

*Where we start . . .*

Some days are just tough. You come to the end of the day, things haven't gone well, you're feeling more than a little discouraged. At such times, what do you need? What would help?

*What we read . . .*

In the midst of the challenges we all face, are needs are multifaceted. Often, it's not just "one thing" that will help turn the situation and our hearts around. Keep that in mind as you read about Jesus' ministry to a leper in Mark 1:40-45.

What do you know about lepers? How were they treated in Jesus' day? Why were they treated that way?

Why did this leper come to Jesus? What does his request tell you about what he was thinking?

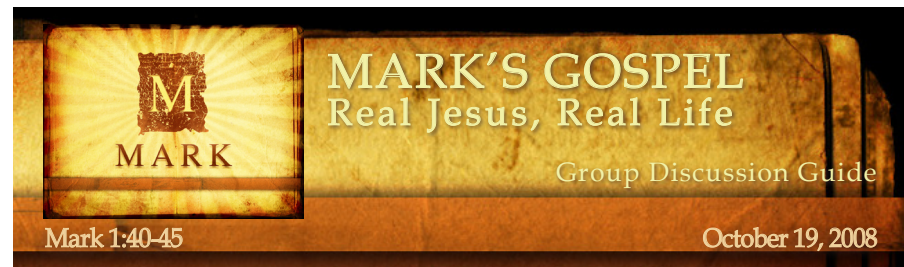
What does Jesus *have to do* in order to heal this man?

What does Jesus *do* in the process of bringing healing to the man? Why do you think Jesus did what He did?

Seeing as the man is healed, why does Jesus send him to the priests? What reason can you imagine for those instructions?

*Why this matters . . .*

Jesus seems willing and interested in responding to needs; the needs of those we meet in Mark as well as our own needs. How does this picture of Jesus' dealings with the leper draw you toward Jesus? How does Mark's account encourage you to trust Jesus with your situation?



*Where we start . . .*

Some days are just tough. You come to the end of the day, things haven't gone well, you're feeling more than a little discouraged. At such times, what do you need? What would help?

*What we read . . .*

In the midst of the challenges we all face, are needs are multifaceted. Often, it's not just "one thing" that will help turn the situation and our hearts around. Keep that in mind as you read about Jesus' ministry to a leper in Mark 1:40-45.

What do you know about lepers? How were they treated in Jesus' day? Why were they treated that way?

Why did this leper come to Jesus? What does his request tell you about what he was thinking?

What does Jesus *have to do* in order to heal this man?

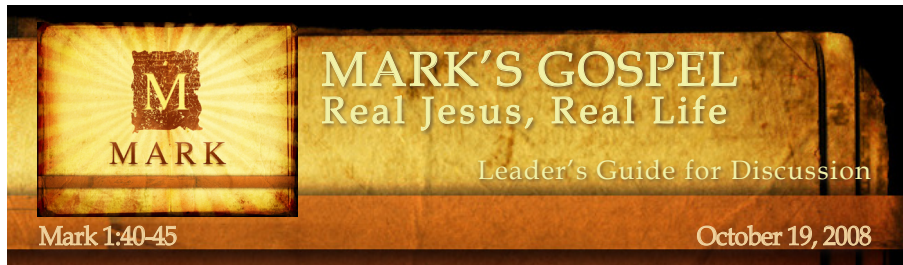
What does Jesus *do* in the process of bringing healing to the man? Why do you think Jesus did what He did?

Seeing as the man is healed, why does Jesus send him to the priests? What reason can you imagine for those instructions?

*Why this matters . . .*

Jesus seems willing and interested in responding to needs; the needs of those we meet in Mark as well as our own needs. How does this picture of Jesus' dealings with the leper draw you toward Jesus? How does Mark's account encourage you to trust Jesus with your situation?





*Diving in . . .*

As we read through Mark you will notice that, from time to time, Mark offers something of a “summary statement” about Jesus’ ministry. (Examples are seen in 1:34 and 1:39.) These summary statements underscore the truth that Jesus can and does heal. What this means for us is that when Mark brings us in for a close-up on a particular healing or ministry opportunity, there is more going on than merely telling us “Jesus can and does heal.” When Mark takes time to give us details of Jesus’ interaction with someone in need, we have to ask the question: What do the details tell us about Jesus *beyond the obvious truth that He can and does heal*? And that is in view in our discussion this week. We watch Jesus’ interaction with a leper only to discover that He does more than just heal the man . . . He ministers and cares for Him in a much more wholistic and compassionate way!

*Discussing . . .*

As you begin your discussion, you will have the opportunity to talk about what helps you best when the days aren’t going so well. The question is not targeting any particular answer; the goal is to have your people become aware that our needs are often complex. What may seem to be just a “bad day,” spills over into physical aches and pains, emotional stress, and maybe even discontentment in soul and heart. To have someone really respond to me *as a whole person* when I am in such a state means they will address more than one facet of the need. That helps set the stage for what we want to explore in Jesus’ caring ministry to a leper.

As you may know, leprosy referred to a variety of diseases, all of which often left the afflicted disfigured and deformed. Although some believe that what is identified as leprosy in the New Testament does overlap some with what is currently identified in the medical community as leprosy, the two might not be identical. Nevertheless, from Biblical descriptions, we can conclude that leprosy was a disease that attacked the body, discoloring the skin and often disfiguring limbs and more.

However, leprosy was not only a physical illness; this disease rendered the afflicted religiously “unclean” and a social outcast. Those who had leprosy were not allowed to participate in normal community life (unlike others who might be ill, or deformed, or handicapped). Whenever a leper came into the vicinity of another person, they were required to cry out “unclean!” so others could avoid any contact with them whatsoever. Lepers received little or no attention from others, no real compassionate care, no social support, no human touch.

At the point in the story where we meet the leper in Mark, we have no indication

that leprosy was one of the afflictions or diseases that Jesus has healed already (Mark 1:34 only tells us that He had healed many of the sick who were afflicted with various diseases.) And even the way the leper approaches Jesus suggests that the leper wondered about what Jesus might do; raising the possibility that the leper wasn’t sure that Jesus would attend to a case like his own. But Jesus affirms He *is* willing to make this leper “clean” and proceeds to heal him. What we need to pay attention to is what Jesus does in the healing.

As the Gospel unfolds, it is clear that all Jesus *must do* to heal someone is will it! When dealing with the demonized man in 1:21-28, Jesus’ word was enough to bring deliverance. What is startling in this account of healing is that Jesus “stretched out His hand and touched him” (1:41).

Touching a leper would have put Jesus at risk of being made unclean (except that in the touch the man was no longer unclean so Jesus was not made unclean!). Nevertheless, no one had probably touched this man in a compassionate way for the duration of his illness. Jesus doesn’t just heal the man, He cares for the man. He ministers to the whole man! His touch is not merely a “random act of kindness;” it is a critical part of bring healing and wholeness to this man.

As you walk through this passage and discuss Jesus’ actions, pay close attention to the descriptions of what Jesus does. Try and help your group see it. Help them understand that anyone on the scene who watched Jesus “stretch out His hand” to touch the leper would have screamed “Don’t do it!!!!” It’s a powerful moment of ministry that goes far deeper than merely cleaning the man’s skin of disease.

Once the man is healed, we have to ask about the instructions that Jesus gives him. Keep in mind that leprosy was not merely a physical illness but it also rendered one so afflicted ceremonially unclean. Leprosy cut off the leper from Jewish life altogether.

Undoubtedly, those in the community knew this leper—and knew to avoid him! Once he was healed, he could be welcomed back into the community, *if only people realized what had happened*. The man, himself, could go around proclaiming that he was healed and was now clean; but that would not have sufficed. Being “clean” or “unclean” was a verdict that could not be rendered by the individual. This is why Jesus instructs the man to go the priest (the ones who *could* render a “clean” verdict) and takes the proper steps to be restored to the community. Jesus was interested in more than just the man’s physical healing; Jesus was concerned about the man, *as a whole person*.

As you discuss this wonderful episode, think through and explore how it pictures Jesus’ ministry to *the man* and not just Jesus’ solution for his disease. In the touch, Jesus does so much more than merely touch the man’s skin—He reaches the man’s heart and soul with compassion and tenderness. In the instructions, Jesus does so much more than merely affirm the man’s healing—He leads the man in the right direction for him to be restored and welcomed back into life and community.

This is a rich and wonderful, an amazing and inviting, picture of Jesus. This is the kind of friend and Savior we should be delighted to come to in times of need. He sees all that we need, and He is willing and able to address all of that need.