



Week 5: Mark 9-16

Study Guide for the week of Jan. 26 - Feb. 1

Personal reflection / journaling exercise

This week, spend time with Mark 10:46-52, Jesus healing blind Bartimaeus.

Read through the passage several times slowly so you have the story firmly in your mind. Now close your eyes and imagine the scene: the noise and bustle of the crowd, the smell of the people and animals jostling around, the feel of the sun's heat on your head and the dust on your skin. Picture the color of the sky and the flowers scattered around the fields, watch the wind blowing the grass and the disciples walking around Jesus and strain to hear what they're discussing. The scene is interrupted by Bartimaeus shouting and the people yelling for him to be quiet – imagine what they are saying. How are the disciples reacting? How is Jesus reacting?

As you visualize the scene, are you an outside observer, one of the crowd, one of the disciples, blind Bartimaeus? What feelings does the scene bring to mind? Do you want to melt anonymously into the crowd or push to the front to eavesdrop on Jesus' conversation with his disciples? Are you embarrassed for Bartimaeus or pleased he's finally speaking up? What do you want to ask the disciples? What do you want to ask Jesus?

Now imagine Jesus turns to you and asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" What do you feel? How do you answer him? Have a conversation with Jesus and share your heart with him (this is prayer). Now listen quietly for a few moments and see what Jesus may reveal to you (this too is prayer). Write down your thoughts, feelings, impressions, what you learned about Jesus and what you learned about yourself.

This exercise of slowly reading and placing yourself into the biblical story to encounter God is an ancient practice called "lectio divina," or prayerful reading. You can use this same exercise each day this week to prayerfully read through different parts of the daily Bible reading that especially strike you. Or you can practice lectio divina using the account of Bartimaeus every day. Don't be surprised if the character that you identify with in the story changes – one day a member in the crowd, another day Bartimaeus. You may learn something new every day or you may return to the same conversation and feelings several days in a row. Both are valuable; the most important thing is that you are spending time talking with and listening to God – which is prayer, an essential for everyone who follows Jesus.

Discussion starters

1. Salt had three specific uses in the world of Jesus: It was used as a sacrifice when people remembered God's covenant with him, it changed the flavor of meat, and it preserved food. Jesus calls Christians to be salt (Mark 9:50). List ways you are salt in remembering God's faithfulness, "flavoring" the world around you, and in countering decay in our world. Do you need to be "saltier"?
2. Reread Mark 10:13-16. What does it mean to receive the Kingdom as a child? List some characteristics of children and distinguish between those that are childlike and those that are childish. Do children have genuine power or total autonomy? Do adults? Will someone deluded by the fantasies of power and autonomy be able to receive the Kingdom?

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3. Many people have mixed feelings about Judas; some hate him, others pity him. What are your feelings about Judas? What did the other disciples do when Jesus was arrested? Have you ever felt betrayed or abandoned? How have you betrayed or abandoned Jesus? Can you see yourself in Judas or another disciple?
4. Reread Mark 14:32-41. This passage illustrates tools we need to resist temptation. List as many as you discover. What has helped you resist temptation? What was a complete bust?
5. The women at the cross couldn't do much: they couldn't testify in court for Jesus, they couldn't come before Pilate, they couldn't control the crowd's thirst for blood, they couldn't order the Roman guards to stop. But they could be present with Jesus as he died. Do you focus on what you can't do or on what you can do? List those things you can't do. List those things you can do. What could God do with your list of "cans" if you offered it to him?

Bible verse to memorize: Mark 16:6