in your life?
- Another consistent theme in Mark—the Holy Spirit in Jesus and the evil spirits seem to recognize one another (vv.6-10). Mark makes us aware of a spiritual world that exists beyond our sight, one that we must not ignore or take lightly. Do you sense the security of Christ in the midst of an unseen spiritual reality?

Reflect. After he is freed from a demon, a man begs to go with Jesus. Instead, Jesus tells him, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you" (v.19). Are you in the habit of sharing with your family members the good things God has done for you?

○ **THURSDAY—MARK 6**

Consider. Jesus is becoming known. In today's reading, people "recognize" Jesus everywhere He goes (vv.3, 14, 33, 54). His reputation, message and power have preceded Him. And, although many will reject Him, it is never based on legitimate moral grounds or character flaws. Is it important to you to have that reputation?

Read.

- Although Jesus' message "amazes" the people in His hometown (v.2), the townspeople (like His mother and brother in 3:21) "take offense at Him" (v.3). They cannot conceive of Jesus being anyone out of the ordinary. Are you ever "put off" by others who demonstrate passion for God? Why the reaction?
- Werner Kelber (*Mark's Story of Jesus*, p.34) offers a powerful insight. In v.27, John the Baptist's execution coincides with Jesus sending the disciples (v.7). In the same way, Jesus' death spawns the Great

Commission (Mark 16:15). In the Kingdom, death gives way to life. How has that been true for you?

Reflect. Without a doubt, Jesus intends that the Kingdom reproduce. He sends out the Twelve (v.7) who preach, teach, and heal. He prays over five loaves and two fish (v.38) and feeds 5000. What is happening in a person's life, or in a church, when the Kingdom is not multiplying?

○ **FRIDAY—MARK 7**

Consider. In the next two chapters, we are going to watch as Jesus draws together two warring factions—Jews and Gentiles. Today, Jesus will *include* Gentiles as eligible to receive God's grace and favor. No one is included or excluded by virtue of their birthright. All may receive as they approach on God's terms. Are you ever tempted to think differently?

Read.

- In His encounter with the Pharisees (vv.1-23), Jesus is defining a new morality—that of the inward disposition of the heart rather than outward adherence to religious traditions. Are you ever tempted to feel justified by your outward observances?
- Mark contrasts the story of the Pharisees (above) with the story of the Syrophenician Woman (vv.24-30). Jesus has offered "Bread" to both. The Pharisees, who justify themselves by observing religious traditions, refuse and forfeit. The woman begs and receives. Jesus is leveling the playing field for all. Are you ever tempted to feel entitled to God's goodness? Are you ever tempted to feel beyond the reach of God's grace?

Reflect. This chapter ends with a compound healing—a man who is deaf and mute. The crowds are "*overwhelmed with amazement*" (v.37). It's remarkable how easily Jesus can heal physical ears, yet unbelieving hearts refuse to "hear" and believe. In what areas of your life might you be "deaf" to the things of God?

○ **SATURDAY—MARK 8**

Consider. Mark begins a motif (an international, repeating theme) that we will see consistently:

Jesus and His disciples are always "*on the way*" (v27). Mark portrays Jesus on a journey and compels us to walk with Him. Jesus' journey is purposeful, and by the end of Mark's story we will discover where Jesus' journey leads.

Read.

- In vv.17-21, Jesus chastises His disciples because they've seen Him feed crowds of thousands, yet concern themselves "*because we have no bread*" (v. 16). When are you tempted to forget or dismiss what God is able to do?
- In v.31, Jesus makes the first prediction of His death and Resurrection. He will do so three times in Mark. It's clear that His disciples don't understand. Jesus is not living into their image of the Messiah. Does Jesus ever seem to disappoint you?

Reflect. Jesus' feeding of the multitudes and His healing miracles beg some thought. There were surely hungry and diseased people all over the Judean countryside. Why did Jesus choose these particular people instead of feeding and healing all? How does this inform us about the nature of Jesus mission? About our mission as Christ's disciples?

Notes:



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