

Unexpected Grace

August 16, 2020



Daily Devotionals Introduction

As you read about Jesus in the Gospels, you might see some things that perhaps you weren't expecting. For this 13-week series, we'll open the Book of Mark together and study the life of Jesus—The Unexpected King. During this series, we will gain a better understanding of who Jesus is and what it really means to be his disciple.

As an individual or as a family, use these daily devotionals and reflection questions to connect with Jesus each day this week.

Each day, there will be a thought stemming from our Scripture passage along with 2-3 questions. Our hope is that as we journey together through the book of Mark, we'll be able to come out the other side knowing more about the life of Jesus.

Be sure to prayerfully consider each day's truth, passages, and each of the questions. If you are a part of a life group, let these devotionals stir your thinking and be the foundation for your group conversation.

Our prayer is that these devotionals, questions, and reflections will help you love God, love people, and make disciples.

Day 1

Last week we looked at the unexpected way Jesus broke into our world. We explored Jesus' identity as the One sent from God to renew all creation, make all things right, bring the Good News, display God's mind in human flesh, and heal that which needs mending. Mark ends chapter one with Jesus compassionately touching and healing a leprous man—a man considered unclean and untouchable, a man changed in such an unexpected way that he could not contain his joy.

Read Mark 2:2-12, taking note of the details in this scene as you slowly read. Who and what do you notice? What is your reaction?

This power, this unexpected grace piqued the attention of the people – from the low and despised, to the high and proud. They were compelled to see more, hear more, get close to Jesus. Chapter two opens with Him preaching the word in a house so full, “there was no room left, not even outside the door.”

Jesus broke into the paralytic's life with unexpected grace. He did not look at this man in neatly cordoned sections, partitioning his physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health. Jesus understands the disabling weight of sin on the whole person. He extended this grace of forgiveness to all of him, renewing his heart, mind, and body.

In verse 10, Jesus calls Himself the Son of Man, a title used 14 times in the book of Mark, a title that reveals His deity. Until God sent His son in human flesh, forgiveness was ONLY accomplished through sacrificial atonement—the blood sacrifice of an animal. In the presence of this crowd, Jesus did the unexpected, the unbelievable, the unimaginable! He healed the whole person of his spiritual and physical brokenness!

The paralytic's friends had grabbed the four corners of this man's mat, jostled through a crowd, climbed atop the roof, tore it open, and lowered their friend to Jesus.

And then Mark ends this passage with a truly amazing event. Mark writes in Mark 2:12, “He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’”

Questions for reflection:

- Re-read **Mark 2:2-5**, this time picturing yourself as the one being brought to Jesus. What goes through your mind as these friends break open the roof and lower you before Jesus? How does Jesus look at you? What do you see in His eyes and hear in His voice as He says, *Child, your sins are forgiven*? How do you respond?
- In what ways do you need the unbelievable, unimaginable healing power of Jesus? Open your heart to Him. Receive His healing for spiritual, relational, and physical

brokenness. Consider sharing your need with a friend or your Life Group. Ask them to bring you into Jesus' healing presence.

- Who in your life needs Jesus' unimaginable healing? Compassionately bring this person before Him. Consider texting, calling, or writing a note to let them know you have brought them before Jesus.

Day 2

Jesus was wrecking the social and religious norms of the day. People were curious about this unexpected newcomer. This local fellow who cast new light on religious rules and traditions. This teacher whose wisdom didn't come from a doctoral degree in Higher Rabbinical Theology. This man who had a deep knowledge *of* God and a direct connection *with* Him.

Today, we see Jesus stepping outside religious boundaries as He pursues sinners, even sharing a meal with the worst of them—a complete and unexpected act of grace. Jesus is the initiator. Jesus is the pursuer. He breaks in, right in the middle of life with its busyness and daily routines.

Just like yesterday, read **Mark 2:13-17** slowly, noticing and thinking about any questions that come to mind. Consider what may have been occurring in each person's life, heart, and mind. (the people in the crowd, Levi, the tax collectors and sinners, the disciples, the Pharisees).

Jesus walks by Levi, sitting in his tax booth, and says, "Follow me. Be my disciple." We learned last week that the invitation to become a disciple is a huge deal. Jesus was basically saying, "Come. Walk with me. Watch me. Live with me. Learn from me. Understand deeply who I am and why I am here. Be changed in the process."

Who was this man, Levi? What was this profession of *tax collector*? Tax collectors were despised extortioners who collected exorbitant taxes for Rome. They were viewed as traitors, often getting rich by skimming from both Rome and their own people. Levi's resumé seemed unsuitable for becoming a disciple of Christ. This makes Jesus' invitation to him an unexpected grace.

In verse 15, we see that Levi could not keep this grace to himself. That is the beauty of God's grace. There's more than enough for all! As we receive it, we want it for others. Levi invited his friends to dinner. He invited Jesus to dinner. Jesus accepted the invitation. His actions were disgraceful in the eyes of the Pharisees, who saw Him eating with despised sinners. But Jesus welcomed *all* at the table—to eat with Him, converse with Him, know Him, be known by Him. Humble, unexpected grace!

Levi opened his home to his friends. He offered his life to Jesus. Jesus had begun the grace-filled work of changing Levi from the inside out and giving him a new identity. Levi even received a new name: Matthew, which means *the gift of God*.

Jesus pursues you and me. He offers his unexpected grace in the midst of our busyness, struggles, and shame. He invites us into a deep and knowing discipleship relationship with Him. This relationship changes us from the inside out and gives us a new identity—an identity as beloved, child of God, disciple of Christ, heir of the kingdom.

Questions for reflection:

- Reread that last paragraph. How do you feel as you read those words? Where and how do you need God to break in with His unexpected grace? Will you open your heart to receive it? Be still. Listen for Jesus' invitation into this deep and knowing relationship with Him. Respond to Him.
- Imagine Jesus walking by where you live or work and saying to you, "Follow me. Be my disciple." What would your response to a call like that be?
- Journal a prayer to God with your thoughts on Jesus' initiation and pursuit of you. Thank Him for his grace and mercy.

Day 3

In His unexpected grace, we've seen Jesus heal a paralytic and eat with sinners. But, what about the religious leaders who've been hassling Him at each encounter?

These leaders learned to blur the lines between religious and secular roles to gain favor with their Roman oppressors. Their duties included preserving order, enforcing religious laws, maintaining the temple, and legislating daily affairs. One group, the Pharisees, added burdensome rules to the laws passed down from Moses. Jewish law required *only one day of fasting a year*—the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29)—but the Pharisees fasted *twice a week*. The leaders were so fanatical about right, wrong, and Rome, that they neglected the spiritual guidance of the people. Jesus said of them in Matthew 23:4, “They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”

With this background, read **Mark 2:18-22**.

Mark lumps the religious leaders together as a group and he shows us that Jesus came to shake up and wake up those who would hear. Might He have spoken in parables so those who “had ears to hear” would hear and thirst for more?

Jesus was in the habit of offering new life (new wine) to hearts soft, malleable, and receptive. Was it possible for hardened Pharisees to receive this new life? Can dry wineskins be reconditioned? Through Jesus' unexpected grace, yes! He came to renew all things—even the hard heart of a Pharisee. We see this evidenced in Joseph of Arimathea, a Jewish leader, who honored Jesus by carrying His crucified body to his own grave. We see it in Saul, a Pharisee and murderer, who encountered Jesus' unexpected grace and became Paul, the apostle and missionary.

Jesus extends this grace to us, as well. Consider the beautiful words of **Ezekiel 36:26**, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

Questions for Reflection:

- Re-read **Mark 2:18-22**. What do you notice about the Jewish leaders (their motives, tone, mindset, humility)? What do you notice about Jesus (his motives, tone, mindset, humility)?
- Is there a bit of Pharisee in you and in me? A critical attitude? A judgmental remark? A desire to control? Invite Jesus to look within you and examine your heart. Ask Him to reveal areas that are stony. Receive His unexpected grace that reconditions hearts, removing stones and replacing them with soft, malleable, receptive flesh.

- Prayerfully close with this chorus from the song [“New Wine”](#) by Hillsong Worship:
Make me Your vessel
Make me an offering
Make me whatever You want me to be
I came here with nothing
But all You have given me
Jesus, bring new wine out of me

Day 4

Yesterday, we looked at the religious leaders of Jesus' day. Their form of religion was so burdensome that it controlled every aspect of their lives: where they went, what they ate, when they ate, when they fasted, who they touched, how they washed, when they prayed, how they prayed, and on and on the list of rules, restrictions, and requirements continued. Do you feel the weightiness and anxiety as you read the list? They lost sight of who God was. They had forgotten His love, hope, and promises for them. Where is freedom? Where is hope? Where is life?

The Jewish people had lost sight of God, but in His unexpected grace, He had not lost sight of them. He remembered His promises, especially the promise of a Messiah who would bring freedom, hope, life!

Look for this freedom, hope, and life that Jesus offers as you read **Mark 3:1-6**. How do Jesus' words and actions differ from those of the religious leaders? What seems important about this to you?

We too can be weighed down by the burdens of living up to expectations, trying to be enough, and meeting others' needs. Add the restrictions during COVID and loss of connections, and our anxiety can rocket out of control. Pile on the *shoulds*, *oughts*, and *expectations* we imagine come from God, and we can feel buried.

Where is freedom? Where is hope? Where is life?

Jesus continues to offer His unexpected grace, even in this. Listen to His invitation in the Message version of **Matthew 11:28-30**, "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Words of freedom, hope, life!

Questions for reflection:

Take a few moments now to come before Jesus. Invite His calming presence. Ask Him to recover your life as you answer the following questions with Him:

- What is going on in my mind? What has occupied my thoughts lately? Offer these to Jesus and listen for what He may have to say to you.
- What is going on in my heart? What emotions have I been feeling? Offer these to Him and listen for what He may have to say to you.

- What is going on in my body? Where have I felt tension, uneasiness, anxiety, etc.? Offer these to Him and listen for what He may have to say to you.
- Give all of this to Jesus. Listen for his invitations. Write a prayer of response.
- Close by rereading His grace-filled words in the **Matthew 11** passage above.

Day 5

This week we have received several invitations into Jesus' unexpected grace: the invitation to bring our brokenness before Him for healing; the invitation to follow Him and be changed from the inside out; the invitation to allow Jesus to remove our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh; and the invitation to release our burdens to Jesus and find rest in Him. Today, we see Jesus extending another invitation of unexpected grace to those who will hear.

Read **Mark 3:20-35**. Where do you notice growing tension and opposition? What must this life of Jesus look like to observers?

In the increasing chaos and opposition, Jesus remains focused on His purpose—extending the Kingdom of Heaven to those who have ears to hear. Increasingly, the crowds are pressing in on Jesus, desperate for Him to meet their needs. The religious leaders lurk around every corner, obsessed with contempt for Jesus. His own family recognizes how seemingly out of control Jesus' life has become.

In verse 31, we see his family coming to rescue Him. In response, Jesus asks this question, "Who are my mother and brothers?" And then, in His unhurried fashion, He looks around the room. Was He looking into the heart of each person in the crowd? Did He see those who had ears to hear—those whose hearts were soft and receptive to Him, open to knowing and following Him? Jesus says of them, "Here are my mother and brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Jesus *is not* dismissing his physical family. He *is* introducing connection into the spiritual family of God. Hidden in His words, Jesus offers an invitation into this family—to those who will hear and follow God's will. In Jesus' time, there was no relationship closer or dearer than "brother." This invitation is truly an unexpected grace!

Consider **John 1:12-13**, "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

Jesus knows the Father, this One who *is* Love. Jesus came to make Him known. **John 1:18** says, "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made Him known." Jesus invites us into a relationship of knowing and being known—intimately! Our weaknesses, failures, joys, desires—every bit of us.

Questions for Reflection:

- Read **Mark 3:20-35**. Where do you notice growing tension and opposition? What must this life of Jesus look like to observers?

- Are you able to be fully known by the One who loves you? Many of us *know* in our minds that God loves us but may have barriers to *experiencing* His love, especially when we have messed up. Are there traits you may be putting on God that distort your view of Him or hinder your openness with Him? Talk with Him about this as honestly and vulnerably as you can.
- Write a prayer, asking Him for the unexpected grace to more fully experience His love. Thank Him for this.