

*Christianity*  
EXPLORED

One life. What's it all about?

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## Welcome

Over the next seven sessions we will explore three questions that cut right to the heart of Christianity: Who was Jesus? Why did he come? What is involved in following him?

Don't be afraid to ask questions, no matter how simple or difficult you think they are. And if you have to miss a week, don't worry. There is a short summary of the previous session at the start of each study.

# GOOD NEWS

## What are we doing here?

1

### EXPLORE

- 🗣️ If you could ask God one question, and you knew it would be answered, what would it be?

## LISTEN

“The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ...” Mark 1:1

- When we look at the natural beauty of the world, and the design of the human body, the question is: Did this all happen by chance? Or did someone create it?
- The Bible says God is the one who created the universe we live in and the bodies we inhabit. So how can we know him?
- We can know God by looking at Jesus Christ.
- Christianity is about Christ – a title that means “God’s only chosen King”.
- Christianity is the “gospel” – the good news – about Jesus Christ.
- When Jesus was baptized, God the Father announced: “You are my Son”.
- God has revealed himself in human history through Jesus Christ. When we look at Jesus, all the guessing games about God stop.

### Notes

## DISCUSS

🗨️ Is there anything that intrigues or puzzles you about Jesus?

🗨️ How do you feel about reading Mark's Gospel?

### Bible words

**Gospel:** Good news.

**Christ/Messiah:** God's only chosen King, who God promised to send into the world.

**Prophet:** God's messenger.

**Baptism:** Immersion in water as a symbol of turning from sin and being washed clean on the inside.

**Repentance:** A change of mind and purpose. Personally turning back to God .

**Holy Spirit:** There is one God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son (that's Jesus) and God the Holy Spirit.

## FOLLOW UP

Each week you'll be exploring a few chapters of Mark. By the end of Session 6, you'll have read the whole of Mark's Gospel. Use the following questions to help you explore the passage. There's room at the end to write down any questions you'd like to discuss next time.

### Read Mark 1:1-20

1. The word "gospel" means "good news". Mark begins his book of good news with three statements about Jesus.
  - a) by the Old Testament prophets (messengers) (Mark 1:2-3)
  - b) by John the Baptist (Mark 1:7)
  - c) by God himself (Mark 1:11)

What do they each say about Jesus?

a)

b)

c)

 **Read Mark 1:21 – 2:17**

2. In chapters 1 and 2 Jesus shows his authority in different situations. (See Mark 1:16–20, 21–22, 23–28, 40–45; 2:1–12.)  
When Jesus speaks or acts, what sorts of things happen?

 **Read Mark 2:18 – 3:6**

3. Even at this early stage, Jesus divided opinions. Some people were amazed by him, while others were enraged.  
What are your early impressions of Jesus?

Do you have any questions about Mark 1:1 – 3:6?

# Can we rely on Mark's Gospel?

## WHO? WHEN? WHY?

Mark was a close friend and companion of Peter, who was one of Jesus' disciples. Peter was an "apostle" (those specifically called to witness the life, death and resurrection of Jesus). Peter wrote two letters to the first-century Christian churches. In one of them he said: "I will make every effort to see that after my departure (ie: his death) you will always remember these things" (2 Peter 1:15). He was referring to the things he saw and knew about Jesus. He passed them on to others like Mark. Peter died in the mid 60s AD. The evidence suggests that Mark wrote his Gospel around that period.

No doubt Mark was influenced by Peter's desire for the news about Jesus to be told to others in later generations, so he wrote it down in a book. His opening sentence reveals the subject of his book: "*The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*" (Mark 1:1).

Jesus died, rose again and returned to heaven around AD30. Mark wrote about 30 years later – well within the lifetime of those who lived through the events he recorded. So Mark had to write accurately. Any inconsistencies between what people saw and what he wrote would have discredited him.

## HAS MARK'S BOOK CHANGED OVER TIME?

How different is Mark's original book from the book that we have today?

We don't have Mark's original to compare with the book we call Mark's Gospel. This is normal for ancient documents, since the original copy would have been written on material such as papyrus or parchment, which would eventually rot away.

For this reason historians assess the reliability of copies of an original by asking the following questions:

- How old are the copies?

- How much time has elapsed between the writing of the original document and the production of the copies that now exist?
- How many copies have been found?

The table below answers these questions for three widely-trusted historical works, and compares them with the New Testament (including Mark's Gospel).

	Date of original document	Date of oldest surviving copy	Approximate time between original and oldest surviving copy	Number of ancient copies in existence today
THUCYDIDES' HISTORY OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR	c. 431–400 BC	AD 900 plus a few late 1st-century fragments	1,300 years	73
CAESAR'S GALLIC WAR	c. 58–50 BC	AD 825	875 years	10
TACITUS' HISTORIES AND ANNALS	c. AD 98–108	c. AD 850	750 years	2
THE WHOLE NEW TESTAMENT	AD 40–100	AD 350	310 years	14,000 (approx 5,000 Greek; 8,000 Latin; 1,000 in other languages)
(MARK'S GOSPEL)	(AD 60–65)	(3rd century)	(240 years or less)	

As the table shows, the oldest surviving copies of Mark were produced 240 years after his original (a comparatively small time) and an astonishing 14,000 copies exist today. So we can have great confidence that what we read is what Mark wrote.