

SESSION 1

MARKED FOR SERVICE

Scripture Focus

Gospel of Mark; Acts 15:36–41;
2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:21; 5:13

Theme



DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS

God presented Christ in Mark's Gospel as the suffering servant Who encourages believers to serve sacrificially.

Measurable Response

Students will study the Gospel of Mark to appreciate Jesus' suffering and be encouraged by His example.

Memory Verse

"And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:44, 45). KJV

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Every year there are a string of reports of celebrities who hit rock bottom and overdosed on drugs or committed suicide. Yet the world continues to point to their lives as the goal for the rest of us. There is a blatant lack of honesty about the inability of money and things to make a person feel whole and happy.
- ☐ Read Mark 10:45. Jesus didn't come to earth to be famous. In fact, He often told others to keep quiet about His miracles because He didn't want to be seen as a celebrity. He focused on serving others, even to the point of suffering and death. That didn't make Jesus sad, though. He looks back on His life on earth with joy and contentment.
- ☐ Mark wanted his readers in Rome to rejoice in the face of persecution and to devote themselves to serving God by serving others, looking to Jesus as their primary example. Encourage your students to set goals for their lives that reflect Jesus' heart for service. Remind them that Jesus' suffering for them makes their joy and contentment possible.

Cultural Barrier

This session addresses the belief that a good career and wealth guarantee a person happiness. Jesus demonstrated that serving God, even to the point of suffering and death, are the keys to true joy and contentment. Having a perfect career and lavish wealth are meaningless and hollow to those without a heart for Christ.

Session Starters

Option 1—Service Industry

Gather

- Resource 33-R1.
- Timer.

Steps

1. Print resource 33-R1 and cut apart the cards.
2. Organize the students into two teams. Each team takes a turn playing. Give a card to a volunteer from the first team. The volunteer must give clues to get teammates to guess the word in bold at the top of the card. The rest of the words on the card are taboo, meaning the volunteer can't say them when giving the clues. Note that all the cards have to do with the service industry.
3. Time how long it takes for the teams to guess the word on their teammates' cards. Add the times up. The team with the shortest time at the end of the rounds wins. Monitor the volunteers to ensure they don't use the taboo words. Add a minute to their time if they say one of the words.
4. Discuss service careers.

ASK: What are some characteristics of service industry jobs? *The person must be sensitive to the needs of others, be willing to sacrifice self to help others, and look out for the happiness and contentment of those they serve.*

ASK: Who here is aspiring to work in the service industry? Why or why not?

ASK: Can a person be happy and content in a service industry job? Explain.

5. Transition to Bible lesson.

People who work in service industry jobs give of themselves to others. They make sacrifices so their customers have an enjoyable experience. At times they endure criticism or even mistreatment. Mark wrote his Gospel to present Jesus as the suffering servant. As we study Mark's Gospel, we will be challenged to serve God sacrificially, looking to Jesus as our example. We will find that, like Jesus, serving God well by serving others brings the joy and meaning that eludes the rich and famous.

Section 1

Game Cards

Waiter	Maid	Taxi Driver	Plumber	Barber
Food	Shave	Wax	Fix	Hair
Order	Wash	Car	Open	Shave
Restaurant	Vacuum	Passenger	Water	Shower
Table	Shut	Hair	Leak	Get
Menu	House	Drive	Wrench	Cut
Cook	Cashier	Janitor	Photographer	Gardener
Make	Money	Shower	Camera	Flowers
Restaurant	Shop	Shower	Portrait	Groom
Kitchen	Cash	Shower	Photo	Wash
Food	Food	Client	Photo	Shy
Ingredients	Cheese	Shut	Shower	Shy

Resource 33-R1

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33-R1

Option 2—G.O.A.T.

Gather

- Whiteboard and markers.

Steps

1. List several categories on the board (e.g., singer, baseball player, teacher, president).
2. Students say who they think is the G.O.A.T. (Greatest Of All Time) in each category and why. When students disagree, have them present their cases. Share which student you think was most convincing.
3. Discuss the common understanding of greatness.

ASK: What makes a person the G.O.A.T. in these different categories?

ASK: What might it take to become a G.O.A.T.?

4. Transition to Bible lesson.

Mark recorded Jesus' teaching on what it takes to become the G.O.A.T. in God's eyes. We will see that it has nothing to do with a great talent or ability. We will also see that Jesus qualifies as the G.O.A.T. because He came as the Suffering Servant to give His life for all.

Bible Study

I. Meet Mark

A. Mark, the minister (Acts 15:36–41; 2 Tim. 4:11)

The John Mark mentioned in Acts is widely recognized as the writer of the Gospel of Mark. John Mark is mentioned in connection with his mother, Mary. Peter went to her house after God miraculously freed him from prison (Acts 12:12). The Jerusalem church had gathered at Mary's house to pray for Peter. It seems, then, that Mark had a strong spiritual background.

Mark was first mentioned in ministry when he joined Paul and Barnabas on their return trip to Antioch from Jerusalem (12:25). He later joined Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey but then abandoned them in Perga to return to Jerusalem (13:13). Paul considered him a risk and refused to take him on their second missionary journey.

READ: Acts 15:36–41. **ASK:** How determined was Paul not to take Mark on the second missionary journey? *Paul had strong feelings and a determined resolve about not partnering with Mark.*

Paul ended up going with Silas while Barnabas took Mark. Barnabas was known for encouraging and developing servants of the Lord. He didn't write off Mark's potential because of Mark's previous failure.

Later Mark served in Rome as an assistant to the imprisoned Paul. Paul also sent Mark on a mission to Asia Minor (Philemon 24; Col. 4:10). Still later, Paul asked Timothy to bring Mark to him in Rome where Paul was again imprisoned and facing what he thought was an imminent execution (2 Tim. 4:11). Paul recognized Mark had grown and become useful in ministry.

READ: 2 Timothy 4:11. **ASK:** Put yourself in Paul's place. Describe the type of person you would want to assist you and help you carry out ministry as you faced death? *Someone who was reliable, capable, and determined to serve even in the face of danger.*

While Mark no doubt regretted abandoning Paul on a missionary journey, he had to look back and rejoice in the lessons he had learned. Mark could teach believers they could come back from failure to serve God effectively. God would not abandon them. Mark's experience with spiritual failure and growth comes through in his Gospel.

B. Mark, the writer (Mark 14:66–72; 1 Pet. 5:13)

Mark seems to have had a close connection with Peter. Evidence points to them both being in Rome at the same time. Early Christian writings testify that Mark wrote accurately, though not chronologically, what Peter recalled about Christ. In addition, Peter called Mark "my son," a term that reflects their close association (1 Pet. 5:13).

So Peter was most likely instrumental in providing much of the firsthand accounts that Mark used in writing his Gospel. Mark took Peter's reports and, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, arranged them to form what is now the Gospel of Mark.

READ: Mark 14:66–72. **ASK:** Why do you think Peter told Mark this account? *It powerfully demonstrates that Christ can bring believers back from failure.*

God used a man who had quit on fellow missionaries and a man who had denied Jesus three times. Their lives give us hope that God doesn't give up on believers.

II. Mark's World

Mark wrote sometime between AD 65 and 68 to Gentile believers

living in Rome. The Roman believers were suffering persecution in the aftermath of the great fire in Rome during emperor Nero's reign (AD 64). About half of the city burned over six days, devastating Rome and tarnishing the empire. Nero falsely accused the Christians of starting the fire. In response, the Romans took vengeance on the Christians. For example, they dressed believers in animal skins and released wild dogs to attack and kill them. The Romans hung other believers on crosses and burned them. Nero used burning Christians to illuminate his parties.

ASK: What could a first-century Roman believer have wrongly concluded about God because of such terrifying and unjust treatment? *That God isn't worth serving; He can't care for His own; He is powerless in comparison to the emperor; serving Him ends in sorrow and pain.*

Mark's Gospel presents the suffering of Christ and provides encouragement to those who faced persecution in Mark's world in first century Rome. Mark's Gospel no doubt helped the Roman church stand strong and spread the good news of redemption through Christ.

III. Mark's Purposes

The historical setting of the Gospel of Mark helps us understand Mark's purposes in writing the Gospel. Perhaps it also explains the seemingly hurried and rather short nature of the Gospel. Mark must have felt pressed to get his message to the Christians enduring persecution.

A. Present Christ's suffering (Mark 1:12, 13; 3:20–22; 8:31–33; 10:32–34; 45)

Mark's Gospel focuses primarily on the suffering and death of Christ, getting to the predictions of His death by the eighth chapter (8:31–33). The passion of Christ takes up about one-third of the Gospel, but that is not the sole reference to Christ's suffering. Mark refers or alludes to suffering throughout his Gospel.

READ: Mark 1:12, 13. **ASK:** What evidence of Christ's suffering is apparent in this account? *Christ is in the wilderness where He is threatened by Satan, wild beasts, and hunger.*

Mark is the only Gospel writer to mention the wild beasts Jesus faced in the wilderness during His temptation. He must have done so to encourage the Christians facing the threat of wild beasts in the Roman arena under Nero. In the wilderness, Christ was victorious over the wild beasts and Satan (Matt. 4:1–11), the believer's most powerful enemy. The mention of the ministering angels who came to Christ's aid would have been a further encouragement to the Romans. They were evidence of God's ability and willingness to care for those who suffered as believers.

READ: Mark 3:20–22. **ASK:** What suffering did Christ endure as He stood with the pressing crowds? *He was criticized by some of his family members. The scribes accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub (Satan).*

Some in Jesus' family thought He was beside Himself. They accused Him of being a fanatic. Most likely they were worried about their family name and reputation. So their concerns were selfish. They tried to lay hold on Jesus and take Him back to Nazareth. Later in the passage Jesus' mother and brothers called out to Him from outside the multitude that surrounded Jesus. Jesus responded by saying that those who do God's will were His family (3:31–35).

ASK: How might this account help Roman believers who felt the sting of rejection from their unbelieving family members? *The account would have encouraged them and drawn them closer to each other and to Christ.*

Mark recorded three of Jesus' announcements to His disciples of His coming death and resurrection (8:31–33; 9:30–32; 10:32–34). The announcements build Mark's case that Christ ministered as a suffering servant. Each time the disciples were confused by Jesus' announcement. Peter even protested Jesus' first announcement.

READ: Mark 8:31–33.

Peter expected a nationalistic Jesus Who would ride into Jerusalem on a horse as a conquering king. Jesus rebuked Peter, telling Satan to get behind Him (8:33), meaning He wanted Satan to get out of sight and stop using His disciples to block His path to the cross.

READ: Mark 10:32–34. **ASK:** What specifics did Jesus include in His prediction of His passion? *He would be condemned, delivered to the Gentiles, mocked, scourged, and spit on.*

Later in this same conversation with His disciples, Jesus stated His purpose for coming to earth (10:45).

READ: Mark 10:45. **ASK:** Summarize Jesus' mission.

Despite Jesus' knowledge of the specifics of what He faced in Jerusalem, He continued to make His way there with His disciples close behind.

B. Encourage persecuted Christians (Mark 8:34–38; 10:21, 42–44; 1 Pet. 2:21)

Jesus' disciples didn't comprehend Jesus' predictions of His coming Passion. Instead, they disputed among themselves who would be the greatest in Christ's Kingdom (Mark 9:33–35; 10:35–44).

The Jesus came to offer Himself as the Jew's king. Both the Jewish religious leaders (Matt. 12:22–32) and the Jews in general (John 19:12–15) rejected Him, meaning Jesus delayed His Kingdom and turned His focus to the cross (Matt. 21:42, 43; 23:37–39). In the future, He will return to earth to set up His millennial Kingdom in Jerusalem.

READ: Mark 10:42–44. **ASK:** What clear message did Jesus send to His disciples about greatness? *Jesus said those who are servants and slaves of all would be great.*

The disciples were slow to understand Christ's teaching, but the persecuted Christians in Rome would have understood right away that the suffering Jesus endured had implications on discipleship. They suffered as part of their living for Christ. And God would reward them for their suffering.

To further support his theme, Mark twice recorded Jesus' teaching concerning bearing one's cross.

READ: Mark 8:34–38; 10:21.

To take up one's cross means to follow Christ obediently and sacrificially.

ASK: What shows that believers are taking up their crosses? *They make serving Christ a priority; they are selfless; they serve Christ even when it is costly; they serve so God might be glorified.*

The rich young ruler, to whom Jesus was talking in the second instance, decided that sacrificing and suffering for Christ was not for him (10:22). He chose to keep his riches and his life of ease instead.

Peter, Mark's close associate, wrote about Christ's suffering at about the same time Mark was writing his Gospel (1 Pet. 2:21–25). Peter knew what it meant both to fail Christ and to stand for Him. He denied Christ but then endured imprisonment and beatings for the cause of Christ.

READ: 1 Peter 2:21. **ASK:** What connection did Peter make between Christ and believers? *Christ's suffering served as an example for believers. They too might suffer at the hands of the unjust.*

The Christians in Rome understood that to live for Christ sometimes means to suffer or even to die for one's faith. But Christ already blazed that trail ahead of them. They were therefore in good company. They could find comfort and help from Christ. Mark helped them realize that. And for those who had failed in their faith, God would help them grow in Christ and become effective. Mark's testimony made that clear

Memory Builder

Gather

- Theme Verse Poster.
- Whiteboard and markers.

Steps

1. Display the theme verse poster and review the meaning of Mark 10:44 and 45.

Jesus' disciples argued about who would be the greatest in Jesus' Kingdom. Christ responded by correcting their thinking. The greatest person in God's eyes is the one who serves others. Christ's life demonstrates that truth. He lived and died for others. He gave up His life so He might pay the ransom for our sins and offer us salvation.

2. Discuss the verse's meaning and application.

ASK: What does the world say makes a person great? Money, fame, good looks, a dream job, phenomenal talents.

ASK: Who in your life is great according to Christ's definition of greatness?

ASK: How might you serve others and attain to greatness from God's perspective?

ASK: What costs might be associated with your service of others?

3. Review the verses as a class. Give students an opportunity to say the verse from memory

Session Application

Gather

- Marks of a Servant poster.
- Marker.

Steps

1. Review the lesson.

John Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark. He leaned on Peter for firsthand accounts about Christ's ministry. Both Mark and Peter knew what it meant to bounce back from failure to become effective ministers. Mark wrote his Gospel to Gentile believers living in Rome during a time of terrible persecution. Nero blamed them for the fire that devastated Rome. Mark encouraged the persecuted Christians by focusing on Jesus' suffering during His ministry and on the cross. Mark's message about Christ comforted the believers in Rome. For those who had failed in their faith in the face of persecution, God would help them grow in Christ and become effective servants.

2. Discuss serving Christ, the Suffering Servant.

ASK: Why did Jesus become the Suffering Servant? *To make salvation possible.*

ASK: Why should we expect to suffer for serving Him? *The world is hostile toward Christ and His followers. Satan, who rules over the world, hasn't changed his ways.*

ASK: How do you expect to grow in Christ from studying the Gospel of Mark?

3. Add a session summary statement to the Marks of a Servant poster. For example, "Looks to Jesus, the Suffering Servant, for hope and strength to serve well."

Session Takeaways

Before dismissing the students, draw their attention to the Time with God page in their student books. Instruct them to complete the study on their own. The activity encourages them look to Jesus as their example for serving God well.