

Teaching programme



Epic Explorers is based on Mark's Gospel. The children will first consider **who Jesus is** (his *identity*) as they hear how he called his disciples, performed miracles, showed his authority and revealed himself to be the Son of God (Mark 1).

They will then learn about **why Jesus came** (his *mission*) as they explore the problem of sin and the offer of forgiveness (Mark 2).

Having heard the truth about the reality of judgment, his substitutionary death, and his resurrection (Mark 15 and 16), the final session, looking at Mark 8, will help the children understand **what it means to follow Jesus** (his *call*).

Session	Main aim	Teaching passage
1. Breathtaking Bay	Children will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know that Jesus has authority over everything. • Understand that Jesus is God's Son. 	Mark 1:1, 16-34
2. Discovery Dens	Children will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know that we don't treat God as we should, and that our biggest problem is our sin. • Understand that only Jesus has power to forgive sin and can rescue us. 	Mark 2:1-17
3. Mysterious Mountains	Children will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know that Jesus' death was planned. He took the punishment we deserve for our sin. • Understand that, through Jesus' death, there's now a way for us to be forgiven friends with God. 	Mark 15
4. Crown Cave	Children will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know that Jesus really did die and rise again. • Understand that, because Jesus has beaten death, we can know life in him. 	Mark 16:1-8
5. Rocky Road	Children will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know that Jesus is God's Son and came to rescue us. • Understand that following Jesus means putting him first, even when it's tough. 	Mark 8:27-35
Family event (at the end of the club/course)	Parents will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be introduced to who Jesus is, understand why he came on a rescue mission, and discover what it means to follow him. • Be encouraged to attend a <i>Christianity Explored</i> course for themselves. 	Summary of all five passages

OPTION A: TWO-AND-A-HALF-HOUR HOLIDAY CLUB OR VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL



Time	Activity	Leader	
<i>Tick when materials are ready for each activity</i>		✓	
Before event	Those running the discussion groups to prepare their material.		
One hour before	Team meeting for Bible thought (download from www.ceministries.org/epic), prayer and final instructions.		
15 minutes (doors open 5 minutes before the session)	Register children as they arrive. Map it out! A brief game to introduce the theme (see introductory activities, page 60*). This can be done EITHER from the front stage with all the children together, OR within the discussion groups they'll be in later. *Page nos. are for Session 1. All sessions have activities listed in the same order.		
50 minutes altogether	Expedition time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme song • Challenge (see Ideas Menu, page 64*) • Song • Memory verse (see Ideas Menu, page 62*) • Prayer (see Ideas Menu, page 63*) • Challenge (see Ideas Menu, page 64*) • Song • Bible talk (see pages 56-59*) • Quiz (see page 53*) • Theme Song 		
60-75 minutes (Allow time for moving children from one area to another)	Round and round. Split the children into age-groups and rotate them around the three activities – 20 minutes on each: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action adventures – games (see Ideas Menu, page 49) • Intrepid inventions – crafts (see Ideas Menu, pages 47 & 63*) • Discovery discussions – discussion groups (see Ideas Menu, pages 65-68*). Serve refreshments in this slot. 		
15 – 30 minutes	Explore all the more <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Song • Drama • 2nd part of the quiz or a family game** (adapt one of the challenges, page 64*) • Theme Song 		
Afterwards	Team time for debrief, prayer and preparation for next session.		

** If you're not doing a family game, then consider serving refreshments for parents in another part of the building and have team chatting with them.

OPTION B: ONE-HOUR THEMED SESSION, EG: ON A SUNDAY



Time	Activity	Leader	
<i>Tick when materials are ready for each activity</i>		✓	
Before event	Those running the discussion groups to have prepared their material.		
30 minutes before	Team meeting for Bible thought (download from www.ceministries.org/epic), prayer and final instructions.		
10 minutes	Register children and a brief game to introduce the theme (see Introductory activities, page 60*). <i>*Page nos. are for Session 1. All sessions have activities listed in the same order.</i>		
10 minutes	Bible talk (depending on the age range of the group, it may be more appropriate to use the talks pitched at a wider age range, see pages 56-59*).		
10 minutes	Discussion groups – keep the children in the same groups each week.		
10 minutes	Game to consolidate the teaching (select from the introductory activities and tweak the explanation).		
10 minutes	Themed craft, related to the Bible story (see the Ideas menu, page 63*).		
5 minutes	Memory verse (see Ideas Menu, page 62*).		
5 minutes	Prayer (see Ideas Menu, page 63*).		
Afterwards	Team time for debrief, prayer and preparation for next session.		

**OPTION C: 40-MINUTE SESSION,
EG: 8-11s IN A "COURSE" SETTING**



Time	Activity	Leader	
<i>Tick when materials are ready for each activity</i>		✓	
Before event	Those running the discussion groups to have prepared their material.		
30 minutes before	Team meeting for Bible thought (download from www.ceministries.org/epic), prayer and final instructions.		
10 minutes	Register children and a brief game to introduce the theme (see Introductory activities, page 60* – the activity in the Scratch Pad or Logbook would work well in this context). <i>*Page nos. are for Session 1. All sessions have activities listed in the same order.</i>		
10-15 minutes	Bible talk (see pages 56-59*).		
15-20 minutes	Discussion groups (see pages 65-68*) – keep the children in the same groups each week. Have snacks while chatting.		
Afterwards	Team time for debrief, prayer and preparation for next session.		

**OPTION D: 25-MINUTE SESSION,
EG: AS PART OF A MID-WEEK CLUB**

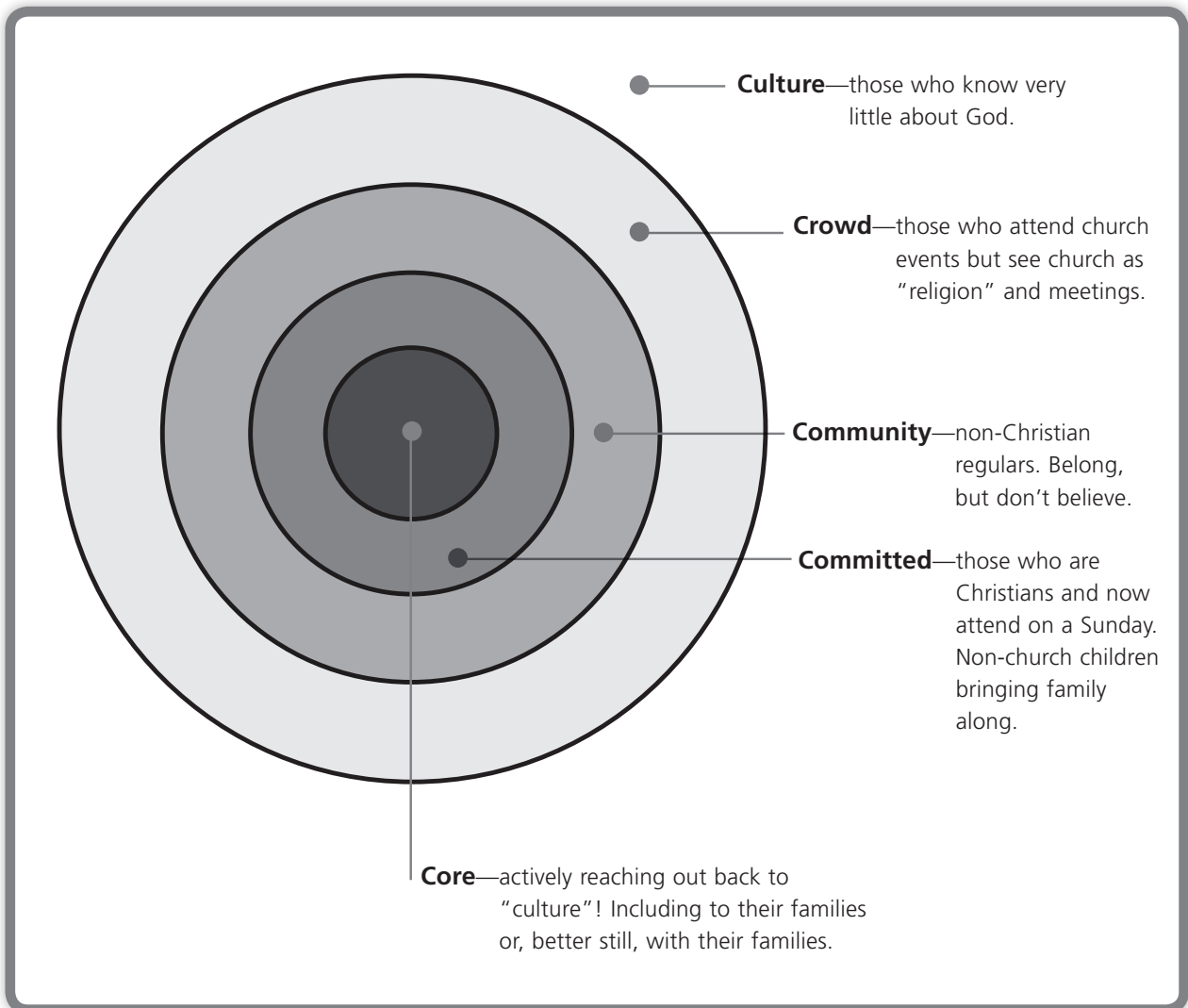


Time	Activity	Leader	
<i>Tick when materials are ready for each activity</i>		✓	
Before event	Those running the discussion groups to have prepared their material.		
One hour before	Team meeting for Bible thought (download from www.ceministries.org/epic), prayer and final instructions. Set up club.		
30 minutes (optional)	Club activities (eg: if your usual club lasts for an hour, start with these). Children arrive, register and join in the regular programmed activities.		
5 minutes	Brief game to introduce the theme (see Introductory activities, page 60*). <i>*Page nos. are for Session 1. All sessions have activities listed in the same order.</i>		
10 minutes	Bible talk – depending on the age range of the club, it may be more appropriate to use the talks pitched at a wider age range.		
10 minutes	Discussion groups (see pages 65-68*) – keep the children in the same groups each week.		
5-10 minutes	Notices and a short game to end.		
Afterwards	Team time for debrief, prayer and preparation for next session.		

Aims



It may be helpful to work through the concentric circles below to establish which your primary aims are and how you will be able to evaluate the event afterwards to see if they were met. The purpose of the circles is to show the different stages we go through in our evangelism and discipleship. It is useful to consider which main stage your event is targeted at and the next stage you are aiming for.



Join the Epic Explorers team



Name:

Email:


Phone:

What would you like to be involved in during <i>Epic Explorers</i> ?	Yes	No	Would you like training/help?
Setting up daily			
Making resources / props			
Leading up-front			
Registration			
Welcoming			
Collect sheets / points			
Sound			
PowerPoint operator			
Scorekeeper			
Timekeeper			
Photographer			
Teaching Bible memory verse			
Running a quiz			
Helping with a quiz			
Music group			
Drama group			
Running games for 4-7s			
Running games for 8-11s			
Helping with games for 4-7s			
Helping with games for 8-11s			
Planning and organising crafts			
Helping with crafts for 4-7s			
Helping with crafts for 8-11s			
Refreshments			
Parents' coffee time			
First-aider			
Cleaning			
Team refreshments			
Family event			
Prayer events / keeping church informed			

Any other comments:

Please return this form to:

Team training session one

 *Note: It is really important to meet with your team in the weeks leading up to Epic Explorers, to run through the aims, session format and content, provide basic training, and pray together.*

ON ARRIVAL

As people arrive, have refreshments available. If you are running *Epic Explorers* as a holiday club or vacation Bible school, you may want to have the theme song playing in the background (see page 150).

GETTING GOING

Welcome the team and have them introduce themselves. You may want to run a short ice-breaker if it's a team who don't know one another particularly well.

It would also be good to share a brief devotional thought, reminding the team of God's rescue plan.

AIMS OF EPIC EXPLORERS

Explain that the general aim of *Epic Explorers* is to share the good news of Jesus with children and families in the area. Then add your own specific aims.

Ask the team to chat in smaller groups about how they think these aims will affect the way you plan and prepare; the way you run *Epic Explorers*; and the way you follow up children and families afterwards. You may want to give them a copy of the concentric circle diagram on page 22 (downloadable from www.ceministries.org/epic). Use this to help your team identify who you are mainly seeking to reach and where you hope, with God's grace, they will be at the end of the sessions. It would also be good to discuss how *Epic Explorers* fits into the bigger picture of church/organisation ministry and evangelism.

Discussing the aims will help give the team unity and ownership, as well as clarity.

TEACHING OVERVIEW: IDENTITY, MISSION AND CALL IN MARK'S GOSPEL

Give out a copy of the teaching programme timetable on page 9 (downloadable from www.ceministries.org/epic).

Explain that *Epic Explorers* has five teaching sessions based on Mark's Gospel. During these sessions the children will explore three major themes of Mark:

- **Who Jesus is** (*his identity*)
- **Why Jesus came** (*his mission*)
- **What it means to follow him** (*his call*)

These three themes are woven through every chapter of the book, although the first half of Mark (Mark 1:1 – 8:30) is largely concerned with the question of Jesus' *identity*; and the second half with his *mission*.

The first half of Mark is bookended with statements on who Jesus is. It begins with: "*The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God*" (Mark 1:1) and ends with Peter's declaration: "*You are the Messiah*" (Mark 8:29). In-between these bookends are accounts of Jesus' authority in his teaching and his miracles, which reveal his *identity*. During *Epic Explorers*, the children will look at two such accounts in Mark 1 and 2, and they will begin to gather evidence proving Jesus is God's Son. Mark 2 will also raise the question of why Jesus came, as our sin problem and need for forgiveness is highlighted.

The cross dominates **the second half of Mark's Gospel**. Three times, Jesus predicts his death and resurrection, and from Mark 11 onwards, the anticipation is mounting as Jesus enters Jerusalem. In these chapters, the reader is helped to see more clearly the purpose of Jesus' rescue *mission*: he had to suffer, die and rise again so that we could be forgiven by God and reconciled with him forever. The *Epic Explorers* will discover this as they look at Mark 15 and 16 in sessions 3 and 4.

The passage containing the turning point in the Gospel (Mark 8:27-38) has all three themes of *identity*, *mission* and *call* in quick succession. This passage will be used for the final session to summarise *who Jesus is* and *why he came*, before considering *what it means to follow him*.

Give your team time to look over the timetable and ask any questions they have regarding the teaching content.

CORE COMPONENTS

Run through the core components of the course with your team:

Introductory activities

These are designed to tie in with the theme of session. It is important that they don't dominate or take up too much time, but rather are integrated into everything else in the session. Everyone (leaders included) should join in.

Leaders may also need reminding to explain afterwards the link between the activity and the rest of the session, as children won't automatically join up the dots.

Teaching

The talk will be around 10 minutes. It should be clearly and visually presented. Remind team members that they need to be listening attentively and encouraging the children to do the same.

Discussion groups

These provide an opportunity to consider the Bible passage further with the children, using the *Epic Logbook* (8-11s) and *Scratch Pad* (4-7s). There are leaders' notes to help generate the conversation and assist with explanations. Leaders should aim to speak less than the children, and should encourage the children to ask questions. More training will be giving on leading these groups next time.

THE FORMAT AND TIMINGS FOR YOUR EPIC EXPLORERS

Use the appropriate outline (pages 13-19) to show your team how your *Epic Explorers* programme will fit together, including a family event if you're having one. You may also want to explain the exploration theme a little if you are running a holiday club or vacation Bible school.

QUESTIONS

Give opportunity for your team to ask questions about the core components and other elements of the programme.

SET PREPARATION FOR NEXT TIME

Ask everyone to read through Mark's Gospel three or four times (each read-through will probably take about an hour) before the next training session. Encourage them to pick out the *identity*, *mission* and *call* themes.

PRAYER

Spend some time praying in groups for one another, that you will:

- Prepare well and be dependent upon God.
- Work well together and show that you are Jesus' disciples by your love for one another.
- Teach and lead faithfully.

Pray too that:

- Children will come along and the Holy Spirit will open their eyes.
- The practicalities will come together well.

Team training session two

ON ARRIVAL

As people arrive, have refreshments available. If you are running *Epic Explorers* as a holiday club or vacation Bible school, you may want to have the theme song playing in the background (see page 150).

GETTING GOING

Welcome back the team. You may want to run another short ice-breaker if it's a team who don't know one another particularly well.

It would also be good to share a brief devotional thought from Mark's Gospel or ask them what things struck them as they read through Mark.

DISCUSSION GROUPS

Why have discussion groups?

- They reinforce the teaching. Questions are asked more easily and things explored more deeply. They can help with application and give children the opportunity to respond.
- They are relational. Consistent discussion groups encourage deeper trust levels and, with everyone involved, children are more likely to be open and honest. Discussion groups also give leaders a chance to share from their own life, and understand the joys and struggles of those in their care.
- They are also an opportunity to train and learn from one another.

The setting

- Check how much time you have and plan what you have to do in that time.
- Remove distractions beforehand.
- Sit in a circle and make sure everyone is comfortable.

- Sit troublesome children either opposite you so that you can see what is going on, or next to you.
- You should sit facing anything that is distracting (such as other groups) so that the children have their backs to it.
- Use eye contact and body language to help you engage the children.

Introduction

- Remember children's names and what they say. React and interact (even jot it down so you can use it in examples in other sessions or to chat to them further).
- If there's time, have a brief opening item that will relax people, eg: joke; light-hearted question (eg: describe favourite ice-cream); game (eg: give 2 truths, 1 lie – can they spot which is the lie?); introduce the person next to you. This will loosen tongues and encourage the children to relax.

ASKING QUESTIONS

Run through the chart on the next page. Then, in twos or threes, ask the leaders to pick out something they struggle with regards to discussion groups and chat about things that may help (if time, pray about this together).

Running discussion groups

DOs	DON'Ts
Do prepare and pray (for individuals as well as the Bible study).	Don't be afraid to ask for help
Do ask questions that deal with feelings as well as facts eg: "How do you feel?"	Don't ask yes / no questions. Rather, encourage discussions.
Do encourage honesty always – including by example, sharing your own life.	Don't dismiss any contributions. Praise people for their contribution even if it isn't quite what you were looking for.
Do be a good listener <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reflect</i>: "It sounds like...", "You mean...", "So you want to..." • <i>Reaffirm</i>: "That's pretty important to you", "That must be difficult for you" • <i>Request</i>: "Tell me a bit more about that", "So what happened then?", "How did you feel?" 	Don't do all the talking. If a child asks you a question, first ask them what they understand before you answer. Encourage others in the group to answer.
Do ask questions that are relevant and at the right level.	Don't assume knowledge and don't use lots of Christian jargon.
Do follow up responses with more questions, and encourage others in the group to do the same. Be willing to challenge if appropriate.	Don't feel you have to answer everything.
Do be flexible eg: if it's a quiet group, then you could break it down into paired discussions and then ask the pairs to feed back.	Don't be afraid of silence – rather interpret it. Is the question too simple? Can you break down into smaller questions? Have you asked too many questions? Are they thinking or are they bored?
Do use illustrations eg: own life example, scenarios, quotes, pictures.	Don't forget there are different learning styles so be creative eg: application sketch, what happens next..., quiz, write a rap or chant or song, draw a picture, listen to music, film clip (but make sure you are supporting and teaching your main aim).

COPING WITH DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES

Within the discussion groups there will be a number of different personalities. Run through the characters below and briefly comment on the top tips for how best to handle them. Ask people to add further suggestions as you do so.

■ Chatterbox Charlie

Very talkative and dominates discussions.

- Sit next to "Charlie" to reduce eye contact.
- Ask: "What does someone else think?"
- Ask "Charlie" to summarize the discussions, so that he has to listen to the others' contributions.
- Talk to him privately about the problem.
- If you have lots of "Chatterbox Charlies", then have an item that group members must hold, or cards they must hand in, before they can speak.

■ Debater Dani

Always presents opposition, and challenges every point.

- It can be intimidating for others but at the same time can help produce a "proper" discussion – so aim to direct "Dani" rather than shut her up!
- Ask for other suggestions.
- Break into pairs so that everyone has the chance to express a viewpoint.
- Set a group rule that it's ok to disagree but you can't talk over each other and can't put down those with different ideas.
- Make sure you stick to main point – have a question time towards the end of *Epic Explorers*.

■ Voiceless Vic

Quieter and rarely contributes.

- Try to get to know "Vic". His silence could be because he is shy or because he doesn't want to be there or because he doesn't understand. Equally, he may be a heavily "auditory" learner, and will learn without having to contribute.
- Give "Vic" chances by asking: "Does anyone want to add anything?" Direct questions sometimes help.

- Sit opposite "Vic" to maximise eye contact.
- Take time to chat outside the discussion group and learn interests, so you can "pitch" questions and illustrations that interest him.
- Personal encouragement can make all the difference – both outside of group time and in thanking him for contributions.

■ Crisis Christine

Wants attention and for everyone to know what they are dealing with all the time.

- "Christine" only really contributes to talk about herself or make negative contributions, rather than actually responding to other's answers – so chat to her beforehand to hear her "crisis" or say we'll pray for one another at the end.
- Help "Christine" see that the group is there to help others, not just herself.
- If there is a genuine crisis, then be willing to chat about it there/aside and to ditch what was planned.

■ Distracter Dom

Constantly fidgeting and prone to sidetracking.

- If "Dom" is a fidget, persistently stifling him will only prove negative, so try to direct his energies eg: being the scribe, holding something up...
- If it's a "red herring" he is distracting with, say: "Can we follow that one up later? What about the question we were asking?"
- If "Dom" tells a joke, join in but then bring the group back to the discussion. With misplaced humour, ignore the comments and move the discussion on.
- Try to do some active learning with the group, so you're not just talking every week. At least they'll stop you settling for boring Bible studies!

■ Churchy Casey

Knows all the answers instantly.

- Remember that "Casey's" knowledge may not indicate spiritual depth and that "church kids" can be the hardest to reach. Conversely, there will be some who are committed believers and will give the "right" answer because it is true for them.

- Don't settle for pat answers – either ask why, or give the opposite answer to get "Casey" to think through her opinions.
- Ask "Casey" to help you with questions so that she engages with the text.
- Scenarios can help the children think through how they usually react and how they can relevantly apply the passage.

Now split your leaders into groups of four or five and ask them to complete the group exercise below, referring back to the top tips. They could also use the DOs and DON'Ts table on page 38 to help them.

The group exercise can also be downloaded from www.ceministries.org/epic

Group exercise

You have a small group to run. There are six young people in your group:

- one is a non-church child who is totally disinterested.
- one is a non-church child who is showing real interest and is asking questions.
- one is a church child who does not volunteer to contribute to the discussion.
- one is a child from a church family who fidgets constantly and has already destroyed his pen.
- one knows all the answers and replies before anyone else has a chance to speak.
- one talks loudly over everyone else about irrelevant stuff, and seems particularly interested in drawing the attention of the children in the next group.



What do you do with your group?

Think about:

- Who do you think is the key person to deal with? How?
- What is your tactic for dealing with those who aren't engaging? How about those who are engaging too much?
- How do you try to get some balance so that everyone has a chance to engage?
- How could you make sure you are prepared for the same group again in the next session?

USING THE BOOKLETS

Spend some time looking over the *Epic Logbook* (8-11s) and *Scratch Pad* (4-7s), considering how best you will use them to assist discussions.

SET PREPARATION FOR NEXT TIME

Ask everyone to prepare the discussion group material for session one.

PRAYER

Have people pray with those they are leading discussion groups with. Pray that you will:

- Plan your discussion times prayerfully and carefully.
- Spur one another on.
- Have great wisdom, patience, kindness and enthusiasm.

Pray too that:

- Children will come along and the Holy Spirit will open their eyes.
- The practicalities will come together well.

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Further training



☛ *If you are running an Epic Explorers holiday club or vacation Bible school, you may want to run an additional training session, which includes the following.*

THE LEGAL STUFF

Talk through the guidelines for child protection (summarize your church/organisation policy), health and safety and emergency procedures.

DIFFERENT TEAM ROLES

Explain the different roles within the team, and some basic principles for running games, teaching the memory verse and asking quiz questions.

If you have different teams eg: crafts team or a band, give them opportunity to talk together or ask the co-ordinators of these groups to pass on any information needed.

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

Good discipline creates a truly relaxed, enjoyable and reverent environment within which we can practically communicate the message of the gospel, both through our own Christ-like actions and through the material we teach. Good relationships and clear expectations are at the heart of loving, effective discipline.

It may be useful to have a signal or set phrase with accompanying action, that your team members can use when you want the children to stop what they are doing and be silent.

In addition, a step-by-step approach to behaviour management can help, both when the children are altogether and in smaller activity groups. For example:

1. Watch for the children that wind others up and intervene before there is a problem. Make intervention precise and clear, eg: "spread out and look out"—sitting among a group or separating certain groups of children.

2. Try to use implicit cues (ie: body language and eye contact) first. Always consider how, why and when you need to draw attention to misbehaviour.

3. Speak to individuals discreetly. Be quiet, firm, precise and brief. Explain why they have not reached your expectations.

4. If the child alters their behaviour for the better, respond positively. If they do not, **offer the child a choice of improving their behaviour or taking time out.** Avoid threats you cannot carry out.

5. If time out is taken, child to be seated for five minutes in lobby, with the worker (ideally, out of sight of the other children, but make sure you can be seen by at least one other team member).

While there **hold a brief discussion as to what is at the heart of the problem**, ie: get beyond the behaviour. Use this to teach about repentance, eg: "If you come back and say sorry, then all will be forgiven and forgotten. We love you but your behaviour is unacceptable". Tailor your reprimand to the individual and occasion. **Note the date, child's name and behaviour in the incident book** (kept with the registration material).

6. If a child has time out twice in the event, their parents should be contacted.

☛ *Note: Remember to adapt to those with special needs eg: educational, behavioural or medical needs.*

The book/phone illustration

This illustration can be helpful when explaining what happened when Jesus was dying on the cross.

What to do

Hold up a book (not the Bible) or a mobile/cell phone in your right hand.



What to say

Imagine that someone has written about your life in this book (or filmed your life on this mobile/cell phone) – but they've just chosen the bad stuff. Every time you've told a lie. Each time you let a friend down or were rude to your mum or dad. All the times you laughed at someone behind their back or took something that wasn't yours.

So this is a record of your sin – every time you have said, thought or done things that are wrong.

Hold your left hand out, with your palm facing the ceiling.



Imagine that this hand is me, and that the ceiling is where God is.

Take the book/phone and put it flat on your hand.



This book/phone shows all the wrong stuff I've ever done – it shows my sin.

Ask: "But when I put it here (*on your hand*), what does it do?" (It gets in the way between me and God.)

It stops me from knowing God and living as his friend. That's why sin is such a problem – it separates us from God.

Hold out your right hand, facing up. Your left hand should still have the book/phone.



Imagine that this hand is Jesus. He was perfect. He never did anything wrong – he never sinned. That means that there was nothing at all between Jesus and his Father, God. They had a perfect, loving relationship.

But when Jesus was dying on the cross, this is what happened:

Now transfer the book/phone from the left hand to the right hand.



Ask: "What is there between Jesus and God?" (The book/phone that lists all your sin.)

This is why Jesus died – it was to take the punishment for all our sin.

Refer to your left hand, now empty, still facing upwards.



But look back at my other hand for a moment.

Ask: "What is there between me and God?" (Nothing!)

When Jesus died on the cross, he took the punishment for our sins so that we can be forgiven. This means that there is nothing to separate us from God anymore. This was God's rescue plan for us!

Team Devotions



SESSION 1: BREATHTAKING BAY

READ TOGETHER:

Mark 1:16-34

STUDY TOGETHER:

Split the team into fours or fives. Ask them to discuss:

- How do we see that Jesus is “the Messiah, the Son of God” in these verses?
- The fishermen immediately left everything to follow Jesus. How did you first begin to follow Jesus? What kind of things have you “left”? (Wouldn’t it be great if we could share our testimonies with the children during *Epic Explorers*?)
- People were amazed by Jesus’ authority (v 22, 27). Share with your group one thing that amazes you about Jesus and one thing that stops you from being amazed by Jesus.

CONSIDER TOGETHER:

Who’s the one person in all of history you’d like to spend a day with? As we read v 21-34, we had a snapshot of what it would be like to spend a day with the Son of God. On this particular day, he’s spent time teaching in the synagogue, healed the man with an impure spirit and restored Peter’s mother-in-law, along with many, many others who were demon-possessed and diseased (v 31-34).

His activity shows who Jesus is.

He is our mighty king – the one who is so different to anyone else; the one who has power in his words and his actions; the one who has authority over everything; the one who reigns over all. Isn’t it great to have a foretaste of what is to come when God’s kingdom fully arrives? Jesus will put an end to sickness and evil once and for all as he restores creation. What a sure and certain hope we have! Let’s pray that today we will once again be amazed by our mighty king, and that we will be those who obey his call, depend on his power and trust in his ways.

We also see that Jesus is our servant king. Imagine how draining the day must have been. You may think a session in holiday club is exhausting – but here’s Jesus surrounded by people 24/7, meeting their individual needs, pouring out his energy and emotion, the one who “did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45). Let’s pray that we would be those who follow his example today – that as Jesus meets our every need, so we would be a team who show compassion, who go the extra mile, who are looking to share each other’s loads.

But as we draw to the end of this exhausting day, there’s one more thing to note and that’s in v 35-38.

Read Mark 1:35-38

Jesus doesn’t demand a lie-in the next day, nor does he bask in the admiration of the crowds. Rather, he demonstrates to us his real priorities – he withdraws to pray with his Heavenly Father and then he declares the good news. Jesus is our mighty king, our servant king and our prayerful king. He still intercedes for us today (Romans 8:34, Hebrews 7:25). Let’s pray we also follow this example – that in our busyness, we won’t neglect spending time praying with our Heavenly Father. Let’s pray that we will be those who love to come before his throne of grace and be those who are passionate about sharing his good news.

PRAY TOGETHER:

- Praise God that he is still calling people into his kingdom and for the work he's done in your life.
- Pray for one another, that you would be Christ-like examples to those in your care.
- Pray for the children to see who Jesus is.

SESSION 2: DISCOVERY DENS

READ TOGETHER:

Mark 2:1-12

STUDY TOGETHER:

- What do you think it was like being a paralytic in Bible times? So how do you think he felt when Jesus announced: "Your sins are forgiven"?
- What evidence does Jesus give in these verses to prove he is God?
- What would it look like for our top priority to be the forgiveness of sin? How can we help the children see it as a priority?

CONSIDER TOGETHER:

Can you imagine being an eyewitness to this miracle? There you are, squashed into the house, listening to Jesus' every word, when the banging starts and then clay dust begins to fall from the ceiling. What would you have been thinking as you cough and splutter, brushing plaster from your hair, and watching a hole slowly form in the ceiling above your head? Would you be staggered by the friends' faith? What would you expect as a man is lowered down on a mat and lands before Jesus' feet? Would you have gasped as Jesus uttered the words: "Your sins are forgiven"?

Why were these Jesus' first words? Today we're going to be thinking about the fact that all of us sin. None of us treat God as we should; none of us meet his standards (Romans 3:23). We know that our sin problem has eternal consequences (Romans 6:23) and that only Jesus can rescue us; only he can meet our greatest need. I wonder though, do we mourn our sin and see the seriousness of it? Do we rejoice in the fact we have been cleansed, healed, restored, forgiven? Let's pray that we would grasp this more, and pray also that nothing in our lives would be a barrier to those we work with this week.

Jesus' words certainly caused a stir amongst the religious leaders present. They knew that only God could forgive sins – so Jesus was claiming to be God and they weren't impressed. If he had healed the man straight away, they might not have minded, but they were definitely offended by his authority. How similarly people respond to Jesus today. They quite like the fact he did "nice, kind things" but quickly switch off when they think of sin and judgment. Let's be praying that the children will see who Jesus is and why they need their sins forgiven.

Now maybe if you were in the room, you would be able to see from the body language of the religious leaders that they were not very happy. But Jesus knew for definite exactly what they were thinking. He is the one who knows all things; the one who perceives our thoughts from afar (Psalm 139:1-2). He knows our every thought and action, our motivations, our personal intricacies. How incredible is that! He knows ALL about us, and cares for us completely. Surely it ought to encourage us and spur us on with confidence, to all that lies ahead in *Epic Explorers* and beyond.

Jesus didn't enter into debate with the leaders. Instead, you watch him prove he can forgive sins – that he really does have the kind of authority – as he tells the man to get off the mat and walk. Can you imagine your amazement, as you have to squash up all the more, so the man can squeeze past with his mat to leave the building? What would you have said? What would you have done? Would you have high-fived the person next to you? Would you have stood there in stunned silence? Would you want to praise God, having never seen anything like it before? Well, let's praise God now for his Son Jesus, the friend of sinners:

*Jesus, friend of sinners
Loved me 'ere I knew him
Drew me with his cords of love
Tightly bound me to him
'Round my heart still closely twined
The ties that none can sever
For I am his and he is mine
Forever and forever*

PRAY TOGETHER:

- Praise God that he loved us before we knew him; that he has drawn us to himself; that he knows our every need; and we can know the joy of our sins forgiven.
- Pray for one another, that you will be those who see your sin and help others see their sin.
- Pray that the children will be those who understand how serious the problem of sin is and why they need Jesus to rescue them.

SESSION 3: MYSTERIOUS MOUNTAINS

READ TOGETHER:

Mark 15:25-39

STUDY TOGETHER:

- Which aspects of the crucifixion prove once and for all that Jesus is God's Son, the Messiah? What does this tell us about God's sovereign plan and purpose?
- What are the implications of realising that Jesus is your King? (See Colossians 2:13-15.)
- How does this passage challenge you?

CONSIDER TOGETHER:

In many ways, today is the climax of the week, as we consider how Jesus deals with the problem of our sin. It should be something we never tire of thinking about, never tire of talking about, and never tire of rejoicing in. For what we see is the whole of God's salvation plan fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and his glorious character displayed.

As Jesus is crucified, as the Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled, he reveals his incomparable authority and love. Grace and mercy are poured out in abundance as Jesus chooses not to use his power to save himself, not to call down legions of angels, but rather remain on the cross to save others.

And then, as the world plunges into darkness, we see God's omnipresence in being in heaven and pouring his wrath upon his Son, while being on earth enduring his own wrath in the person of his Son. Moreover,

we see God's wisdom, holiness and justice at work, as the greatest exchange ever takes place: Jesus, the perfect Son of God, takes our guilt, and therefore our punishment, and offers us his right relationship with God. Despite learning in our last session that we're all fallen, selfish people, deserving judgment – Romans 8:1 tells us that, because of the cross, we're declared not guilty. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The cry of "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" seems so hopeless, doesn't it. And yet we know that there is a message of hope in those words. The abandonment is not final. In Psalm 22, where these words come from, it moves from despair to exalting God and says: "*I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you*" (v 22). And we can share that same sentiment, for on the cross we see God's kindness and power as the price is paid and our sin is dealt with. The temple curtain tearing reminds us that now, through Jesus, every human being can approach God. Jesus makes forgiveness and reconciliation possible.

It's no wonder Paul said: "I resolved to know nothing ... except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). There really is nothing else to preach or glory in! How can we fail to stop now and give thanks? So, let's spend some time in reflecting all that Christ revealed and accomplished on the cross. And how we must plead that the Lord will enable the children to grasp something of this message – that they can become friends with God, that they can be forgiven by him, that they can live and rule with him forever.

PRAY TOGETHER:

- Praise God that Jesus did not spare himself, but took our punishment and died in our place. Praise God that through Jesus you can know forgiveness and friendship with him.
- Pray for one another, that you will be those who delight in the cross and live lives shaped by the cross.
- Pray that the children will grasp what it means that Jesus paid the price for them.

SESSION 4: CROWN CAVE

READ TOGETHER:

Mark 16:1-8

STUDY TOGETHER:

- What eyewitness evidence is there for the resurrection?
- How do you feel when you recognise you've failed God? Why is verse 7 so fantastic?
- Why does Jesus' resurrection mean that following Jesus is worth it?

CONSIDER TOGETHER:

So how does Jesus' resurrection show us that he is worth following? From the angel's message in v 6-7 there are at least three reasons.

1. He is unlimited in power

We see more of Jesus' power displayed as he comes back to life, proving he is God, proving he's the one who rules over everything. After telling the women not to be afraid, the angel tells them that, although Jesus had been dead and buried, he is now alive and risen. Jesus is absolutely victorious: nothing can defeat him, death is not the end for him. And because death is not the end for Jesus, it is not the end for us too.

Because he has been raised, we too can know his resurrection power. Shouldn't that excite us and make us want to celebrate?! Shouldn't it show us that Jesus, the Son of God, is worth following? Through his power, we can have eternal life.

2. He is forgiving and kind

The angel's message at the resurrection not only shows us Jesus' power, but also his kindness. Listen to verse 7: "But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

The disciples had failed Jesus: they had turned against him, denied him and deserted him. Peter had disowned him three times. And yet the angel asks the women to pass the good news of the resurrection on to the disciples, even Peter. And not only does Jesus meet with them but he also offers forgiveness to them. There is restoration and transformation. Through Jesus' resurrection we also can know hope in our failures, we can know forgiveness and reconciliation because his payment for our sin was accepted. In a minute, we are going to thank our gracious God for his kindness beyond measure.

3. He is faithful to his promises

Jesus' resurrection shows us he is worth following not only because of the power it displays and the kindness on offer, but also because in the resurrection, we see once again that Jesus is faithful to his promises. Jesus had promised three times in Mark (8 v 31, 9 v 31, 10 v 33) that he would die and rise again on the third day – and he had. Not only that, he had already promised his disciples that he would meet them after his resurrection in Galilee (Mark 14:28), which is why the angel tells the women to pass on the message. Through the other Gospels and the letters in the New Testament, we know that they do indeed meet with him there. The resurrection shows us once again that Jesus' word can be trusted. Let's pray then that those attending *Epic Explorers* will trust his word – that they will be those who confess that he is Lord and believe God raised him from the dead; that they will be those who are saved (Romans 10:9).

PRAY TOGETHER:

- Praise God that: "Death is crushed to death, life is mine to live, won through your selfless love".
- Pray for one another, that you will be those who savour the sweetness of his forgiveness; those who trust in his word; those who pass on the good news and those who have eyes to see how his power is at work.
- Pray that the children will see that the risen Christ is our powerful, kind and faithful King who reigns on high.

SESSION 5: ROCKY ROAD

READ TOGETHER:

Mark 8:27-38

STUDY TOGETHER:

- Why does Jesus ask for the disciples' thoughts about his identity, instead of just telling them who he is? What do you think Peter had based his answer on?
- What does it mean to deny self and carry the cross? How does that link to what Jesus said about his own suffering?
- How do you feel about the fact that following Jesus may cost you your comfort, your reputation, even your life itself?

CONSIDER TOGETHER:

What is life all about? In today's passage we learn that, according to Jesus, it's about self-denial and suffering. That may not seem too compelling at first, which is why we need to begin by reminding ourselves who Jesus is.

In verse 29, we saw how Peter grasped that Jesus is more than a teacher, more than a miracle worker, more than a prophet. Jesus is the Christ, God's promised rescuing King. And yet, although Peter understands that Jesus is the Christ, he doesn't really understand what that means, which is why he responds so strongly when Jesus began to speak of his suffering. It didn't fit with Peter's view of a king. I wonder when are you like Peter? When do you pick out the bits of Jesus' teaching you like, and ignore the bits you don't? Is it when it gets costly? Let's pray that we will have eyes that see Jesus as King and hearts that submit to his ways and his rule.

Let's pray too that we will be those who remember why Jesus suffered and died (v 31) – that he acted out of love despite the fact we rebel against him. As Isaiah put it 700 years before Jesus came:

"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ... it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer" (Isaiah 53:5-6, 10).

For once we have grasped the wonder of his undeserved love in the cross, then we will see why we must follow, denying self and taking up the cross. For where our Saviour leads so we must follow. He has given all for us, why would we not want to give all for him?

And yet the reality is, I often fail to deny myself and make Jesus the most important, I often want to live my way, not God's way, I often look for earthly rewards – albeit in people's affirmation or success in work. But "what good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."

So let's pray that we and the children will remember that Jesus' suffering and death gave way to victory and glory – that through him we can know his enabling and an eternal reward. Let's be those who "fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12 v 2-3).

PRAY TOGETHER:

- Praise God that Jesus was willing to suffer and die for us.
- Pray for one another, for strength to follow him wherever he may lead us, whatever the cost.
- Pray that the children will fully understand who Jesus is, why he came and why he is worth following as Saviour and Lord.

Questions from Mark's Gospel

These notes are here for your interest as leaders, mainly to help you as you do your own preparation in Mark's Gospel. We suggest that you read them prior to running the course, so that, if questions do come up, you are able to answer them simply and clearly.

Epic Explorers has been purposefully written from selected parts of Mark's Gospel, aiming to keep things simple. It is unlikely that questions like those below will be asked by children during the course.

MARK 1:2-3

What are these strange quotes at the start?

Mark quotes from the Jewish Bible (what we call the Old Testament) – Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3 (written 700 years before Jesus was born). They are quotes from passages that promise a messenger who will announce the arrival of a rescuer King – the Christ or Messiah, who will save God's people from judgment. The promise of a messenger is clearly fulfilled by John the Baptist in Mark 1:4-8. Even his clothing (Mark 1:6) was like that of an Old Testament prophet, in particular Elijah (2 Kings 1:8).

MARK 1:13

What are angels?

The word literally means "messenger". They are spiritual beings in the service of God, who particularly are sent to deliver messages. An angel delivers the wonderful message of the resurrection in Mark 16:5-6. He is described as looking like a young man dressed in a white robe. No mention of wings!

MARK 1:23-27

What are evil spirits and demons?

The Bible says that there is an unseen spiritual world, which includes angels and evil spirits. According to the Bible, Satan, or the devil, is a fallen angel who is in rebellion against God and

hostile to God's people. Demons are part of that fallen spiritual world, and serve Satan. Although Satan and his demons are powerful, the New Testament shows that Jesus has overcome Satan by the power of his death on the cross (see Colossians 2:15).

Note: If this topic comes up, deal with it briefly but don't allow it to dominate the session – some people are fascinated by "the dark side" and want to talk about it for hours. And make sure you explain to them that Christians have nothing to fear from the devil – Jesus has defeated him.

MARK 1:34; 7:36

Why did Jesus tell the people he healed not to tell anyone?

No one has ever healed people as Jesus did. It was instantaneous, spectacular and complete. People didn't just "start to feel a bit better". They were completely better immediately. Not surprisingly Jesus drew huge crowds who wanted to see these amazing miracles, but who seemed less interested in his teaching. Jesus did not want people coming just to see signs and wonders. He rejected such people (Mark 8:11-13). In Mark 1:45 it becomes clear that he has to leave the crowds in order to teach. He probably told people not to tell anyone so that the crowds would not become a problem.

MARK 2:10

Why did Jesus call himself the Son of Man?

"Son of man" is a Jewish term meaning simply "a man". But "Son of Man" is also a well-known title used in the Old Testament for the Messiah – God's promised King. See Daniel 7:13-14. The religious leaders would have understood that when Jesus used the title "Son of Man", it was a claim to be the Messiah.

MARK 2:16

What is a Pharisee?

This group of strict Jews did not just obey the Old Testament but held to many strict traditions. They were seen as some of the most holy men in Israel. But Jesus called them “hypocrites”, which literally means “play-actors”, because of the way they showed off their religion and self-righteousness. He strongly condemns them in passages such as Mark 7:6-9.

MARK 2:19

Who is the “bridegroom”?

Jesus is making the point that, for the disciples, fasting (going without food) is totally inappropriate when he’s with them, just as it would be for wedding guests to be miserable at a wedding. Jesus is saying he is the bridegroom of God’s people. This is another claim to be the Messiah promised in the Old Testament (Isaiah 54:5; 62:4-5; Hosea 2:16-20).

MARK 2:21-22

What is the new cloth/old coat, new wine/old skins story about?

People complained that Jesus was not following the religious rules of his day (Mark 2:18). Jesus says that the faith he has come to bring is not about rules at all. Jesus cannot be “fitted into” their “religion of rules”. He came to bring a living friendship with God, not rules. Jesus brings grace, love and peace – not religious rules.

MARK 2:23

What is the Sabbath?

The Sabbath was the special day of rest when no work was done. The Sabbath was an opportunity for God’s people to remember God’s creation and how he rescued them from Egypt.

MARK 3:6

Who are the Herodians?

These were supporters of Herod Antipas, the king of Judea, who depended on the controlling Roman Empire for his power. They would have seen Jesus as a threat to Herod’s rule.

MARK 3:13-19

Why did Jesus choose twelve apostles?

Jesus calls the twelve apostles on a mountain-side. In the Old Testament God shows himself to his people on mountains (eg: Genesis 8; Exodus 19; and 1 Kings 18). There were twelve tribes of Israel – God’s people in the Old Testament. Jesus is making the point that God is calling a new group of people to follow him.

MARK 3:22

What does it mean to be possessed by Beelzebul?

Beelzebul is another name for the devil. Note that the religious authorities don’t question whether Jesus is powerful or whether the miracles happen. They simply ask where his power comes from. They say that Jesus is possessed by the devil and is driving out demons. Jesus replies that their claim is foolish – after all, if the “prince of demons” really was driving out other demons, then he would be fighting against himself.

MARK 3:29

What is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that will never be forgiven?

The religious leaders have seen Jesus perform wonderful miracles, and have heard his astonishing teaching. Now they claim that the work of the Holy Spirit is actually the work of the devil. Jesus’ warning has nothing to do with swearing at the Holy Spirit – in simple terms, it means rejecting the only way of forgiveness that God has provided. Of course, this sin is only unforgivable for as long as a person goes on committing it. Many of the same religious leaders changed their minds about Jesus later, and so were forgiven (Acts 6:7). This is vital to understand. There can be no forgiveness if we reject Jesus.

MARK 4:2

Why did Jesus teach in parables?

Jesus told these memorable stories to teach spiritual truths. Parables have a clear surface meaning, but also a deeper meaning (often just one main point), which Jesus explains to those who will listen (Mark 4:1-34). There is a spiritual principle here: "To everyone who has, more will be given" (Luke 19:26). The disciples are intrigued by the parables and draw nearer to Jesus to hear the explanation. But, to the crowd, the parables are just curious stories. They hear, but do not understand (Mark 4:12). All people are like moths or bats reacting to light. They are either attracted to Jesus' teaching, or repelled by it.

MARK 4:40

Why does Jesus say: "Do you still have no faith?"

Despite all the evidence they've seen, the disciples still don't have faith in Jesus (note: to "have faith" in someone means to trust him or her). The disciples express terror rather than trust both before and after Jesus acts. Interestingly, just before this miracle, Jesus has told three parables making the point that God's word is powerful. He then calms the storm with a word. The disciples should have drawn the obvious conclusion.

MARK 6:3

Did Jesus have brothers and sisters?

These were the natural children of Joseph and Mary, conceived after the birth of Jesus. See also Mark 3:32. This answers the question as to whether Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus. In addition, Matthew 1:25 certainly implies that Joseph and Mary had a normal sexual relationship after Jesus was born.

MARK 6:7-11

Why did Jesus send out the twelve disciples?

Jesus sends out the twelve disciples, telling them to expect some to accept and some to reject their message. They are to reject those who, by refusing to listen, reject them. The reference to shaking off dust refers to what Jews did on returning to Israel from Gentile countries, which they viewed as "unclean". For the disciples to do it in a Jewish village was like calling the village Gentile! It is a mark of judgment (see also Acts 13:51).

MARK 6:14-29

Why is there all this stuff about John the Baptist?

Mark tells us about the death of John the Baptist to make an important point. It answers the question that is implied in Mark 6:1-13: why don't people see who Jesus is? The answer is that people reject Jesus because, like Herod, they will not repent. In other words, they will not turn from their rebellion against God.

MARK 7:24-30

Why does Jesus call this woman a dog?

Mark tells us this incident to show that Jesus has come to rescue and save Gentiles as well as Jews. The woman is a Gentile (= non Jew) from near the city of Tyre. "Children" here refers to the Jews, and "dogs" was a common, unflattering expression that Jews used for any Gentile person. So Jesus is saying: "It isn't right to take what belongs to the Jews and give it to you Gentiles." In her reply (v 28) the woman is saying; "Yes Lord – I acknowledge that as a Gentile woman I have no right to ask help from you, the Jewish Messiah. But you have such great power and mercy that you must have enough to help me as well!" Jesus is impressed by her faith and her persistence, and grants her request.

MARK 8:15

What is the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod?

Yeast – the stuff you put in bread to make it rise – is used as a picture in the New Testament to refer to the influence of someone or something. Just as a tiny amount of yeast has a great effect on the whole batch of dough, so Jesus warns against being affected by the sinful attitudes of the Pharisees and Herod: specifically, these would be hypocrisy and worldliness.

MARK 8:17-21

Why do the disciples not understand?

Jesus has fed thousands in the desert (twice), healed people, forgiven sin, cast out evil spirits and stilled storms with a word. So what's wrong with the disciples? As the following two stories show – they need spiritual help to understand the truth that is staring them in the face. Spiritual truth can only be revealed by God's Spirit.

MARK 8:22-25

Why is there a two-part healing?

Jesus hasn't lost his touch, or found it difficult to heal this man. He is doing the healing as a kind of "acted parable", to explain what happens next. When Peter announces that Jesus is "the Messiah" in Mark 8:29, he is like the man in Mark 8:24 (he has partial sight). It is clear from the verses that follow – where Peter rebukes Jesus – that although he has understood *who* Jesus is, he has not yet realized *why* Jesus has come (Mark 8:30-33).

MARK 8:32-33

Why does Jesus say: "Get behind me, Satan!"?

Peter had recognized that Jesus was the Christ, but he could not understand why Jesus had to suffer and die. Jesus recognizes in Peter's words a temptation to reject God's plan that the Christ should die on the cross. It is not that Peter is Satan, or that Satan has "taken control". It is just that Peter is saying what the devil wants, which is to knock Jesus off course in his mission to rescue us by dying on the cross and rising to life again.

MARK 9:1

What does Jesus mean when he says that some "will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power"?

This probably refers to the transfiguration of Jesus, recorded immediately after (Mark 9:2-7), although it could also be a reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:8).

MARK 9:4

Who are Elijah and Moses?

Both of these people represent the Old Testament: Moses was the law-giver and Elijah the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. The fact that they talk with Jesus shows that he is the one the Old Testament is pointing to.

MARK 9:11-13

What does Jesus mean when he says: "Elijah does come first"?

The disciples have failed to recognize that John the Baptist was the Elijah-like messenger promised in Malachi 4:5-6 who would come before "the Lord". Elijah was a prophet in the eighth century BC who lived out in the wilderness, wearing animal skins and a leather belt (2 Kings 1:8). This is how John the Baptist is described in Mark 1:6. Jesus makes it clear that John was the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning Elijah.

MARK 9:43-48

Why does Jesus tell us to cut our hands off?

Jesus obviously did not intend that a Christian should physically cut off a hand or foot, or pluck out an eye. It's not as if sin is confined to a particular part of our bodies. Jesus is exaggerating to make a point: "If anything is stopping you from entering the kingdom of God, it is better to take drastic action to rid yourself of it, whatever it is, than to end up in hell for ever." The most important thing is getting right with God. The logic is obvious: temporary pain is better than eternal punishment.

MARK 10:1-12

What does Jesus think about divorce?

Jesus makes it clear that divorce is always against the perfect purpose of God. God's plan in creation is that married people should live together for their whole lives (see Genesis 2:24). Jesus says that if people seek a divorce because they have found an alternative partner, such action is adultery (Mark 10:11-12). It is only because people's hearts are so hard (Mark 10:5) that divorce could ever be permitted. The danger is either that we use the concession of verse 5 as an excuse for deliberate sin, or that we think that divorce cuts us off from God for ever. Christ came to die for all sin, including the failures of divorce.

Note: Be aware that you are likely to have children in your group who have experienced the reality of broken marriages. For some this may be a significant personal issue.

MARK 10:15

What does it mean to "receive the kingdom of God like a little child"?

The disciples need to understand that they have nothing to offer God, and must therefore depend fully on God, just as a little child depends fully on its parents. Jesus is not implying that children are innocent or pure – neither of which are traits of most children!

MARK 10:38

What did Jesus mean when he said: "Can you drink the cup I drink"?

In the Old Testament, "the cup" was generally a reference to suffering. It also refers to the cup of God's anger (see Jeremiah 25:15-16). In Mark 10:38, Jesus is showing that the disciples don't know what they are talking about. They, unlike Jesus, have their own sin to deal with and therefore cannot suffer God's wrath on other people's behalf; a sinless substitute is required. However, Jesus adds – in verse 39 – that they will suffer.

MARK 11:12-14, 20-21

Why did Jesus curse the fig-tree?

This can seem strange as it is Jesus' only destructive miracle. Mark interweaves the cursing of the fig-tree with the events in the temple (Mark 11:15-19, 27-33). In the same way that Jesus curses the fig-tree for having no fruit on it, he condemns the "fruitlessness" of Israel's religion (ie: the lack of genuine worship, the failure to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, etc).

MARK 12:1

What does the story about the vineyard mean?

The vineyard was a common Old Testament symbol of Israel. In particular, this passage is very similar to Isaiah 5, where the people of Israel are rebuked for the terrible way they have rejected God, and are told that God's righteous judgment will come. Jesus' hearers would have understood that the "man" in the parable was God, that the "vineyard" was the people of God, and that the missing fruit was loyalty to the son (= Jesus).

MARK 12:10

What is a capstone?

This is the most important stone; the foundation stone. Here it means that although Israel's leaders have rejected Jesus, he is still the Messiah, and will become the Saviour through dying on the cross.

MARK 12:18-27

What's the point of the strange "one bride for seven brothers" story?

In Jesus' day there were two major religious groups who argued about what happens after we die. The Pharisees believed in life after death. The Sadducees said that death was the end. So the Sadducees came up with this question to trick Jesus. In his answer, Jesus makes two things very clear. **First**, that there is life beyond the grave. He says that the Bible refers to God as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob". It must mean that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still alive. God is the God of the living, not the dead. But **second**, Jesus makes it clear that we

must not think of life after death as though it was the same as this life, but without some of the bad bits. It will be completely different. So different that our relationships will all change. We will recognize and know our close friends in the world to come – but it is a mistake to think that things like marriage will be the same.

MARK 13:14

What is “the abomination that causes desolation”?

This is an example where a passage in another Gospel helps. Luke 21:20 substitutes the words “Jerusalem being surrounded by armies”, for this phrase. It refers to the occasion in AD 65 when Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem after a political uprising. After a horrific five-year war, the Roman armies entered the city, desecrated the temple, and then proceeded to pull it down and destroy the city. Jesus’ words in Mark 13 came true.

MARK 13:32

Why does Jesus not know the date of his own return?

Some suggest that Jesus could not be perfect, or God, if he does not know this important fact. When Jesus was born as a man he “emptied himself” (Philippians 2:7, NASB). As a child, Jesus had to grow in wisdom, just as all human children do. He was not born with complete knowledge built in. This is one of those things which helps to verify the trustworthiness of biblical history. If someone was making up the story of Jesus Christ, he would never have left in Mark 13:32!

MARK 14:12

What are “the Festival of Unleavened Bread” and “the Passover lamb”?

God commanded the Israelites to keep the annual feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread to remind them of how he had rescued them from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:14-20). Israel could only be saved from the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn, by killing a lamb, eating its roasted flesh with bitter herbs and unleavened bread, and smearing the blood on the door frames. Wherever

there was blood on a door, the Lord “passed over” the house and spared the firstborn (Exodus 12:1-13). The meal eaten in Mark 14:12-26 takes place at Passover. Jesus’ death would be the true means of rescue from God’s judgment; it would be the true Passover. This is why Jesus is sometimes referred to as the Lamb of God.

MARK 14:24

What is the “blood of the covenant”?

Passover commemorates rescue from slavery in Egypt, and from the wrath of God, by the pouring out of blood (Exodus 12:23). That rescue was followed by a covenant (an agreement made by God on behalf of his people) that was sealed by a blood sacrifice (Exodus 24:6). Jesus’ sacrificial death mirrors this. He bled and died to turn God’s wrath away from us, and to start a new covenant.

MARK 15:33

Was the darkness an eclipse of the sun?

Not possible. Jesus was crucified at the time of the Jewish Passover, which is always at full moon. At full moon, it is impossible to have a solar eclipse. Physically there is no adequate explanation of the darkness, other than that it is a supernatural sign at the time of mankind’s darkest deed – killing the Son of God.

MARK 16:9-20

Why do we stop reading at Mark 16:8?

Most scholars agree that Mark’s Gospel ends at chapter 16:8. The women run away terrified, not knowing what to think after being told that Jesus is risen. The ending provokes the question: are you able to see *who* Jesus is, *why* he came, and *what* it means to follow him?

Verses 9-20 of Mark chapter 16 appear to be attempts by later writers to add a fuller resurrection ending to Mark. However, the oldest manuscripts do not include this section, and its style and vocabulary are different from the rest of Mark. This does not mean that what is contained in this ending is made up. Most of the details also appear in the other Gospels. It just means that they were probably not in Mark’s original.