

*Where we start . . .*

Everybody has challenges in life; we all face hurdles that we have to overcome. What has been the largest obstacle or hurdle you've faced to get to where you are in life?

What enabled you to face and overcome that hurdle(s)?

*What we read . . .*

In Mark, we meet a man who was also facing a great hurdle; he had a physical handicap. Read about his encounter with Jesus in 3:1-6.

How serious was the man's deformity? What would it have been like for him in that condition?

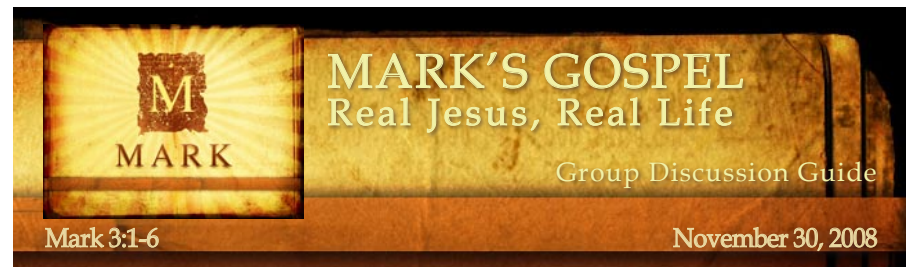
What kinds of things might have gone through his head as He understood that Jesus was calling *him* to rise and come and stand in front of those gathered in the synagogue? Why?

Had you been in his place, how do you think you would have felt about Jesus' command to "stretch out your hand?" How would you have understood what Jesus was calling you to do?

*Why this matters . . .*

Every one of us is need of Jesus' speaking words into our lives to call us to the kind of living we cannot reach *apart from His creative and gracious power*. Where have you been hearing Him call to you? How have you responded?

What will have to happen for you to give in and "stretch out" in that area of life where you are desperate for His grace and power?



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*Diving in . . .*

Although we don't often readily admit it, following Jesus and experiencing the kind of life He intends for us isn't merely hard, it's impossible. Specifically, the kinds of things that He intends to have happen in our lives are not things we can either manufacture ourselves or pull off in our own effort. From His first word to our soul (when He calls us to "Live!" and "Believe!") to the growth that is supposed to characterize us as His followers ("Love one another!" and "Forgive one another!" and "Serve one another!"), what we need to have happen in us can and will happen only by His doing! He gives us seemingly impossible commands only then to so work in us so that what would seem impossible happens by His grace and through His power. That is pictured for us, this week, in the account of the man Jesus met in the synagogue—the man with the withered hand.

*Discussing . . .*

Although we have already spent some time in this passage, we need to revisit the account because there is something else we yet need to see. We have already spent time reflecting on how Jesus' approach to the Sabbath brought Him into conflict with the religious leaders of the day. Jesus was offering life with God through relationship with Himself . . . and the religious leaders only had "religion."

But in addition to the conflict pictured between Jesus and those leaders, there is another person whose life is wrapped up in what Jesus says and does in Mark 3. Jesus encounters a man with a withered hand; and it is Jesus' dealings with that man that demand a bit more attention.

As you read the simple account, it could be possible to simply conclude; "Oh, see Jesus can heal people." We've already seen that in Mark; Jesus has an extensive healing ministry. But seeing as Mark gives us more than just the statement that the man was healed, we should pay attention to the details.

Specifically, we need to "enter in" to the account and see it unfold before our eyes. It would help for us to think well about what the experience was like for this man Jesus meets.

Because of Jesus' wide-spread reputation, the man with the withered hand might have anticipated that Jesus could heal him. He might even had been hoping that Jesus would do that very thing when he discovered that Jesus was there, in the synagogue, that Sabbath day. But it is how Jesus goes about

ministering to the man that concerns us and guides our discussion. Listen carefully to Jesus' words to the man; Jesus says just two short sentences.

First, He commands the man to (literally) "Rise and stand in the midst." He is calling him to make himself visible to those gathered. His withered hand would have been shrivelled up; useless and ugly. Hardly the kind of thing the man would have wanted waved around in front of everyone. And Jesus calls him to stand in front of all.

But Jesus is not humiliating the man (although he might have initially felt the rush of that emotion in making his way forward). Jesus does intend to heal the man. So what else is going on? Why not just heal the man where he stood? Why the "exposure" before the healing?

Apparently, Jesus is interested in putting His own glory and power on display. Not for the sake of show as much for the sake of instructing others. And there is the first thing we need to note about Jesus' dealings with this man. Jesus intends to heal the man, but Jesus also desires to instruct and teach others through what He is going to do in the man's life. And because of that, what He is about to do cannot be done in the corner, hidden.

Does He not also, at times, do the same with us? We tend to hide our needs and weaknesses . . . not just from Him but from others as well. And when Jesus exposes our needs and others see how desperately needy we are, Jesus doesn't do that to embarrass us or humiliate us. He does that so that we might be wonderful examples of His grace and goodness and power.

Jesus' second command is no less startling. He commands the man to do the one thing that man is sure he cannot do! "Stretch out your hand!" But it is in the commanding of what the man cannot do by and of himself that the power of God is going to be seen. In fact, Jesus often does this very kind of thing—commanding the lame to walk, the blind to see, and the dead to live! Jesus' powerful command brings with it all that is necessary for the one commanded to give into and carry out the command. And in responding to Jesus' word, we experience life and healing and growth and grace.

As you talk with your group about both their individual neediness and where they are each hearing a seemingly impossible command from Jesus, be sensitive to the reluctance many might feel to be transparent and open. It might not be necessary for everyone to lay themselves fully bare before the group; but it will be important for us to understand that it is our very neediness that is the occasion for Jesus' great work of grace and that it is that very area of life where we are incapable of doing differently that He will likely command new life!

What is shrivelled and withered in the lives of those in your group? Most of us hide such "deformity" well. What call of Jesus have the individuals in your group ignored, thinking the command was impossible? It is the very nature of the transformative power of the Gospel to hear Jesus call us to an impossible kind of life!