

DISCUSS

We are at the end of our reading of Mark’s gospel, the climactic Resurrection scene. Some of your Bibles include more details about Jesus appearing to several disciples after his resurrection, a short concluding section. But scholars agree that verses 9–20 were not part of Mark’s original manuscript. We will focus on verses 1–8 as we wrap up this series.

[Note: For further background on why verses 9–20 are disputed, see Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of the session.]

Read Mark 16:1–8 again.

Who visits Jesus’s tomb?

At the end of chapter 15, right after the pagan Roman centurion confessed that Jesus was the Son of God, we’re told that the only followers of Jesus who stayed with him until the end were these women. They witnessed where his body was laid, and here we see them returning.

In what ways have you felt invisible?

This scene at the garden tomb is the first time some of the women get a mention in the book of Mark. They’re the silent followers. We know they were at the cross, watching everything (15:40–41), but they are silent in the text.

We’ve discussed the centrality of following Jesus on this journey of discipleship. But in a society obsessed with power and platform and importance, it can be easy to judge the success of our Christian life along those same lines.

But the women at the tomb argue differently. What matters is faithfulness, not power or prestige or popularity. This way of discipleship is the same regardless of who you are.

Popular Christianity, whether online or in the media or in your church small group, can focus on worldly benefits. The famous get attention. The do-gooders are praised.

Have you ever felt lost among all the “celebrity” Christians?

Horizontal lines for writing.

In what ways can you encourage someone in their quiet obedience to Jesus?

In Mark 16:4–7, the women find Jesus’s tomb empty. Instead of a body to prepare, they are greeted by an awe-inspiring angel, proclaiming the fulfillment of Jesus’s promise: He. Is. Not. Here!

What does the angel tell the women to do?

Why do you think the angel specifically mentioned Peter?

The disciples had abandoned Jesus, but Peter had gone out of his way to deny he knew Jesus three times. It’s not hard to put ourselves in his shoes after that kind of failure. But here the angel has a specific message from the risen Jesus for Peter: Jesus still wants him.

Have you ever believed that something you’ve done, thought, or said might be too much for Jesus to forgive? How have you dealt with that burden?

Peter is a comforting figure. What does his story tell you about Jesus’s capacity to forgive and restore?

Notice verse 7: “But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”

In the same breath Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him, Jesus also promised that, after he had risen, he would go ahead of the disciples back to Galilee (see 14:28). And here in the mouth of the angel, Jesus reaffirms his promise: “I’m going back to Galilee.”

It may seem like a small detail. But even in the small things, God keeps his promises. What promises have you seen God keep in your life?

We all have some desires that are yet unfulfilled. How can this story encourage your faith that God has not forgotten you?

Are you ready to walk the road from Galilee to Jerusalem? From life to self-sacrificial death, so that others may know Jesus? Are you willing to bring people along with you and show them the way to follow Jesus?

What convinced you that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God?

How do you express your faith on a daily basis? What habits and values do you live out?

Jesus openly admitted that following him would not be an easy endeavor. How have you found that to be true?

How would you answer the question, "Is following Jesus worth it?"

LAST WORD

Mark wraps up his gospel by telling us that the women scattered from the empty tomb and kept their mouths shut because they were afraid. Throughout the story, even Jesus's closest friends responded to his power and mission in fear. So, Mark's asking us what *we're* going to do. Be silent and afraid? Or be confident in the knowledge that we serve the God-Man Jesus who paid the price for our redemption?

The choice is yours to make, and only you can decide. **Take a few minutes here at the end of this study and discuss what God might be asking you to do as a next step, both individually and as a group.**

Maybe it's simply getting right with Jesus like Peter needed to. Maybe it's willingly forsaking the distractions keeping you from following Jesus wholeheartedly. Maybe it's engaging with someone else who needs to know the gospel. Maybe it's embracing the truth of Jesus for the first time yourself. Maybe it's taking up Francis's challenge to go back and read the book of Mark again, for yourself and then be willing to evaluate your life in light of what the Gospel of Mark teaches.

Whatever it is, take a minute and write it down. And then spend time with Jesus in prayer. This whole study is pointless if we don't walk away changed by God's Word. The Christ has come. He died. He rose again.

So, what are you going to do now?

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Background: What is the "longer ending" of Mark?

Mark technically has two endings—the long and the short. Most Bibles will have a note starting in Mark 16:9 pointing out that the last two thirds of the chapter weren't in the oldest manuscripts. The long ending's also missing from over one hundred other manuscripts, and many of the early church fathers write as if they knew only the short ending of Mark. In addition, the tone and style of the original Greek in the long ending don't seem to match the rest of Mark's gospel, implying that it was composed at the very least much later if not by someone else entirely.

So why do we have it in our Bibles? The easy answer is that the large majority of manuscripts do include the long ending, and the early English translations of the New Testament adopted the long ending without question. Despite scholarly argument against the authenticity of the long ending, translational tradition kept it in each new edition of the English Bible. Even now, it's included almost as a nod to that tradition, despite nearly all English translations pointing out that it's probably not original to the Mark's gospel.

Should we be worried? Absolutely not. Virtually all scholars agree that the last twelve verse of Mark were added by someone else—most likely as a way to harmonize the Gospel of Mark with the other four gospels. That doesn't take away from the Bible's reliability, but instead shows us the importance of careful reading. Mark has a point to make, and he constructed his book in a very specific way. In order to honor his design, this study covers only the short ending of Mark.

Horizontal lines for writing notes.

What have you been taught about the short and long endings to Mark?

Does the history of the biblical text interest you, intimidate you, bore you?

Why do scholars care about such things, and how does it affect everyday readers?
