

Unexpected Power

August 30, 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 – Unexpected Power

Recently a violent explosion in Beirut killed hundreds of people and wounded thousands. In the blink of an eye, a city was rocked by unexpected power. Sadly, this is not the first time something powerful caused great damage or harm. We've all seen the effect a lightning strike, a tornado, or a tsunami can have. Sometimes unexpected forces of power have devastating consequences.

Yet all we have to do is read God's word to see that unexpected power can also bring peace, freedom, life, and healing. That's what we'll explore this week as we look at four encounters with Jesus from the Gospel of Mark.

But today, we'd simply like to set the stage for the journey God might want to take us on the rest of this week.

PREPARE

Situate yourself comfortably in a quiet, solitary place. Calm your body and quiet your mind before God. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and feeling as you read **Psalms 66:1-9** and **LISTEN ...** marking words or phrases that stand out as you read.

Shout for joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious. Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you; they sing the praises of your name." Come and see what God has done, his awesome deeds for mankind! He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot—come, let us rejoice in him. He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations—let not the rebellious rise up against him. Praise our God, all peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard; he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping.

LINGER

Read the passage again out loud. Are the same words or phrases you marked the first time still standing out? Write them down.

LEARN

Read the text for a third time. Ask yourself, "How is God inviting me to respond? What does He want me to learn from this?" Write out what comes to mind.

LIVE

Read the passage one last time and answer these questions:

1. Where do you see God's power at work in this text?
2. Where do you need to see God's power at work right now in your life?

Spend time in prayer asking God to open your eyes to see His power on display in unexpected ways.

Day 2 – Power Over Creation

Read Mark 4:35-41

There have been so many movies and TV shows about boats in distress. If you're older, you remember *Gilligan's Island* or *The Poseidon Adventure*. A little younger and you've probably seen *Titanic* or *The Perfect Storm*. More recently it's *Captain Philips* or *The Heart of the Sea*.

Each of these stories brings up images of people out in open water, in serious trouble. That's where the disciples find themselves in **Mark 4:35-38**.

It's hard for us to imagine how a storm of such force can happen on a lake. But the Sea of Galilee is no ordinary lake. To the west are the plains of Jordan, and the land runs flat until it drops off into steep cliffs that end at the water's edge. Sudden winds can sweep across the plain, descending to the surface of the water and causing waves 6-8 feet high.

At least four of the men in the boat had been on those waters fishing most of their lives, and they joined the others in fear.

"*Quiet, be still.*" Those were Jesus' words to the storm, but I wonder if they're not also words for the hearts of His disciples on the boat.

The disciples could not calm the storm, but they traveled with the One who can! And guess what...we do too!

Reflection:

1. What do these verses tell you about the person of Jesus?
2. What "storms" are you facing right now in your life? Write them down.
3. Jesus asked the disciples, "Why are you so afraid?" That's a great question for us. What about your current situation brings feelings of fear or anxiety?
4. Some "storms" are consequences of our own choices, and some come upon us for no reason. If you're facing a storm because of your own choices, confess that to God. Ask God to remove the shame that keeps you from running back to His loving arms. If you're in a storm brought about by forces outside your control, ask God to either calm the storm, or calm your heart.

Today, remember that even though you can't calm the storm and bring peace, you travel with the One who can.

Day 3 – Power Over Evil

Read Mark 5:1-20

Jesus encounters a man in **Mark 5** that no one wants to mess with. Not because of his muscles, but because he is possessed by a legion of demons. We read that the demon possession was so strong that chains and irons couldn't bind him and no one was strong enough to subdue him. But here are a few key points to this text that are worth thinking about:

1. The demons knew Jesus and were afraid.

From a distance the possessed man recognized Jesus, ran to Him, and fell on his knees, calling Jesus by name and identifying Him as "Son of the Most High God."

2. Jesus has command over evil.

Verse 13 says Jesus "gave them permission..."

3. Jesus sent the freed man on a mission to help others.

Instead of allowing the man to follow Him, Jesus sends him back home as a testimony of His power and grace.

Isn't Jesus amazing?

With that story still swirling around in your mind, here are some questions for you to consider from this text.

Reflection:

1. What do these verses tell you about the person of Jesus?
2. We read in this text that the demons knew *of* Jesus. Perhaps it would be worth reflecting on how our relationship with Jesus is different than that of the demons. So...*Where are you in your journey to know Jesus?* In **John 10:27** Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." Do you feel like you're just starting out in your journey toward knowing Jesus, are you stalled in your journey, or are you able to recognize His voice and follow Him? Take a few moments to write down where you are and why you feel that way.
3. Where is your compassion level for "sinners" or those who live in opposition to the ways of the Kingdom of God? With whom do you struggle most to have compassion?
4. What do you need to be "freed from" this week? What do you feel is constraining you or holding you back that is not within God's will? Chances are you're not possessed by a legion of demons, but there's probably something in your heart that continues to fill your mind and lead to actions and attitudes that are not God-honoring. Confess those constraints to God and ask for freedom.

Day 4 – Power Over Death

Read Mark 5:21-24, 35-43.

You can imagine the horror a parent would feel if faced with the death of a child. In our text today, Jairus' daughter is in some serious trouble. So Jairus does what any loving father would do – he throws himself at the feet of Jesus and pleads for help.

But while he's still on his way home with Jesus, word comes that his daughter has died.

"Don't bother the teacher," they say, "it's too late." And Jesus responds with words that are our key takeaway today: "Don't be afraid; just believe." Reading on, we find out how the story ends. Jesus takes the little girl by the hand, says to her, "Little girl, I say to you, arise," and she gets up and begins walking around! She is restored!

Rare are the stories of people on the verge of death who are totally healed. Rarer still are those pronounced dead that come back to life. As a fact of life, many of us have faced death head on – a family member, a friend, a colleague, a neighbor.

After losing his wife to cancer in 1960, C.S. Lewis wrote thoughts and feelings in his journal which became a book called *A Grief Observed*. Here is one of many passages describing his despair:

Part of every misery is, so to speak, the misery's shadow or reflection: the fact that you don't merely suffer but have to keep on thinking about the fact that you suffer. I not only live each endless day in grief, but live each day thinking about living each day in grief.

Grief is hard. So hard that we sometimes avoid it, bury it, hide it, or try to spend or pleasure it away. As a Christian man, C.S. Lewis lived in the reality of death. And yet his faith in God, the promise of eternity, and the healing power of Jesus sustained him through the deepest of valleys.

Paul wrote this about death in **1 Corinthians 15:54-58**:

...“Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”...thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you....

Jesus said: "Don't be afraid, just believe." Faith and fear – two opposing forces that we will continue to wrestle with, this side of heaven. But even in the most difficult days, we can hold on to our faith knowing that the cross, *not* death, has the final word!

C.S. Lewis also wrote, "For the greater the love the greater the grief, and the stronger the faith the more savagely will Satan storm its fortress."

Reflection:

1. Is there a loss that you are grieving? Write it down. How has this loss affected you physically? Emotionally? Mentally?
2. Which is the stronger pull for you now, faith or fear? Why?
3. How might remembering that victory is ours through Christ help us when we face grief?
4. Read through **Isaiah 61:1-3** as a prayer to God, asking Him to increase your faith in His goodness and provision.

Day 5 – Power Over Sickness

Read Mark 5:24-34, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

It's supposed to be the "Happiest place on Earth", but Disney World jam-packed with people is just not very fun. Weaving in and out of the crowds trying to get to the next attraction, only to wait in line for what seems like forever; people packed like sardines in designated areas to watch fireworks; dodging strollers, screaming kids, exhausted parents...not my idea of a relaxing vacation.

In the text from Mark, similar-sized craziness now surrounds Jesus as He travels to the home of Jairus to heal his daughter. A second story is sandwiched in between parts of the story we read yesterday. Many times biblical authors "sandwich" their stories in the middle of others to make us really pay attention to the "meat" in the middle!

In this sandwiched story, a woman in the crowd, desperate to be healed from debilitating bleeding, reaches out in faith to touch Jesus. "Immediately her bleeding stopped, and she felt in her body that she had been freed from her suffering." Sensing power has gone out from Him, Jesus then asks, "Who touched my clothes?"

Two questions occur to me when I read this text. The first one is just mild curiosity: Did Jesus really not know who touched Him? He can read the thoughts of the Pharisees, drive out demons, order creation, raise the dead...did He really not know who touched Him? Or was He giving the woman a chance to step forward? Then, a more serious question: Why does God heal some people and not heal others?

In the text from 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul, the man who wrote letters to churches that make up a large chunk of the New Testament, is asking God for healing. If anyone would get a "yes" from God, you'd think it'd be Paul. But God's response is, "My grace is sufficient."

God's reason for answering "no" was not because of sin in Paul's life or some lack of faith. God said "no" because He had something much bigger and much better in mind for Paul that could only be achieved through perseverance in suffering.

That's a hard pill to swallow. As followers of Jesus, one thing that we need to learn is to pray in faith for our own physical healing or the healing of someone else *while also surrendering* to any answer we receive, even if that answer is no. (Jesus himself surrenders like this in the Garden of Gethsemane, by the way [**Matthew 26:39**].)

Reflection:

1. Spend time specifically lifting up in prayer those you know, including yourself, who are struggling physically. Surrender to God the outcome of your prayer.
2. Describe an occasion when you struggled physically for some time. In what ways do you think God used that struggle to teach you something? What did you learn?
3. Spend time thanking God for specific times when you've been weak and His strength was obvious in your life.

