



Date: 18<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Theme: **Wisdom in Temptation**

Bible Readings: **Mark 1:9-15 & Mark 8:31-38**

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## PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

Please remember to contact your group beforehand to remind them of the date and time. Please make yourself familiar with the material and passages. **Paper and coloured pen or pencils will be useful.**

## PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

If you have a Bible at home (or online), please read the Bible passage from **Mark 1: verses 9-15**. This is the set Gospel reading this year for the first Sunday in Lent. We will also be looking at the Gospel reading for the second Sunday (Lent 2): **Mark 8: verses 31-38**.

Reflect on the following questions:

*Jesus faced temptations in his time in the wilderness. What temptations do you face in your everyday life? What temptations have you faced but overcome? What do you know you still struggle with?*

*Where or to whom do you go to find wisdom? Do you have someone you can trust to talk to about your struggles, doubts or questions?*

These are not necessarily to be shared with the group, unless you feel safe and comfortable doing so.

## STARTING THE SESSION: FINDING OUR ROOTS

If you are in a group of more than 5 people, please split into smaller groups.

On a sheet of paper, **draw a timeline sketch of your life**. Don't spend too long on it. It doesn't need to be a work of art.

*What are the key moments in your life? Where are the important decisions? Have they always been good decisions? Can you indicate where the 'ups and downs' are? Maybe use different colours.*

When you're happy with your sketch or life-map, discuss some of these questions with the group:

*When making choices in life, who or what has guided you?*

*Can you see times when God has led you on the right path?*

## A PRAYER

Lord, we thank you for the opportunity for sharing together today.

We ask you to open our ears and minds, so we can think about what following you means.

Give us grace to listen to one another,

and help us to understand more about how others see you and your word.

Challenge us, and remove any complacency from our faith.

As we thank you for your presence with us,

we ask that you be with those who are not here today.

Let them know we care for them, and strengthen us all in your love,

by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

## READING THE SCRIPTURES

**Read together the Bible passages:** **Mark 1:9-15 and Mark 8:31-38**

**Background Information:** Mark's Gospel is the shortest and earliest-written of the four gospels. The **first chapter** is a fast-paced introduction to Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. This is 'good news', and he tells it with urgency! As you read Mark, notice how often he uses the words '*and immediately*' or '*at once*'. In our first passage, we are given three snapshots of very important episodes in the life of Jesus: his baptism, his temptation in the wilderness, and the beginning of his ministry in Galilee. We can find more details in other gospels (e.g. Matthew 3 & 4), but Mark seems keen for us to notice and move quickly on. It's as if we're on a theme-park ride, being pulled from one scene to the next, as the gospel twists and turns. We can of course get off and walk! Take a short passage or sentence and prayerfully mull it over. For example: '*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased*' (v.11).

Much has happened in Jesus' ministry by the time we arrive at **chapter 8**. In this central chapter, his lead-disciple Simon Peter has identified Jesus as the Messiah or 'Christ'. We the readers are told this from the beginning, but there's an air of secrecy and wonder about Jesus' identity throughout Mark's gospel. It is a question he wants the reader to come to a decision about – *Who is Jesus? Who is he to you?* After this revelation, Jesus reveals to his disciples the true nature of his mission, and it involves suffering and death. Peter struggles to accept this. Jesus rebukes him in the strongest possible terms: '*Get behind me, Satan!*' He then begins to explain to his disciples about the way of the cross – the sacrificial nature of following Jesus. It is something they will take a long time to fully comprehend.

## DIGGING DEEPER – Questions for group discussion

Jesus' baptism came *before* his temptations. *What does this say to new Christians? How do we prepare newly-baptized or newly-confirmed disciples for the challenges they may face?*

Peter was already a committed disciple when he challenged Jesus, but Jesus said, 'Get behind me, Satan!' *What message should this give us, as we try to follow Christ? What can we learn from Peter?*

*How do you understand temptation? As internal desire, a time of trial, a challenge set by God, or the works of the devil? Do you find the personification of Satan helpful?*

*When are people most likely to give in to temptation? When tempted, how easy is it to draw on our internal resources (wisdom) to work out what to do? And are we able to seek the wisdom of others?*

*How does God lead us? How does wisdom increase in us? What can our past mistakes teach us? On our life's map, how do we choose the right path? What tools or helpers do we have to guide us?*

*Who are the angels who might minister to us in times of trial, when we seem to be in the wilderness or surrounded by wild beasts? How can we feel loved and supported in the decisions we make?*

When we say the Lord's Prayer, we say: 'Forgive us our trespasses (sins)... And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.' *What does this mean to you? Does God lead us into temptation? Might we see it differently if we added a comma: 'Lead us, not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'?*

*Albert Einstein is reported to have said: "Any fool can **know**. The point is to **understand**." When we think we know Christ, how can we ensure we understand him better?*

## PRAYING TOGETHER

- Pray for wisdom and supportive ministry for people who face harsh temptations, especially those who find their resources and energy low; in weakness, exhaustion, or mental ill-health.
- Pray that the church remembers its calling to take up the cross, and to follow the Servant King.
- Pray that we will each find wisdom, as followers of Christ, to seek God's leading and guidance in our life's journey and decisions.
- Pray for peace in the world; for an end to fighting between Israel and the Palestinian people, for wisdom for the leaders of the nations, and for peace in Ukraine after two years of war.
- Say **the Lord's Prayer** together, and remember to hold securely to the forgiveness God offers.