

**LIVING THE  
QUESTIONS  
IN Mark**



# LIVING THE QUESTIONS IN Mark

A NavStudy Featuring

*The*  
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BRINGING TRUTH TO LIFE



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# CONTENTS

ABOUT THE LIVING THE QUESTIONS SERIES	7
HOW TO USE THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE	9
SMALL-GROUP STUDY TIPS	11
LESSON 1 <i>"What kind of action suits the Sabbath best? Doing good or doing evil?" (Mark 3:4)</i>	13
LESSON 2 <i>"How can we picture God's kingdom? What kind of story can we use?" (Mark 4:30)</i>	25
LESSON 3 <i>"Why are you such cowards? Don't you have any faith at all?" (Mark 4:40)</i>	39
LESSON 4 <i>"How many loaves of bread do you have?" (Mark 6:38)</i>	51
LESSON 5 <i>"Don't you see that what you swallow can't contaminate you?" (Mark 7:18)</i>	61
LESSON 6 <i>"Why does this generation clamor for miraculous guarantees?" (Mark 8:12)</i>	73
LESSON 7 <i>"Who do the people say I am?" (Mark 8:27)</i>	83

LESSON 8	95
<i>"What were you discussing on the road?" (Mark 9:33)</i>	
LESSON 9	109
<i>"What do you think the owner of the vineyard will do?" (Mark 12:9)</i>	
LESSON 10	123
<i>"Don't you ever read the Bible?" (Mark 12:26)</i>	
NOTES	137

# ABOUT THE LIVING THE QUESTIONS SERIES

I want to beg you, as much as I can . . . to be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. . . . Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

RAINER MARIA RILKE, *LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET*

Christians usually think about Jesus as the One with all the answers; the God-man with the evidence the verdict demands; a divine answer-man, sent down to earth to give us just what we need. And yes, he did give us just what we needed. Yet a careful reading of the Gospels shows that Jesus asked just as many questions as he gave outright answers. You would not have found a “The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it” bumper sticker on Jesus’ backpack. It was more like, “This is God’s Word. Stop and think about it, and let’s talk about it.”

However, the perception of Jesus as the divine answer-man appeals to a great many people. Life has questions, so you go to the Scriptures, look on the right page, find the answers, and everything’s good. But while that works great for algebra class, it just doesn’t seem to work well for this thing called *life*. Could the “divine answer-man” approach be too simplistic? Too one-dimensional for such a deep character as Jesus Christ? For one, it seems to leave you and me, the children of

God, out of the picture. We're not collaborators with God; we're just laborers.

Jesus went about doing good. Apparently part of this "good" was asking great questions—questions that would cause people to stop and pause and ponder the things they were living for and what might be worth dying for; questions not bound by a calendar but applicable to the ages; questions as poignant today as they were then.

The book you hold in your hand takes the approach of looking at the questions found in the Gospels—the questions Jesus asked. The questions are specific to the text of Eugene Peterson's *The Message*. I'm talking about questions such as, "All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference?" or "Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick?" Our temptation might be to respond quickly because we think we know the answers. But what if these questions must be lived? Lived out in dimensions such as friendship, family, and church? Lived out in locales such as homes, classrooms, and forests primeval? Lived by the flesh and blood whose main focus is the future, and lived by those who think mainly of the past? And what if living out these questions might lead us one day, gradually, without noticing it, into The Answer—the One who described himself as the way, truth, and life?

*Live the questions now.*

# HOW TO USE THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. This NavStudy is meant to be completed on your own *and* in a small group. You'll want to line up your study group ahead of time. A group of four to six is optimal—any bigger and one or more members will likely be shut out of discussions. Your small group can also be two. Each person will need his or her own copy of this book.

2. Lessons open with a Scripture passage intended to help you to prepare your heart and mind for the content that follows. Don't skip over this preparation time. Use it to reflect, slow down from a busy life, and transition into your study time.

3. *Read* the Scripture passages and other readings in each lesson. Let it all soak in. Re-read if necessary. There's no blue ribbon for finishing quickly. Make notes in the white space on the page. If you like journaling, think of this as a space to journal. If you don't like journaling, just think of it as space to "think out loud on paper."

4. *Think* about what you read. Respond to the questions we've provided. Always ask, "What does this mean?" and "Why does this matter?" about the readings. Compare different Bible translations for Scripture readings. Respond to the questions we've provided, and then discuss the questions when you're in your small group. Allow the experience of others to broaden your wisdom. You'll be stretched—called upon to evaluate what you've discovered and asked to make practical sense of it. In community, that stretching can often be painful and sometimes even embarrassing. But your willingness to be transparent—your openness to the possibility of personal growth—will reap great rewards.

5. *Pray* as you go through the entire session: before you read a word, in the middle of your thinking process, when you get stuck on a concept or passage, and as you approach the time when you'll explore

these passages and thoughts together in a small group. Pause when you need to ask God for inspiration or when you need to cry out in frustration. Compose a prayer prompted by what you've uncovered in the readings and your responses to the "Think" questions.

6. *Live.* (That's "live" as in "rhymes with give" as in "Give me something I can really use in my life.") This is a place to choose one thing you can do to live out the question posed in the lesson. Don't try to craft a plan that is lofty or unreachable. Choose something small, something doable. Then, in your small group, talk about this "one thing." Commit to following through on your idea, wrestle with what that means in practical terms, and call upon your group members to hold you accountable.

7. *Follow up.* Don't let the life application drift away without action. Be accountable to small-group members and refer to previous "Live" as in "rhymes with give" sections often. Take time at the beginning of each new study to review. See how you're doing.

# SMALL-GROUP STUDY TIPS

After going through each week's study on your own, it's time to sit down with others and go deeper. Here are a few thoughts on how to make the most of your small-group discussion time.

**Set ground rules.** You don't need many. Here are two:

*First*, you'll want group members to make a commitment to the entire ten-week study. Significant personal growth happens when group members spend enough time together to really get to know each other. Hit-and-miss attendance can hinder this growth.

*Second*, agree together that everyone's story is important. Time is a valuable commodity, so if you have an hour to spend together, do your best to give each person ample time to express concerns, pass along insights, and generally feel like a participating member of the group. Small-group discussions are not monologues. However, a one-person-dominated discussion isn't always a bad thing. Not only is your role in a small group to explore and expand your own understanding, it's also to support one another. If someone truly needs more of the floor, give it to him or her. There will be times when the needs of the one outweigh the needs of the many. Use good judgment and allow extra space when needed. *Your* time might be next week.

**Meet regularly.** Choose a time and place, and stick to it. Consistency removes stress that could otherwise frustrate discussion and subsequent personal growth.

**Follow the book outline.** Each week, open your small-group time with prayer, and read aloud the reflective Scripture passage that opens

the lesson. Then go through the study together, reading each section aloud and discussing it with your group members. Tell others what you wrote. Write down new insights gleaned from other group members. Wrestle the questions together. When you get to the “Pray” section, ask for volunteers willing to read aloud their written prayers. Finally, spend a few minutes talking together about each person’s “one thing” and how to achieve that goal.

**Talk openly.** If you enter this study with shields up, you’re probably not alone. And you’re not a “bad person” for your hesitation to unpack your life in front of friends or strangers. Maybe you’re skeptical about the value of revealing to others the deepest parts of who you are. Maybe you’re simply too afraid of what might fall out of the suitcase. You don’t have to go to a place where you’re uncomfortable. If you want to sit and listen, offer a few thoughts, or even express a surface level of your own pain, go ahead. But don’t neglect what brings you to this place—that longing for meaning. You can’t ignore it away. Dip your feet in the water of brutally honest discussion, and you may choose to dive in. There is healing here.

**Stay on task.** Refrain from sharing material that falls into the “too much information” category. Don’t spill unnecessary stuff. If structure isn’t your group’s strength, try a few minutes of general comments about the study, and then take each question one at a time and give everyone in the group a chance to respond.

# LESSON 1

“What kind of action suits the Sabbath best?  
Doing good or doing evil?” (Mark 3:4)

## *Before You Begin*

Take some time to reflect and prepare your heart and mind for this study. Read the following Scripture passage. Soak up God’s Word. There’s no hurry. Then, when you’re ready, turn the page and begin.

### **EXODUS 20:8-11**

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Work six days and do everything you need to do. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to God, your God. Don’t do any work—not you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your servant, nor your maid, nor your animals, not even the foreign guest visiting in your town. For in six days God made Heaven, Earth, and sea, and everything in them; he rested on the seventh day. Therefore God blessed the Sabbath day; he set it apart as a holy day.

## READ

Mark 2:23–3:6

One Sabbath day he was walking through a field of ripe grain. As his disciples made a path, they pulled off heads of grain. The Pharisees told on them to Jesus: “Look, your disciples are breaking Sabbath rules!”

Jesus said, “Really? Haven’t you ever read what David did when he was hungry, along with those who were with him? How he entered the sanctuary and ate fresh bread off the altar, with the Chief Priest Abiathar right there watching—holy bread that no one but priests were allowed to eat—and handed it out to his companions?” Then Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made to serve us; we weren’t made to serve the Sabbath. The Son of Man is no lackey to the Sabbath. He’s in charge!”

Then he went back in the meeting place where he found a man with a crippled hand. The Pharisees had their eyes on Jesus to see if he would heal him, hoping to catch him in a Sabbath infraction. He said to the man with the crippled hand, “Stand here where we can see you.”

Then he spoke to the people: **“What kind of action suits the Sabbath best? Doing good or doing evil? Helping people or leaving them helpless?”** No one said a word.

He looked them in the eye, one after another, angry now, furious at their hard-nosed religion. He said to the man, “Hold out your hand.” He held it out—it was as good as new! The Pharisees got out as fast as they could, sputtering about how they would join forces with Herod’s followers and ruin him.

## THINK

“What kind of action suits the Sabbath best?  
Doing good or doing evil?”

- What is your immediate response to this question?
- Why do you think you responded in this way?

- Read the introductory passage from Exodus again and then put yourself in the Pharisees' sandals for a moment. Do you empathize with them at all?
- At one point Jesus is described as "angry" and "furious." How do those descriptions affect your reading of these words?
- Ponder this for a moment: Jesus says that the Sabbath (usually viewed as a day of rest) can be characterized by action (usually thought of as nonrest). What is your reaction to that seeming paradox?

## READ

From *Spiritual Friend*, by Tilden Edwards<sup>1</sup>

Today, in the Protestant-dominated parts of the West especially, we are pulling away from the last vestiges of a well-intentioned but oppressively legalistic period of Christian Sabbath observance. Sunday legislation probably reached its height of narrow, rigid interpretation in the English Puritans' seventeenth-century legislative acts that prohibited any kind of recreation on Sunday, even going for a walk.

With the gradual demise of the last related "Blue Laws" legislation in the United States, there is a general sigh of relief. On the other hand, with them one of the few remaining symbols of a meaningful basic rhythm of life has been abolished from public consciousness. As Harvey Cox says, though Sunday is a holiday, it increasingly is just another day whose emptiness is filled with leisure industries. The Churches themselves increasingly are limited to a rushed hour of vestigial Sabbath gathering, with no sense of a whole day's different rhythm of life. Numerous non-observant Jews ignore the Sabbath altogether. Liberal Jews can water it down to a glancing tip of the hat, along with a majority of Christians. For others in the culture, the Sabbath is simply unheard of.

What are we missing in ignoring the guidance of this different quality of time represented by the Sabbath? We are missing a profound human truth: our need for what the great Jewish scholar and mystic, Abraham Joshua Heschel, called "a sanctuary—a cathedral in time."

## THINK

"What kind of action suits the Sabbath best?  
Doing good or doing evil?"

- What was your experience of Sabbath growing up? Narrow and rigid? Watered down? Simply unheard of?
- Who or what primarily influenced that experience?

- What role does Sabbath play in your life now?
- Edwards talks of a “meaningful basic rhythm of life.” Do you believe there is such a thing? Why or why not?
- How does the offer of “a sanctuary—a cathedral in time” sound to you?
- What would you do in your “cathedral”?

## READ

From *Making Sunday Special*, by Karen Mains<sup>2</sup>

I would hustle and bustle, find the missing shoe, iron the shirt that had been neglected the night before, throw the wet clothes into the dryer, set the table for ten for Sunday dinner, prepare a simple meal for guests, go over the last-minute preparations for our interracial Christian Education Center plans, then finally get myself dressed after a most inadequate catch-as-catch-can family breakfast. David would emerge from his study, holiness sitting on his brow, anointed to present the Word of the Lord to our congregation, oozing peace and equanimity. Oh yes, I knew how Martha felt when Mary sat at the feet of Jesus.

But then I discovered that many Christian families (not just those of us in pastoral ministry) had the same struggles. Sunday morning, leaving for church, was often the worst time in their week.

As a couple, David and I vowed to work together to restore our observance of the Lord's Day, to seek to make Sunday the best day of the week, the high point, to struggle to establish this rhythm of the sacred in our lives as individuals and in our lives as a family. We wanted Sunday to become the joyful focal point of our weekly lives.

Now it's important to underline the word joyful. We did not want to slip back into an old legalism, that grim old joyless observance of the Lord's Day with its killing *can't's* and *don't's* and *won't's* and *shall not's*. That attitude has done as much to create a dread of worship as anything I know. It was against this kind of legalism Christ had to continually speak. In three of the Gospels his words of reminder and rebuke are recorded, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." I wanted the kind of celebration in our family hearts that I read about in Isaiah . . .

"If you . . . call the Sabbath a *delight* . . . if you honor it, not going your own ways . . . then you shall take delight in the Lord . . ." (Isaiah 58:13-14).

So David and I moved slowly but determinedly into recapturing Sunday meaningfulness in our new role as lay people. We refused to schedule meetings on Saturday evenings. If we were traveling, we attempted to return home in time for church on Sunday. . . . Not only were we going absolutely counter to the secular culture of society in which the weekend was viewed hedonistically and narcissistically, but we soon discovered that we were going counter to the secularized culture of the church where a full calendar was viewed as sacred.

## THINK

“What kind of action suits the Sabbath best?  
Doing good or doing evil?”

- Can you relate to what Mains says about her Sunday mornings?
- Would you use the words *joyful* and *delight* to describe your Sabbath experiences?
- Have you been or are you now a part of the church culture that sees a full calendar as sacred?
- If you want to change your current experience, how would you go about doing that?

## READ

From *Community and Growth*, by Jean Vanier<sup>3</sup>

Many people get burned out because, perhaps unconsciously, some part of them is rejecting the need to relax and find a harmonious rhythm of life for themselves. In their over-activity they are fleeing from something, sometimes because of deep unconscious guilt feelings. Maybe they do not really want to put down roots in the community and stay for the long haul. They may be too attached to their function, perhaps even identified with it. They want to control everything, and perhaps even want to appear to be perfect, or at least a perfect hero! They have not yet learned how to live; they are not yet free inside themselves; they have not yet discovered the wisdom of the present moment, which can frequently mean saying “no” to people.

These people need a spiritual guide to help them look at themselves and discover why they have not the freedom to stop, and what is the cause of their compulsive need to do things. They need someone who can help them stand back and relax enough to clarify their own motives and become people living with other people, children among other children. God has given each of us an intelligence. It may not be very great, but it is great enough for us to reflect on what we need in order to live what we are called to live—community.

## THINK

“What kind of action suits the Sabbath best?  
Doing good or doing evil?”

- Does this passage change in any way the way you’ve been thinking about Jesus’ question?
- What are your reactions to the idea that relaxed people are best able to do good or truly help people?
- Would you describe yourself as a person who can stop and rest? Or do you have a “compulsive need to do things”?

- Would others around you agree with your answer to the previous question?

## READ

From *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, by Marva Dawn<sup>4</sup>

One of the specific choices among the values of the Christian community is the embracing of time instead of space. We must return to the question of how we in our busy lives can afford to spend a whole day in Sabbath ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting when it seems we don't have enough time to do what has to be done. Surrounded as we are by the rapid pace of too much change, we think we cannot set aside such time. However, when we take the day to assess our use of time, we learn what is important in all those changes and how to prioritize our tasks and desires so that we aren't overcome by the tyranny of the urgent. We must develop an objective perspective . . . to assess the quality of our days. This perspective has many aspects, but one of the foremost is the deliberate decision to focus on events in time with persons rather than using time to acquire or accomplish things.

## THINK

“What kind of action suits the Sabbath best?  
Doing good or doing evil?”

- When was the last time you took a Sabbath and assessed your use of time?
- Can you recall a Sabbath (Sunday) that was overtaken by the “tyranny of the urgent”? What was that like?
- Later in her book, Dawn refers to the Sabbath as “a day to celebrate persons and life.” How does that sound to you? What would it take for you to move in that direction?

## PRAY

Look back at the “Think” sections. Ruminates on your responses. Let them distill into a prayer, and then write that prayer below.

*Lord of the Sabbath . . .*

The issue of prayer is not prayer; the issue of prayer is God.

ABRAHAM HESCHEL

## LIVE

“What kind of action suits the Sabbath best? Doing good or doing evil?”

The challenge now is to take this question further along—to live out this question. Think of one thing, *just one*, that you can personally do to wrestle with the question, inhabit the character of it, and live it in everyday life. In the following space, jot down your thoughts on this “one thing.” Read the quotes that follow for additional inspiration. During the coming week, pray about this “one thing,” talk with a close friend about it, and learn to live the question.

*One thing . . .*

Six days we live under the tyranny of things in space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time, a day on which we are called . . . to turn from the results to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world.

Abraham Heschel

My Lord Sabbath  
 Welcome to my home.  
 Welcome to my heart.  
 Welcome to my mind.  
 Welcome to my spirit.  
 May this Sabbath/Sunday  
 Be filled with your presence.  
 Amen.

Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

RAINER MARIA RILKE, *LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET*