

*Where we start . . .*

It's likely that you've heard the word "discipleship" if you've been around church life long enough. What comes to mind when you here "discipleship"? What images does that word stir?

If you had the chance to go on a week-long retreat to get "discipled," would you be inclined to go? Why or why not?

*What we read . . .*

When referring to Jesus' followers, Mark uses words like "disciples" or "followers." Both words carry the sense of learning from and getting involved with Jesus and what He is all about. Look at the way Jesus' "invitation" gets extended to some by reading Mark 3:7-19.

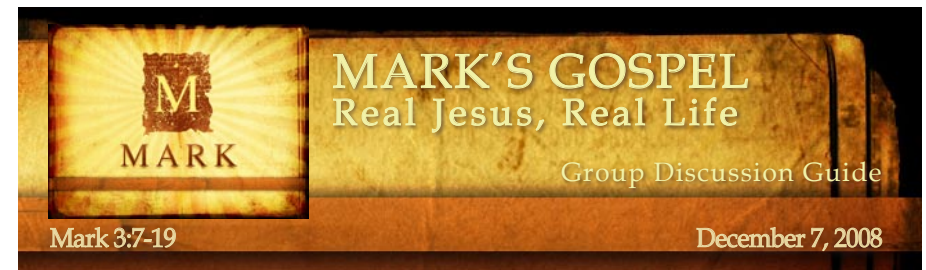
What was the atmosphere like wherever Jesus was ministering? As Mark summarizes Jesus' ministry for us, what kinds of things characterize what Jesus is engaged in?

Look closely at Jesus' call to the twelve. What, specifically, is He inviting them into?

What do you think their initial reaction would have been to this invitation? Why?

*Why this matters . . .*

Jesus invited those who had been just watching and enjoying what He was doing to become participants in what He was doing. His intention was to "rub off" on them with the result that they would begin living like He lived. Is this how you see your own relationship with Jesus? Why or why not?



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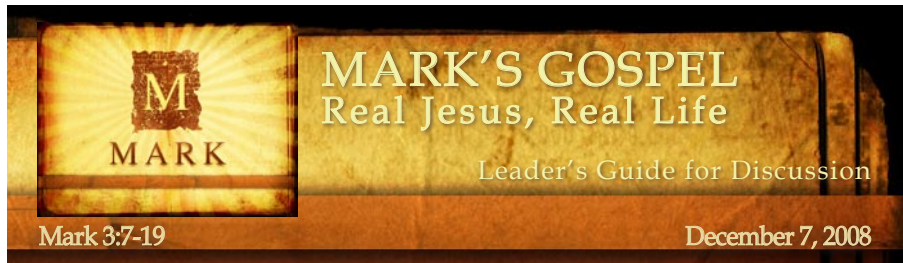
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*Diving in . . .*

What comes to mind when you think of “discipleship”? For many, the images are ones of Bible reading plans, regular quiet times, and finding better ways to prioritize the day so as to be more consistently “serving the Lord.” Not that any of those things are bad; but in all honesty, an invitation to more rigor, more discipline, and more tasks just doesn’t seem very attractive. But Jesus had a group of enthusiastic and involved disciples. How did He manage that? Perhaps it is rooted in what He invited them into. And, to put it simply, the invitation was a call to an adventure like no other they had experienced!

*Discussing . . .*

As you begin your discussion, the intent is not to bash the way that “discipleship” has been handled or understood by those in your group. You might find that some have genuinely had great experiences under that banner. But it is likely that for many in your group, like for many Christians, discipleship gets associated with discipline, routines, and “holy habits.” Again, not necessarily bad things in and of themselves, but hardly the sorts of things that energize most people in a passionate pursuit of life with Jesus.

As we have been journeying with Jesus through Mark, we have watched Him engage in truly startling and God-glorifying ministry. The teaching has been amazing. The lives He has touched—physically, spiritually, and emotionally—do not remain the same. The diseased are made well. The demonized are set free. The disgruntled hear good news that will change their lives. And this has been going on long enough and openly enough that everywhere that Jesus goes, crowds follow.

Mark offers a summary of Jesus’ growing ministry in 3:7-12. As you read and reflect on that passage, really try and picture what it must have been like. Often, the “Hollywood” versions of the Gospel stories seem to downplay the crowds and the commotion and the celebration. But, clearly, given Mark’s account of all that Jesus was doing and saying, the atmosphere would have been electric, the expectations high, and the rejoicing fervent.

Why is it important to get a sense of what it was like to be in this crowd of people who were constantly hanging around Jesus? Because it was out of this crowd that Jesus called the “twelve.” Those invited into a more intentional life of “discipleship” were drawn from this crowd. They were those who were there because of how impressed and taken they were with all Jesus

was saying and doing. They were those who had been impacted, one way or another, by this amazing Man. And when Jesus “appointed” them, it was probably more like an invitation into an unbelievable adventure than a call to a more stable and disciplined life (the way many tend to think of “discipleship”).

Mark uses a variety of language to refer to those who are found in Jesus’ company. Here, in 3:13-19, he introduces us to the “twelve.” These come to be referred to as “apostles” (as here) or “the disciples” (quite often throughout the book). They are something of the prototypes of all who are to end up following Jesus. In fact, “following” Jesus is a common way for Mark to speak about those who are in Jesus’ entourage. To follow means to fall in step with, to join, to participate with and in. The word “disciples” speaks, fundamentally, of one who is actively learning from another. And “apostle” carries the idea of delegated representative. Although the twelve will carry some unique responsibility, they are invited, fundamentally, into the same life that all true disciples of Jesus are invited into.

Jesus calls to them. He wants them for Himself (3:13). And He appointed them “to be with Him” (3:14). A major part of this disciple life is to keep on being around Jesus. He rubs off on them. And He appointed them so that He could send them out (3:14-15). What will they be sent out to do? The very things Jesus Himself was doing! They were being invited into His own ministry; they were being welcomed to become participants in what He Himself was doing.

That is why it is so helpful to really grasp what immediately precedes this “call” of the twelve. They were there, around Jesus, because they were so taken with all that He was doing and saying. And then He turned to them and, in a sense, simply asked: “Would you like to do what I am doing?” That was the invitation.

We will come to see that there are some facets of Jesus’ own life and ministry that they will not fully enter into. (For example, He will give His life a ransom for them; they will not give their lives away in an identical way.) But what we will see is that much of what characterized Jesus’ life and ministry comes to characterize their lives as well. And that certainly seems to be what Jesus has in mind.

How might the “twelve” have initially reacted to this invitation? Perhaps, “You want me to do *what?!?!?*” Or maybe even, “You are inviting *me* into this kind of life-altering ministry?” They had been so taken with Him, that the call must have sounded amazing, fantastic, startling, challenging, fearful, thrilling . . . just about anything but dull and boring (which is how lots of people seem to think of “discipleship”).

There is more to be unpacked in Mark about what this disciple-life really entails. At this juncture in the story, we simply want our people to understand that what Jesus is ultimately after is our active participation in His own ministry. Discipleship is an invitation to a yet-unimagined spiritual adventure, with Jesus taking the lead and our participation in the breaking in of the kingdom into the world around us.