

# Life's Big Questions (Week 1): Is there a God?

## **Key Concept:**

Is there a God?<sup>1</sup>

## **Bible Study:**

Read Mark Chapters 1-4

## **Objective:**

Help you address one of life's big questions: Is there a God?

## **Introduction**

This series is designed for you to process some of life's big questions. During this six week series, we'll address a few of life's big questions and go on a journey of learning together. Some of you may be interested in learning how to use the material we'll cover in this series to journey with friends of yours to help them process their questions and ultimately experience the love of God. If you are interested in how to use this information with others, then reference the coaching points that correspond with each lesson on <https://movementmentoring.live/>.

As we begin the series, think about what question you would ask God if he were to walk through the door and sit down next to you? What is the one thing you have always wanted to ask God? Take a second and write down your question in the space provided and share it with your group.

## **2 Overarching Questions**

The question you wrote down will inevitably fall under one of the two overarching questions we all have to address on our spiritual journeys.

---

<sup>1</sup> We are greatly indebted to the Christianity Explored Material and have incorporated the shell of the outline that follows for the next 6 weeks from Christianity Explored.

## 1. is there a God?

## 2. If there is a God, how do we relate to he, she, or it?<sup>2</sup>

Really, those are the questions Mark addresses in his biography of the life of Jesus found in the Bible. Over the course of the next 6 lessons, we're going to guide our discussion around those 2 big questions as we read through the Book of Mark.

### How do we relate to God?

We'll begin with the second question, which is admittedly a struggle for all of us at some point. To begin with, let's start with some common struggles in relating to God.

**Boring Church:** Many of you grew up in a boring church. You stared at the ceiling. A lot. Or there was hangman. If church was supposed to teach you to relate to God in some way, then the lesson you deduced was that God was pretty boring.

**Hypocritical Church:** Even worse than a boring church for most people is a hypocritical church. Pick up the newspaper on any given day and there is a good chance you're reading about some inappropriate behavior by a clergy member. And you think, "I want nothing to do with it." In fact, Gandhi reputedly said, "I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."<sup>3</sup>

A friend, echoing Gandhi's words, similarly said, "The biggest thing keeping me from becoming a Christian is Christians." We could go on and on—so many people end their journey with the church or God because of the hypocrisy they see all around them in professing Christians. While many

---

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis said th

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/dec/31/gandhi-glimpsed-christ-rejecting-christianity-fals/>

professing Christians talk a good game, the walk is lacking and it is a major turn off.

**Irrelevant & Culturally Regressive Book:** The Bible is another big obstacle in relating to God for many in their journey. After all, it was written 2,000 plus years ago and 2,000 plus miles away (if you live in America). What relevance could it possibly have for us? And isn't this book demeaning to women and culturally regressive?

**Faith & Science are At Odds:** Many believe that if they become a Christian they will no longer be a progressive, thinking person. "Since faith and science are at odds with one another," the logic goes, "I will have to stop believing in science and just believe everything on faith." Not surprisingly, many in the modern world struggle in relating to a God who would ask them to reject the "incontrovertible" claims of science for a life of faith.

**Guilt Induced Religion:** People view the church and Christianity as just one big set of rules. They are turned off by religious people heaping huge portions of guilt and judgement upon them. Focusing on the few rules they somehow manage to keep, religious people pretentiously look down their long noses at everyone. No thanks!

### **Transition to Mark 1-4**

Mark tells a different story. It isn't one of guilt but of good news found in Jesus. Mark 1:1 says, "The beginning of the **gospel**." The word "gospel" means "good news," the good news of...Jesus Christ. Mark did not announce a gospel that requires you to suspend your mental faculties to believe in Jesus. On the contrary, Mark knew Jesus was and is someone who can be investigated and he encourages us to do just that.

One of the great things about Jesus Christ is that when we look at him, the guessing games about God stop. The Bible says that God has shown us

what He is like by sending his Son, Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:1 says that Jesus is “the visible image of the invisible God.” He’s 100% man and 100% God, at the very same time. He made an invisible God visible to us by becoming a man.

This was gospel good news for Mark (and for us!). Without God showing up on the scene, how would any of us ever know how to relate to him? Let me illustrate. Imagine you are a big U2 fan. You would love to spend some time with Bono. Yet, you are not alone. Bono has lots of fans and he can’t spend time with each one. Imagine trying to get to know him personally. You could write him a letter; you could call his fan office; you could go to a concert and stand outside afterwards with a big sign asking him to have dinner with you.

In all likelihood, none of these methods will help you develop a personal relationship with Bono. Your only chance of relating to Bono personally would be for Bono to choose to open the door for a relationship with you. He would need to see you in the crowd or somehow make a connection with you that would cause him to come to you (or at least make a way for you to come to him).

The good news Mark heralds is far greater than Bono coming down off stage and choosing to spend time with you. Mark is announcing that God came down from the stage of heaven to establish a relationship with us. He crosses all the barriers that separate us and takes on skin in the person of Jesus Christ.

Mark 1:1 uses that name exactly: Jesus **Christ**. “Christ” isn’t Jesus’ surname; he wouldn’t be called under the “C’s” in middle school in Nazareth. No, Christ means “God’s Anointed King.” Now that was an outrageous thing for Mark to write. In fact, Mark had every incentive not to write that Jesus was God’s Anointed King. Writing such a thing could, and did, get him killed. He was making a direct threat to Caesar, whom the

Romans was ruling on behalf of the gods. So to say that He was God's Anointed King would be a direct challenge to Caesar's authority.

Therefore, right out of the gates, Mark touts Jesus as a higher authority than the emperor, and it is worth pointing out Mark ended up being drug to death in front of the pagan idol, Serapis, for what he wrote and believed. Now, a really wise man named Blaise Pascal states that he tends to believe those witnesses "who let themselves be slaughtered.." <sup>4</sup> What he meant is that we believe people who have every reason to change their story and stick with it to their death.

And what Mark does over the first few chapters of his book is stack up layer after layer of evidence from eyewitness testimony accounts to justify his claim that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We'll consider the evidence put forth about Jesus by Mark as he answers one of life's big questions: "Who was Jesus? Was he really God?"

### **Who was Jesus? Was He God? Evidence Based Approach in Mark**

Mark writes his gospel much like an attorney would write. It is as if he is presenting the evidence as a lawyer would in court. So, let's process these first 4 chapters by considering the evidence Mark's evidence:

#### **Exhibit A: The POWER AND AUTHORITY OF JESUS' TEACHING**

The first exhibit Mark presents to establish the divinity of Christ is the authority and power seen in his teaching. In our culture, what gives someone the authority to teach? We typically look to things like degrees, expertise, and experience with the subject matter to create the authority to teach. Every once in a while a boy genius comes along with none of these resume builders that create authority. The Einsteins, the Mozarts of the world--they don't need training, they just have it. In fact, they usually teach their teachers, tossing credentials and training to the wind.

---

<sup>4</sup> Blaise Pascal, [The Thoughts of Blaise Pascal](https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2407), translated from the text of M. Auguste Molinier by C. Kegan Paul (London: George Bell and Sons, 1901). 9/30/2019. <<https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2407>>

One of my favorite films about a boy genius with no training is Good Will Hunting. In the film, Matt Damon plays a southy, a rough kid from South Boston with no schooling who roamed the streets and beat the tar out of anyone who messed with him. At nights, he would clean the floors of MIT - one of the most prestigious math institutions in the country. One of the leading professors at MIT put a problem on the chalkboard in the hall that took the faculty two years of work to solve. Matt Damon, playing the part of Will Hunting, solved it in seconds.

After the professor spends time with Will Hunting, he quickly realizes that all of his own credentials and accolades pale in comparison to the sheer genius of a boy with no training. It was as if he was a 4 year old playing chopsticks in the presence of Mozart.

This is what happened with Jesus. When Jesus was 12 and He went to the temple to talk to the religious teachers and experts. Twelve year olds did not do this, nor could they hold their own with the religious scholars, yet we find that “everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers” (Lk. 2:47). People realized there was something different in the way He taught as a boy that continued when He grew up.

The same is true in Mark 1: 21-22. Unlike Jesus, the teachers of the law did not come up with their own material. There was nothing original in their teaching. They stood on the shoulders of other great rabbis of the past and claimed no authority of their own.

Jesus, however, “taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law” (Mark. 1:22). He didn’t hide behind anyone else’s authority; He claimed authority of His own. He said, “I tell you on my authority; you can take it from me.” For example, he doesn’t simply teach that sin can be forgiven--He forgives sin himself (Mark 2:5-7). In sum, the

power and authority of Christ's teaching function as Exhibit A of Mark's case for the divinity of Christ.

## **Exhibit B: JESUS HAS POWER AND AUTHORITY OVER SICKNESS (& DEATH)**

Mark presents his second exhibit as evidence that Christ was God by chronicling his power and authority over sickness and death. In Mark 1: 29-31, Jesus demonstrates absolute authority over sickness. A mere touch of His hand and the fever of Simon's mother-in-law is cured. And this is not an isolated incident. Three verses later, in verse 34, we read that Jesus cured whole crowds of sick people and wielded absolute power over demons. A few days later he did what absolutely no one would do--he touched a leper. Shockingly, he didn't contract leprosy; he controlled the leper and was healed (Mark 1:41)!

The train of miracles keeps chugging in chapter 2 where His words healed a paralytic: bones, muscles and tendons knitted together before people's very eyes without a hint of surgery. The crowds were amazed, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!" (Mark 2:12). There are, in fact, thirty healings recorded in the Gospels, all showing us that Jesus has power and authority over sickness, even over death as we'll see a bit later.

If you are skeptical, you might respond, "Fair enough. But wouldn't all the noise created by Jesus through his miracles lead other people who are not Biblical authors (or followers of Jesus) to record some of these things?" Yes, you are correct, and this is exactly what happened. Let's consider a few Non-Christian sources of the day that also speak of Jesus' healings. First, consider Josephus, the 1st century Jewish historian who was not a follower of Jesus, who said, "At this time, there appeared Jesus, a wise man. He was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following among many Jews and among many of Greek origin."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?* (Harper One, 2012) 61

In addition to Josephus, “The Jewish traditional literature, although it mentions Jesus quite sparingly...supports the gospel claim that he was a healer and miracle worker, even though it ascribes these activities to sorcery.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the Gnostics and Ebionites, whom were deemed heretical by early Christians, didn’t deny that Jesus was a historical figure who performed mighty miracles. Think about the significance of this evidence when accumulated together. Those who were in no shape or form followers of Jesus are acknowledging he performed incredible miracles. Moreover, we have plenty of followers of Jesus who also provide extra-Biblical sources to corroborate the historical veracity of the miracles performed by Jesus such as Irenaus, Quadratus, and Justin Martyr<sup>7</sup>. This evidence, in isolation, isn’t sufficient to prove the divinity of Christ, but it is another helpful piece of the puzzle.

### **Exhibit C: JESUS HAS POWER AND AUTHORITY OVER NATURE**

The third exhibit Mark presents in making the case that Jesus is God is found in Jesus’ power and authority over nature. In Mark 4, Jesus and His followers are in a boat on the Lake of Galilee and “a furious squall” blows up. As the waves break over the boat so that it’s nearly swamped, Peter and the other seasoned fishermen say to one another, “We’re done for.” In their terror, they wake Jesus, who was in the stern sleeping on a cushion.

And they say: “Teacher, don’t You care if we drown?” (Mark 4:38). What does Jesus do? Does he grab the helm and steer them out of the tempest? No. He gets up and says: “Quiet! Be still!” (Mark 4:39). Instantaneously, the wind stills and the waves die down and all is completely calm.

---

<sup>6</sup> M. Wilcox, Jesus in light of His Jewish environment (Aufstieg und Niedergang der romischen Welt 2, no 25.1, 1982) 133, as cited in Lee Strobel, The Case for Christ (Zondervan, 1998) 91

<sup>7</sup> Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, Pg. 568; The Apology of Quadratus, Bishop of Athens, as preserved in Eusebius "History of the Church" Book 4, Chapter 3

Try this yourself. You don't even need to go to the ocean. Try this in the bathtub or in the sink. Get the water all choppy and then say, loudly, "Quiet! Be still!" See how you do.

In striking fashion, Mark is saying, "The same God who separated the sea from dry land in the book of Genesis is here! The same God that sent the wind to part the waters of the Red Sea is here. He's among us. His name is Jesus Christ, God's anointed King. He's God with skin on." Yes, it is hard for many of us to believe. It was for the disciples as well. They asked, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:41). That's the key question we all must settle. Who is this? Is Jesus really God?

#### **Exhibit D: JESUS HAS POWER AND AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS**

Let's return to Mark 2: 1-12. Once again, Jesus is healing people right and left, but notice the first thing He says to the man whose legs are paralyzed. His first words are, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). If I was the paralytic on the mat, I probably would have said something like, "Thanks Jesus, but that isn't really why I came. My problem is the leg."

Notice, however, how the religious people in the crowd respond. They started thinking (not speaking!) and Jesus read their minds: "Now some teachers of the law were sitting there **thinking to themselves**, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone? Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts...(Mark 2:6-8)" Once again, Mark makes a clear and compelling case for the divinity of Christ. He is a mind reader!

The teachers of the law seemingly overlook Jesus reading their mail, mostly because they are all hot and bothered by Jesus offering to forgive sins. They had bigger fish to fry. Jesus was claiming to be God and that couldn't be tolerated. Sure, other people have performed miracles and healings, but no one forgives sin. That is God's business.

Sin. It's an important topic in Mark, and it is one that has become incredibly charged in our culture. Religious people use the word sin all the time; irreligious people, on the other hand, tend to exclude the word altogether from their vocabulary. Since sin is a term you're going to see frequently in the Bible, we should take a few minutes and talk about what it means.

In order to develop a good working definition of sin, let's turn to one of the most universally accepted ethical codes on planet earth: The Ten Commandments. In the first commandment, God tells us not to put any other gods before him (Ex. 20:3).

In religious circles, this is called idolatry, which is misleading to us in 21st century America because we begin to think about little wooden statues of Buddha or some other god. Yet, in the First Commandment, God is essentially telling us put him at the very center of our lives. He is the person our lives are to be built around.

With that backdrop in mind, we can establish a definition of sin. Sin is building your life around something other than God. It's putting something else besides God at the center of our lives. And all of us build our lives around things other than God. We take good things like careers, relationships, power, influence, acceptance, and we build our lives around them. In doing so, God gets pushed to the margins of our lives. Even worse, we use him like a genie in a bottle to get the thing we have built our lives around.

Or here is another way to define sin: sin is taking a good thing and making it a bad thing by making it our ultimate thing. Only God is ultimate - not work, not your spouse, not anyone or anything. Let me illustrate from the classic film Chariots of Fire how this happens (time stamp 1:37:26-1:38:43). In the film, you have the story of 2 runners. Harold Abrams is a Jewish boy who is trying to make it in high society in Britain. To win the gold medal in the 1924 Olympics will mean that he has made it, that

he has arrived into the top tier of British society, that he'll be somebody. So he runs for fame and fortune.

In many ways, we can all sympathize with his plight, because as a Jewish boy in Britain in the 1920s, he suffered extreme prejudice. There was a glass ceiling that would only let him rise so high, unless he could win the gold medal. In contrast, you have Eric Liddell, a Scottish missionary who runs because God made him fast and when he runs he feels God's pleasure. He doesn't run for fame. In fact, his life isn't about his fame, but about God's fame.

In the film, hours before Abrams is about to race, he is in the dressing room with his trainer and says, "And now in one hour's time, I will be out there again. I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor; four feet wide, with **ten lonely seconds to justify my existence**. But will I?" Abrams says that has 10 lonely seconds to justify his existence. He gets his sense of self, of who he is, from winning. Abrams has made a good thing (winning a gold medal) a bad thing by making it his ultimate thing. Or use our first definition, "He has built his life around winning a gold medal, not God. He's put the gold medal and everything that comes with it at the center of his life."

Eric Liddell, on the other hand, has built his life around God. He is every bit as talented and competitive; he loves to run and is passionate about doing so. Winning, while important, isn't ultimate--God is. As a result, when the event that he has trained for his whole life - the 100 meters - is scheduled for a Sunday, he pulls out because he won't run on Sunday. Do you see how loosely he holds this event? The 100 meter dash has gripping control on one runner and it has absolutely no control over the other. One runner has God at the center of his life and the other has success at the center of his life.

Let me give you another example, one more subtle - kids. Kids are a wonderful gift from God, but they aren't designed to be at the center of our

lives. Think about how the sin of putting them at the center of our lives affects the husband and wife. Slowly, over time, they grow apart. In a child-centered home parents stop dating one another because everything now revolves around Susie's soccer games and Victor's violin lessons. We're seduced by the nobility of "helping the kids be successful in life." It sounds good and virtuous. How could investing deeply in your kids so that they will be successful be sinful? Because, while sacrificing for them, we've put them (not God) at the center of our lives.

Parent after parent has fallen into this pitfall and marriage after marriage has fallen apart when the kids head off to college or enter the working world. This is why you see so many parents hold it in the road until the kids go to college and finally throw in the towel, "Enough is enough. I don't even know you anymore. The center of our lives has been pulled out and our marriage is over."

Parents aren't the only ones who suffer when kids are placed at the center. A sense of entitlement quickly settles in on the kids, giving birth to arrogant, spoiled children. Moreover, the kids feel the pressure from Mom and Dad to continue to give them life. "We invested all this money and time into you and now you should...."

So, my friends, when the Bible talks about sin, it means this: building your life around something other than God. Good things like children, careers, success, relationships, and just about anything can become bad things when they become our ultimate things. And the staggering claim that Jesus makes to the paralytic in our text is this, "I have the authority to forgive you of your sin." Jesus is saying, "I am not like you. I haven't built my life on anything else but God. Indeed, I am God, because, as the religious leaders have told you, only God has the ability to forgive sins."

Therein lies the key take-away from today. Mark and Jesus were both crystal clear on one thing: Jesus was and is God. He came to deal with

our sin problem and *we all have a sin problem!* The question we all must settle is this: is Jesus really God?

Discussion Questions:

1. List and describe the problems that you have had in your journey of relating to God.

2. Read Mark 2:1-12. One of the exhibits Mark presented for the divinity of Christ is that He has power and authority to forgive sins. Based on the lesson, define sin.

4. Describe one way that you have built your life around something other than God.

5. Read Mark 1:21-22. The first exhibit that Mark gives for the divinity of Christ is the way He taught. Discuss what qualifies someone to teach and then what was unique about the teaching of Jesus.

6. Exhibit B that Mark presents for the divinity of Christ is the power and authority that He has over sickness and death. List the examples of healing in chapters 1 & 2. How does this impact your thinking on the divinity of Christ?

7. Read Mark 4: 35-41. Exhibit C that Mark presents for the divinity of Christ is that He has power and authority over nature. Describe how that impacts how you view Jesus.