

# THE PLAYERS



THE  
BETRAYER



THE  
CHALLENGER



THE  
COWARD



WHERE IS  
JESUS



THE PEOPLE  
PLEASER



THE  
BYSTANDER



MOCKERS,  
SCOFFERS  
AND CYNICS

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE



# Session 1—Judas the Betrayer

*Mark 14:43-52*

## **To Begin**

Spend some time sharing something good or new from your past week.

- When was the last time you were nervous or fearful the night before a big event or upcoming challenge? Describe what it was and how you felt?

## **Digging Deeper**

Over the course of this series, we will be spending time in preparation for Easter by reading the story of Jesus, particularly his last few hours. We call this part of the story the Passion Narrative, because of Jesus' great suffering and his passion found in Mark 14 & 15. Mark makes use of story to draw us closer to Jesus and to involve us in the events of the Passion. One feature of Mark's use of story is the characters involved. In this series we are looking at the people of the Passion, the different players that are involved in Mark as we lead up to Easter.

As the story unfolds each week different players are contrasted with Jesus, the primary character. Each week we slowly enter deeper into the passion of Jesus as he heads towards the cross. Hopefully you will be able to find yourself in this story of God's grace.

We begin this series in Mark 14. We enter the Passion Narrative after the Last Supper and find ourselves at a place known as Gethsemane, which is located on the Mount of Olives. This is the place of Jesus' betrayal.

There were many opportunities for authorities to arrest Jesus but it was Judas, one of the twelve and one who was closest to Jesus who betrayed him, valuing Jesus' life at thirty pieces of silver.

Along with Judas was a mob armed with swords and clubs to arrest Jesus. He was never violent, never carried a weapon, but they approached him with hate and rage. In verse 48, Jesus questioned the reasoning behind the armed mob. If their reason for arresting him had been valid, why not arrest him during the day, why sneak around under cover of darkness? Why bring weapons?

But Jesus has an answer to this all. Jesus knows he is the true Christ, the Messiah and that all of this must happen because the Scriptures must be fulfilled! He is destined to suffer, to be humiliated, and to die. Nothing will keep him from fulfilling his destiny.

### ***Together read Mark 14:43-52***

#### **Picture yourself as Judas . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about? How do you relate to Judas?

- Have you ever been betrayed by someone? How did you deal with it?
- We all have betrayed Jesus at one point or another, have you betrayed Jesus recently?

#### **Picture yourself as a member of the mob . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about? How do you relate to a member of the mob?

**Picture yourself as a disciple . . .**

For most of the disciples, this is the last we hear of them in Mark’s gospel. What do you think it would have been like for them? Why do you think they acted the way they did?

**Picture yourself as Jesus . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about? Describe Jesus’ emotional state in this passage. How do you relate to Jesus? How can we learn to be more like Jesus from this situation?

- Looking back over the many characters involved, which character do you relate to the most? Why?
- How does this story apply to your life? What will you do about it?

**Praise & Prayer Points**

Pray for each other’s prayer requests and share what God is doing in your lives.

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# Session 2—Priests The Challengers

*Mark 14:53-65*

## To Begin

Spend some time sharing something good or new from your past week.

- Have you ever been accused of something or received credit for something you didn't do? What was your response?

## Digging Deeper

We come to the point in the Passion Narrative where Jesus has been arrested and is now standing trial before the council. The Sanhedrin was the high court of Judaism, composed of the chief priests and other prominent religious leaders of Jerusalem. If all the members were present that night, there would have been seventy of them gathered around ready to accuse Jesus. This night time gathering was not a normal experience. The Pharisees and teachers of the law often created exceptions to established rules in order to justify their plans. They wanted Jesus gone.

Throughout Jesus' trial many testified falsely against him. The Pharisees were trying to find witnesses to accuse Jesus so they could put him to death, but nothing seemed to come together. Their stories never matched. There was no real opportunity for a defense on Jesus' part. Whether or not strictly legal, it was certainly not fair. Nonetheless, this was all a part of God's plan.

If we think about the religious leaders, their job was to be shepherds, to watch over and care for the people. The religious leaders were supposed to stand for truth and justice. They were all looking for the promised Messiah, but little did they know he was right before them.

They twisted Jesus' words to make it sound as though he wanted to destroy the temple in the city. Jesus remained silent throughout this whole process until they ask him if he is the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One. Jesus has done plenty of miracles before them to show them that he is the Christ. However, when Jesus tells them the truth, their verdict is blasphemy and mockery follows.

We deserve the judgment that Jesus received, and yet he did not defend himself.

***Together read Mark 14:53-65***

**Picture yourself as the Priests . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about? How do you relate to the Priests as they accuse Jesus?

**Picture yourself as Jesus . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about? How do you relate to Jesus?

- How does Jesus' behaviour differ from that of the priests? What does that say about the character of each?
- What would your reaction be to seeing Jesus spit on, blindfolded, beat and mocked?

Take some time to read Mark 14:61-62 several times, stopping after each word or phrase. After reading it a few times, share your thoughts. What words or phrases stand out to you? Why?

*"But Jesus was silent and made no reply. Then the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven." – Mark 14:61-62*

- Which character do you relate to the most? Why?
- How does this story apply to your life? What will you do about it?

## Praise & Prayer Points

Pray for each other's prayer requests and share what God is doing in your lives.

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# Session 3—Peter the Coward

## *Mark 14:66-72*

### **To Begin**

Spend some time sharing something good or new from your past week.

- Is there anything that you are afraid of?

### **Digging Deeper**

The Passion Narrative continues and in this session the Scripture highlights the character of Peter. While Jesus is undergoing trial by the Jewish High Council, Peter waits outside in the courtyard. When reading through Peter's story, events happen exactly as Jesus had predicted. Peter would deny knowing Jesus three times before the rooster crowed twice. The guilt and shame for disowning Jesus troubled Peter immensely.

Jesus stood alone and defenseless before the Jewish court. What Jesus had to do, he had to do all by himself. No one else can give their life as a ransom, a perfect sacrifice for our sins. No one else can bring Israel's story of failure back to redemption. If he is the Messiah, there comes a moment when he will have to face the judgement and weight of the world on his shoulders, alone. That moment has now arrived.

***Together read Mark 14:66-72***

### **Picture yourself as Peter . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about? Why do you think Peter denied Christ? How do you relate to Peter?



- What “rooster” reminds you of failure and guilt? How did you get through?
- What does the story about Peter tell you about human nature? What would you have done if you were questioned in the courtyard?

### **Picture yourself as a bystander . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about? Have you ever stood by and been an accuser? How do you relate to being a bystander?

As followers of Jesus we are to stand out from others. Peter was one of the most prominent of Jesus’ disciples, yet he was still a sinner in need of God’s mercy and forgiveness.

- When, if ever, have you felt your failures had made it impossible for God to use you again?
- Why are Christians sometimes afraid or reluctant to identify themselves as believers in Christ? What sorts of situations make you uncomfortable or fearful about identifying with Christianity?
- What warnings and encouragement can you draw from Peter's experience?
- Which character do you relate to the most? Why?
- How does this story apply to your life? What will you do about it?

### **Praise & Prayer Points**

Pray for each other’s prayer requests and share what God is doing in your lives.

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# Session 4—Pilate the People Pleaser

## *Mark 15:1-15*

### To Begin

Spend some time sharing something good or new from your past week.

- When someone accuses you of something you didn't do, how do you react?

### Digging Deeper

We move along in the Passion Narrative to the beginning of Mark 15. Prior to this, Jesus had been arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Council. He was found guilty of blasphemy which is a crime that is punishable by death in Jewish law. However, these religious leaders didn't have the authority to put a criminal to death. Only the Romans had the authority to execute criminals. The Sanhedrin's power was under the control of Roman rule, so they have to bring Jesus to Pilate, a Roman governor with the request for his execution. Pilate had the authority and served as Jesus' judge. Pilate could declare Jesus' innocence and set him free, or declare him guilty and punish him.

The religious leaders thought Jesus was guilty of blasphemy, but the Romans considered blasphemy a religious offense, not a crime against Rome. With an angry mob yelling "Crucify him!" Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, delivers Jesus to be crucified.

Jesus is rejected first by Jerusalem, then by Rome; by Jews and by Gentiles, though for different reasons. No one in Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion is just a spectator.

All are participants, even you and me.

***Together read Mark 15:1-15***

**Picture yourself as Pilate . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about? How do you relate to Pilate?

**Picture yourself as Barabbas . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about? How do you relate to Barabbas?

**Picture yourself as Jesus . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about? How do you relate to Jesus?

**Picture yourself as one of the crowd . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about? How do you relate to being in the crowd?

Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent and did not deserve death. However, he condemned him to death because of pressure from the crowd.

- Pilate found no fault in Jesus, but still condemned him to death. How does this illustrate what Jesus did for our salvation?
- Have you ever been influenced by the crowd to make wrong decisions or say the wrong thing? What can we do to minimize the influence that a crowd has on us?

Take some time to read Romans 3:23-25a and 2 Corinthians 5:21 several times, stopping after each word or phrase. After reading each section of Scripture a few times, share your thoughts. What words or phrases stand out to you? Why?

*“For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God freely and graciously declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood.”* Romans 3:23-25a

*“For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.”* 2 Corinthians 5:21

In Mark’s Passion narrative, Jesus is no longer the one who initiates action, he becomes subject to other people’s actions. He is silent, answering nothing, taking nothing except the lashes from their whips. Jesus is the greatest example of enduring suffering with peace and grace while trusting in God to deliver.

- Which character do you relate to the most? Why?
- How does this story apply to your life? What will you do about it?

### **Praise & Prayer Points**

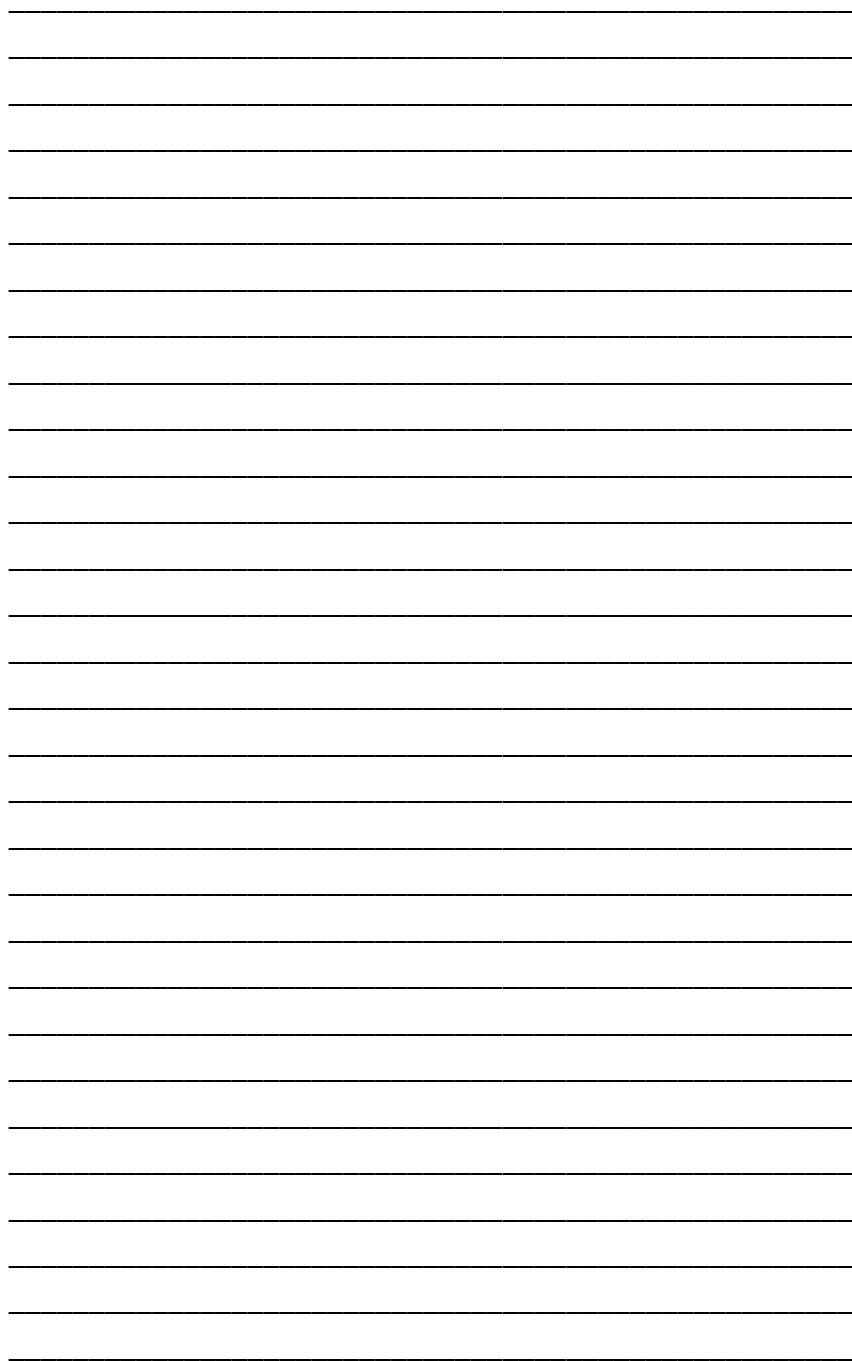
Pray for each other’s prayer requests and share what God is doing in your lives.

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# Session 5—Simon the Bystander

## *Mark 15:16-39*

### **To Begin**

Spend some time sharing something good or new from your past week.

- What was the most crazy or insane thing that you've been a witness of?

### **Digging Deeper**

At this point in the Passion Narrative, Jesus has been condemned by both Jewish and Greek authorities. The soldiers take Jesus away, cloth him in a purple cloak, a sign of royalty, and put a twisted crown of thorns on his head. They mock him, strike him with a reed, and spit on him. After they had done all this, they strip him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on, and lead him out to be crucified on the cross.

Mark doesn't tell us why Jesus did not carry his own cross, but it's easy to assume that Jesus was either too weak or slow from all that he had endured. The soldiers compel a bystander, Simon, to carry Jesus' cross to the place called Golgotha, the Place of a Skull. This is where they crucified Jesus on the cross.

The crucifixion is the event toward which Mark's entire story builds. One commentator describes Jesus death in this way: "Death by crucifixion was one of the cruelest and most degrading forms of punishment ever conceived by human perversity." It is on the cross where Jesus death paid the price for our sin. The divine judgment of God was laid upon Jesus for the sins of humanity, past, present, and future. This free gift now

waits for those to accept it. We can be forgiven, changed from the inside out, we can have a relationship with the living God.

The heart of the Gospel is being revealed here, the idea of substitution. God in Christ, took our place of condemnation, and we freely receive the gift of freedom from our sins. This alone should move our hearts. Jesus took it all, for you and for me.

***Together read Mark 15:16-39***

**Picture yourself as a mocking soldier . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about? How do you relate to the soldiers?

**Picture yourself as Simon . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about? How do you know that Simon's life was changed by his experience with Jesus? How do you relate to Simon?

**Picture yourself as someone in the crowd . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about as you see Jesus hanging on the cross?

**Picture yourself as the Roman officer. . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? How do you relate to the Roman officer?

Take some time to read Mark 15:37-39 several times, stopping after each word or phrase. After reading it a few times, share your thoughts. What words or phrases stand out to you? Why?

*"Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. When the Roman officer who stood facing him*

*saw how he had died, he exclaimed, "This man truly was the Son of God!" Mark 15:37-39*

Earlier in Mark, Jesus calling to the crowd to join his disciples says this, *"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me."* Mark 8:34

- What word or phrases stood out to you the most from Mark 8:34? Why? Why do we often find it difficult to pick up our crosses daily? What does it mean to pick up our crosses daily?
- Thinking back over the characters mentioned, which one do you relate to the most? Why?
- How does this story apply to your life? What do you need to do to follow Jesus on a daily basis?

### **Praise & Prayer Points**

Pray for each other's prayer requests and share what God is doing in your lives.

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# Session 6—Where is Jesus?

*Mark 15:40-16:8*

## **To Begin**

Spend some time sharing something good or new from your past week.

- What was the most incredible event you've ever witnessed?

## **Digging Deeper**

In this session, we will be finishing our time in the Gospel of Mark. We come to the part in the story just after Jesus had breathed his last breath. A group of women gathered and watched from a distance. Jesus' beaten and lifeless body is on the cross. Joseph of Arimathea decided to take a risk and ask Pilate for Jesus' body as Sabbath was approaching. It was not lawful to prepare the body for burial once Sabbath had started. Pilate agrees to let Joseph take the body of Jesus. Joseph buys a long sheet of linen cloth, takes Jesus' body down, wraps him in the cloth, and then lays him in a tomb that had been carved out of the rock. A stone is rolled in front of the entrance. Jesus, the Messiah, is dead.

A whole day goes by and as Sabbath ends Saturday evening, Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of James and Salome went out to purchase burial spices. Spices may not have been used for everyone but were often used for the bodies of special people. Spices helped reduce the stench of decomposition in the hot Mediterranean days.

They arrive at Jesus' tomb only to find it empty. As they enter the tomb, a messenger from God speaks of Jesus' resurrection to

these women. Just as Jesus had predicted, he was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy, he has risen from the dead! This changes everything.

***Together read Mark 15:40-16:8***

- Why does Mark take such care to show that the resurrection was a historical event? Why does this matter?

**Picture yourself as Joseph . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about? How do you relate to Joseph?

**Picture yourself as the women . . .**

What emotions or feelings come to mind? What are you thinking about when you see the angel? What about the empty tomb? How do you relate to the women?

- Would you have had trouble believing the angel's words? Why or why not?
- Who did Jesus send to you to tell you that Jesus is risen? Did you have trouble believing this person?
- How were you finally convinced of Jesus' resurrection?
- How can this passage reinforce our commitment to sharing the good news of Christ with others?

Take some time to read Mark 16:6 several times, stopping after each word or phrase. After reading it a few times, share your thoughts. What words or phrases stand out to you? Why?

*"The angel said, "Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body." Mark 16:6*

- How has the resurrection of Jesus changed your life?
- What will you remember most from the Gospel of Mark?
- How does this story apply to your life? What will you do about it?

## Praise & Prayer Points

Pray for each other's prayer requests and share what God is doing in your lives.

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