

THE INTERPRETATION BIBLE STUDIES LEADER HELPS

MARK

The IBS Leader Helps are designed to facilitate group study by providing lesson plans for the ten units in each of the Interpretation Bible Studies. These lesson plans utilize a variety of interactive methods, which have been chosen for the express purpose of engaging participants in the learning process.

Each participant in the group should have a copy of IBS study book and should make a commitment to do advance preparation for each session.

The sessions are planned for one hour. If the time allotted is shorter than an hour, it will be necessary to be selective about the activities, choosing those which are most appropriate for your group.

Leader Preparation

Read the Gospel of Mark in its entirety before beginning to teach. The author suggests that this is important, not only to familiarize yourself with Mark's content, but to prevent "cross-pollination" with other gospels, carrying over their details into Mark's story (p. 4).

Skim through the whole study book to discern its flow. This is especially helpful if there are multiple teachers, in order to prevent leaping ahead into the next unit.

Prepare the room ahead of time. For informal discussion and ease of sharing, a semi-circular arrangement of chairs works best. Position yourself as one of the group, instead of setting yourself apart as "the authority."

Secure necessary teaching aids. A newsprint easel is an invaluable asset. Be sure to have markers and masking tape if you wish to display the sheets for future reference. A map of Palestine in New Testament times is very helpful. Check the teaching suggestions for other necessary materials, such as hymnals, paper, pencils, art materials, and so on.

Prepare necessary handouts. A folder for each participant's handouts is helpful, but not essential.

Keep the key idea firmly in mind. Make sure all activities point participants towards this goal.

Pray for God's guidance. Prior to making preparations for the session, allow time to pray for each participant and for yourself.

Unit 1: The Mystery Appears (Mark 1:1–15)

Key Idea: The good news (and the great mystery) is that in the person of Jesus, God’s long awaited reign on earth has begun.

Advance Preparation

For each participant, provide a pencil and a sheet of paper divided into two sections, labeled “John” and “Jesus” respectively, and a copy of the words of commitment from a service of baptismal renewal (either the ones at the end of the lesson plan, or from your denominational liturgy). In addition, provide pencils and slips of paper, approximately 8x2 inches, for the closing exercise.

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Prayer

Pray aloud this prayer in unison or use one of your own:

Gracious God,
 Your promises of old have been fulfilled.
 The good news of your love has been revealed to us in your Son.
 Enable us to trust and accept this good news,
 to repent and believe.
 Teach us as we study your Word together. Amen.

Presentation (15 minutes)

2. Introduction to Mark

Review the material in the Introduction (pp. 1–6 of the study book) by asking the group to define “Gospel.” Put their answers on newsprint.

Ask participants to review quickly the eleven characteristics of Mark on pp. 4–5 for two minutes, then name aloud as many as they can without referring to the text. List the characteristics on newsprint as they are named. If all eleven are not named, have the participants check the text to see what they omitted.

Discuss: Why does the author use the word “mystery” in each chapter title? (Hint: See characteristic 8 on p. 5.)

3. Listening to Scripture

Distribute the sheets of paper divided into two sections, headed “John” and “Jesus.” Read aloud the first fifteen verses of Mark’s Gospel. Ask participants to listen carefully and jot down on their prepared sheets the verbs relating to John and Jesus. Discuss: What do these verbs tell us about the role each of these men is to play?

Exploration (20 minutes)

4. Question and Answer

Ask the following questions of the group, allowing adequate time for their response.

- What is the significance of the two ways to translate the Greek word *eis* (see p. 11 of the study book)? What does baptism *into* forgiveness mean, according to author Deibert?
- Why was Jesus baptized? (See p. 12.)
- What does your baptism mean to you?
- What is the difference between *chronos* and *kairos*?
- What should be our response to the words, “the kingdom is near”?
- What does the author mean by the following phrases? Give an example of each.
 - “realign our prideful posturings”
 - “recalibrate our ethical thresholds”
 - “remanufacture our principled priorities”
 - “reform and trust.”

Response (10 minutes)

5. Sentence Completion

Ask participants to complete the following sentence on a slip of paper: “The good news of Jesus Christ is good news for me because” Suggest they share their response with one other person, then ask for several volunteers to read aloud their statements.

Closing (5 minutes)

6. Renewal of Commitment

These words of renunciation are from the service of “Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant for a Congregation” in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *Book of Common Worship*. Use them or similar words from your own denomination’s liturgical resources:

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God,
do you turn from the ways of sin
and renounce evil and its power in the world?

I do.

Who is your Lord and Savior?

Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

Will you be Christ’s faithful disciple,
obeying his Word and showing his love?

I will, with God's help.

(From *Book of Common Worship*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, p. 480.)

7. Closing Prayer

Pray together the Lord's Prayer.

8. Assignment

Have the participants read Unit 2 and write their answer to these questions:

- What picture is offered in Mark 3:13–35 of the church?
- Question 2 on p. 23 of the study book. (The quote is on p. 22.)

Unit 2: The Mystery Discriminates (Mark 3:13–35)

Key Idea: Jesus Christ matters ultimately to everyone; there can be no indifferent response to him.

Advance Preparation

On a sheet of white poster board, draw the outline of a church (preferably your own) and tape to the wall. Cut red construction paper into as many brick shapes (2x3 inches) as there are participants. Provide a black marker for each participant. Have masking tape ready.

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Prayer

Offer a prayer of your own, or ask one of the participants to pray.

2. Summary of Interim Chapters

Ask participants to scan quickly the verses between 1:15 and 3:13, and name the happenings in those chapters. List these on newsprint. Check with the author's list in the study book for omissions. What does this tell us about Mark's Gospel?

Presentation (20 minutes)

3. Mini-dramas

Divide into three groups. Assign the following scripture passages to the groups:

- Group 1 (The Disciples): Mark 3:13–19
- Group 2 (Jesus' Family): Mark 19b–21, 31–35
- Group 3 (The Scribes): Mark 3:22–30

Allow ten minutes for each group to read its passage aloud and develop a three-minute mini-drama showing the response of the three groups to Jesus. What would they have said or done? Invite the groups to present their dramas to the others.

Exploration (15 minutes)

4. Group Discussion

As a whole group, discuss these questions:

- In each of these incidents, what is Mark saying about what it means to be related to Jesus Christ?
- What level of commitment is required?

Response (10 minutes)*5. The Mission of the Church*

Ask each participant to write on one of the brick shapes the answer to this question: What is one specific thing we can do as a church to reach our community? As participants share their ideas with the group, invite them to attach their bricks to the outline with tape. When all have contributed, discuss ways to implement the ideas presented.

Closing (5 minutes)*6. Closing Prayer*

Offer sentence prayers for the church.

7. Assignment

Have the participants read Mark 4:1–34 and Unit 3 in the study book. Ask them to look up the word “parable” in a Bible dictionary or on the Internet, and write down three discoveries they make about parables.

Unit 3: The Mystery Discloses (Mark 4:1–34)

Key Idea: Jesus uses parables to teach his followers that they are to sow without ceasing, but are to remember that the results are God’s alone.

Advance Preparation

Prepare a tray with an assortment of everyday items: bread, a pencil, a basket, a flower, a cup, scissors, tape, a piece of fruit, an empty box, a sponge, a marker, a growing plant, a balloon, and so on. Provide paper and pencils.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Prayer

Begin with this prayer or one of your own:

Giver of all good things,
teach us how to sow the seeds of the kingdom with patience,
with perseverance
and with trust,
remembering that you alone bring the harvest.
In the name of the Master Sower, Amen.

Presentation (15 minutes)

2. Listening to Scripture

The author suggests that Mark wants us to read the passage as a “unified word,” as one complete seaside scene. To accomplish this, ask each of seven participants to read one of the seven paragraphs in the text and the interpretation of the paragraph given on p. 33 of the study book under “An Interpretative Map for the Parables of the Kingdom.” Invite them to answer this question: What new light does the author’s interpretation throw on the parable?

Exploration (15 minutes)

3. The Meaning of “Parable”

Ask the participants to name their findings about parables. List on their answers on newsprint. Ask the following questions:

- What are the two moves suggested by the author to grasp Jesus’ meaning? (See p. 35 of the study book.)
- Why does Jesus refer to Isaiah?
- What is the function of parables according to Jesus? (See p. 37.)
- What are the four dimensions of sowing? (See p. 38.)

Response (20 minutes)*4. Writing a Parable*

Present to the group the tray on which you have placed the everyday items. Distribute paper and pencils and ask participants to choose one item about which to write a brief parable about the kingdom of God. Ask participants to read their parables to the group and invite the group to add further ideas to the interpretation. Ask, “In what ways do parables make it easier to talk about faith?”

Closing (5 minutes)*5. Prayer*

Use this prayer or one of your own:

Teach us to perceive instead of just looking,
to understand instead of just listening,
so that we might know how to sow the seeds of the kingdom.
In the name of the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ, Amen.

6. Assignment

Have the participants read the scripture and Unit 4 of the study book. Ask them to find the answers to these questions:

- In Mark 4:35–41, what represents chaos? What is the explanation for Jesus’ sleep?
- In Mark 5:1–20, what represents chaos? What three factors make the disciples’ landing in a particularly gruesome predicament?
- In Mark 5:25–34, what represents chaos? What three words describe the woman Jesus healed?
- In Mark 5:35–43, what represents chaos? What is the antidote to fear in this story?

Unit 4: The Mystery Calms (Mark 4:35—5:43)

Key Idea: Jesus can overcome the storms and chaos of human existence.

Advance Preparation

Provide a hymnal for each participant.

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Prayer

Use as a prayer the words of the hymn “Jesus Savior, Pilot Me.”

2. Naming Fears

Ask participants to name one thing that frightens them. List their responses on newsprint.

Presenting (20 minutes)

3. Role Play

Divide the participants into four groups. Assign one of the four stories in today’s unit to each group. Ask them to role play the scene in turns, improvising dialogue to show clearly what the characters might be feeling. At the end of the role plays, ask: What new insight did you gain into the story from the role play, as participants or as observers?

Exploring (15 minutes)

4. Discussion of Assignment from Previous Session

Remind the participants of their assigned questions from last time:

- In Mark 4:35–41, what represents chaos? What is the explanation for Jesus’ sleep?
- In Mark 5:1–20, what represents chaos? What three factors make the disciples’ landing in a particularly gruesome predicament?
- In Mark 5:25–34, what represents chaos? What three words describe the woman Jesus healed?
- In Mark 5:35–43, what represents chaos? What is the antidote to fear in this story?

Share aloud their answers to these questions “popcorn style”—that is, in a voluntary fashion “as the Spirit moves.”

To the list of participants' fears already on newsprint, ask the group to add the fears revealed in the four stories. Make another list on the newsprint headed "Trust." Ask: What are examples of trust in the stories? Where do people today put their trust? Put the answers on newsprint. Make a third list headed "Faith." List examples of faith shown in the stories.

Responding (10 minutes)

5. Sharing with a Partner

Ask participants to sit with one other person and discuss these questions:

- When is it hard for you to trust?
- What word of encouragement do these stories offer when you are frightened?
- What place does faith have in your times of fear?

Closing (5 minutes)

6. Litany of Trust

Use this litany as a closing prayer:

When the storms of life roll over my head,

I will not be afraid;

I will trust in you.

When I find myself facing the loss of security, warmth and love,

I will not be afraid;

I will trust in you.

When illness takes away my health and strength;

I will not be afraid;

I will trust in you.

When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will not be afraid;

I will trust in you.

Lord of life,

Ruler over chaos,

we trust in you. Amen.

7. Assignment

Have the participants read Mark 8:22—9:1 and Unit 5 in the study book. Ask them to write the answers to the following:

- What impressed you most about this passage?
- What defines being Christian? a disciple?
- What are the two terms of discipleship?

Unit 5: The Mystery Scandalizes (Mark 8:22—9:1)

Key Idea: Christian discipleship involves self-denial and cross-bearing.

Advance Preparation

Display a map that shows the location of Bethsaida and Caesarea Philippi. Tape to the wall five sheets of newsprint with the following headings: “Discipleship,” “Expectations of Christ,” “Being Christian,” “Self-Denial,” and “Cross Bearing.” Cut a 4x6-inch cross from white poster board for each participant. Provide an assortment of colored felt tip markers.

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Prayer

Pray together The Lord’s Prayer.

2. Question and Answer

Ask: What does The Lord’s Prayer say about the meaning of Christian discipleship? List the responses on the newsprint sheet labeled “Discipleship.”

Presentation (15 minutes)

3. Listening to Scripture

Read the scripture aloud, assigning the following speaking parts to participants: Jesus, the blind man, the disciples, and Peter. Read the narrative portions yourself.

Ask: What were the expectations of Jesus from the crowd? the blind man? the disciples? Peter? List the responses on the newsprint sheet headed “Expectations of Christ.” Post this sheet on the wall.

4. Map Study

Locate Bethsaida and Caesarea Philippi on a map.

Exploration (20 minutes)

5. Discussion of the Assignment from Last Session

Allow participants to share their responses to the first assignment question. Ask: What impressed you most about the passage? Invite participants to share their answers to the second assignment question: What defines being Christian? List their answers on the third newsprint sheet, labeled “Being Christian.” Then ask: What defines discipleship? Add their answers to the list already begun on the sheet headed “Discipleship.”

6. *Probing the Text*

On the sheets of newsprint labeled “Self-denial” and “Cross bearing,” draw vertical lines dividing each sheet in half. Ask: What examples does the author give of ways we mishandle the concept of “self-denial”? (See p. 66 of the study book.) List the participants’ responses on half of the “Self-denial” sheet. Then ask: What does the author say Jesus really means by “self-denial”? List the answers on the other half of the sheet.

Then ask: What does the author say about wrong perceptions of “cross bearing”? (See p. 67.) List the responses on half of the “Cross Bearing” sheet. Ask: What do you think Jesus really meant by cross bearing? List their responses on the other half of the sheet.

Response (10 minutes)

7. *Cross Bearing*

Give each person one of the crosses cut from white poster board. Give these instructions:

- On one side of the cross, use the colored markers to describe a situation when doing the will of God might have difficult consequences for you.
- On the other side, list the strengths you have that will help you bear that cross. Keep your cross in your Bible as a reminder of this strength.

Closing (5 minutes)

8. *Singing a Hymn*

Sing or read aloud one of these hymns: “Take Up Your Cross, the Savior Said” or “Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken.”

9. *Prayer*

Ask participants to offer sentence prayers, praying specifically for the person on their right.

10. *Assignment*

Have the participants look up the following words, preferably in a Bible dictionary or in Alyce McKenzie’s IBS study on *Matthew* (p. 3). Ask them to bring definitions to the next session. For resources, suggest they try the church library, pastor’s study, or the Internet.

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------|
| • Chief priest | • Pharisee |
| • Priests | • Herodian |
| • Scribe | • Sadducee |
| • Elder (in Judaism) | • Sanhedrin |

Unit 6: The Mystery Discloses (Mark 11:27—12:34)

Key Idea: Faith is dangerous when it becomes a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

Advance Preparation

Make copies of the following quiz for each participant.

WHO'S WHO IN JESUS' DAY

1. The _____ accepted only the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) as authoritative.
2. The _____ accepted both the written tradition and the oral interpretation as authoritative.
3. The _____ were the lawyers of Judaism.
4. The _____ were a political party that was pro-Roman.
5. The _____ were a body of seventy-one persons, including elders, priests, and scribes.
6. The _____ represented the people as a whole in worship, indicated by a breastplate symbolizing the twelve tribes.
7. The _____ were a group of lay people who were rigorous in observance of the ceremonial law.
8. The _____ had professional qualifications consisting of advanced scholarship in the Law of Moses.
9. The _____ inherited their religious roles.
10. The _____ were representatives of the people in the governing body.
11. The _____ did not believe in the resurrection.
12. The _____ fostered the synagogue as a place of worship and instruction.
13. The _____ were the only ones who could offer sacrifices.

Answers:

1. Sadducees
2. Pharisees
3. Scribes
4. Herodians
5. Sanhedrin
6. High priest
7. Pharisees
8. Scribes
9. Priests
10. Elders
11. Sadducees
12. Pharisees
13. Priests

Opening (15 minutes)

1. Prayer

Use this prayer or one of your own:

Almighty God, as we read your Word, may we be aware of how it reflects our own lives. Forgive us for the ways in which we, like the religious leaders of Jesus' day, use your living Word to support our own goals and causes, instead of allowing it to transform us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

2. Who's Who?

Give out copies of the quiz. Ask participants to fill in the blanks with names from the assignment given at the end of the previous session.

Presentation and Exploration (30 minutes)

3. Listening to Scripture

Ask one participant to read aloud Mark 11:27–33. Discuss question 2 on p. 80 of the study book.

Ask another participant to read aloud Mark 12:1–12. Discuss:

- To whom is this parable addressed?
- How was this parable “against” them?
- What does the author mean by “murderous stewardship?” (See p. 73 of the study book.)
- What does the parable say to those in authority in the church today? (See p. 74.)

Invite a third participant to read aloud Mark 12:13–17. Discuss:

- What mistake do we usually make in interpreting this passage?
- What does the author say it really means? (See p. 76.)
- Do you agree or disagree?
- What is the significance of this passage for our attitude towards our possessions?

Have a fourth participant read aloud Mark 12:18–27. Discuss question 3 on p. 80 of the study book.

Ask a fifth participant to read aloud Mark 12:28–34. Discuss question 4 on p. 80 of the study book.

Response (10 minutes)*4. Summary of Learnings*

Ask: What is the most important thing you have learned from this unit? What changes will you make as a result? Have participants share their responses with a partner, then ask for several volunteers to share their learnings with the group as a whole.

Closing (5 minutes)*5. Prayer*

Use this prayer or one of your own:

Forgive us, O God, for our self-important boasting. We take credit for our strength without thought of your gifts. When honors are bestowed, we treat them as our due. We claim as our victories the triumphs of your grace. You shower us with blessings, which we ignore. You bring new life; we take it for granted. Deliver us from our vain ways, and forgive our smug complacency. Turn our boasting to thanksgiving for Christ's power within us. Amen.

(From James G. Kirk, *When We Gather, Year B: A Book of Prayers for Worship*; Louisville: Geneva Press, 1984.)

6. Assignment

Have the participants read Mark 13:1–37 and write down three “puzzles” they have about this passage.

Unit 7: The Mystery Urges (Mark 13:1–37)

Key Idea: Jesus’ farewell discourse urges disciples to live in a way that confidently testifies to God’s sovereign reign in the world.

Advance Preparation

Make copies of the opening prayer (step 1). Make copies of the handout, “A Little Dictionary” (step 3). Tape a sheet of newsprint to the wall labeled “The Character of Discipleship.”

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Prayer

Ask the participants to read in unison:

O God our Redeemer, you bid us watch for signs of your reign. You tell us through Christ to be ready, since we know not when the hour will come. Keep us from putting off until another time the discipline that will make us better disciples. Make us willing to break the comfortable routine and dare to start ventures that will test our obedience. Surround us with those who have made a similar commitment, so that they may teach us. Help us to seek their assistance and to learn of their ways. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

(Adapted from James G. Kirk, *When We Gather, Year B: A Book of Prayers for Worship*; Louisville: Geneva Press, 1984, p. 17.)

2. Discussion of the Assignment from Last Session, Part I

Ask the participants to identify what puzzles them in the text. List these “puzzles” on a blank sheet of newsprint. Do not answer any of the questions that have been raised, but indicate there will be time at the end of the session to revisit these.

Presentation (10 minutes)

3. Definition of Terms

Distribute the following as a handout and discuss the terms briefly:

A Little Dictionary of the End Times

Eschatology: the study of the end times; theology dealing with death, resurrection, judgment, second coming of Christ.

Apocalypse: literally “an unveiling or disclosure.”

Apocalyptic literature: Predictions focused on the final outcome of human affairs, the last age of the world, when good will triumph and evil will be punished. Daniel and Revelation are two examples in the Bible.

Parousia: the Second Coming of Christ

4. *Mini-lecture: Mark 13*

Summarize briefly the author's introductory comments about Mark 13, found on pp. 81–84.

Exploration (25 minutes)

5. *Small Group Study*

Divide the class into six groups. Assign one of the paragraphs on pp. 84–89 to each group. If the class is small, use three groups and give each group two paragraphs.

Allow the groups ten minutes to read their assigned paragraph(s) silently and to create a sentence beginning “A disciple should . . .” that summarizes the central idea about discipleship. Then ask them to add one concrete illustration of what this might mean for Christians today. As the groups share their responses, list them on newsprint under the heading “The Character of Discipleship.”

Response (10 minutes)

6. *Discussion of the Assignment from Last Session, Part 2*

Return to the list of puzzles from step 2. Are there any that have not been dealt with? Try to answer what you can, or assign someone to research the answers during the next week.

For help with apocalyptic literature and more specific interpretation of these verses in Mark, see William Barclay, *At the Last Trumpet; Jesus Christ and the End of Time* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) and Lamar Williamson, *Mark* (Atlanta: Westminster/John Knox, 1983).

Closing (5 minutes)

7. *Prayer*

Lead the group in the following guided prayer. After each phrase, allow time for silent prayer.

O God,
 in your loving kindness
 you have guided me when...
 you have taught me that...
 you have given me hope that...
 My prayer is to...
 In the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

8. *Assignment*

Have the participants review the roles and beliefs of the Sadducees, priests, and Pharisaic scribes from the Who's Who test in Unit 6, consulting dictionaries and other resources for more information.

Unit 8: The Mystery Forsaken (Mark 14:53–72)

Key Idea: This scene contrasts the courage of Jesus with the cowardice of Peter to show that the integrity of discipleship rests on the grace of God rather than on the valor of our labor.

Advance Preparation

Make 11x4-inch I.D. cards. Punch holes in two corners and attach yarn or string long enough to hang around the neck. Label the cards with large print as follows:

- High Priest (On the back, write: Member of one of the top five priestly families)
- Sadducee 1
- Sadducee 2
- Pharisaic scribe 1
- Pharisaic scribe 2
- Witness 1 (On the back, write: Make up a false charge against Jesus)
- Witness 2 (On the back, write: Make up false charge that disagrees with the charge of Witness 1)
- Witness 3 (On the back, write: Make the charge about Jesus destroying the temple in three days)
- Witness 4 (On the back, write: Disagree with witness 3)
- Jesus
- Guard 1
- Guard 2

If desired, provide lengths of fabric to serve as robes, one of which the high priest will tear. Provide a strip of cloth for a blindfold. Provide slips of paper and pencils.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Sharing of Experiences

Give each participant a slip of paper. Ask them to write on one side a time when they felt betrayed, and on the other a time when they felt alone. Have those who wish to share their examples with the larger group do so briefly.

Presentation (25 minutes)

2. Mini-lecture: The Sanhedrin (5 minutes)

Quickly present the following information as a foundation for the enactment to follow:

The Sanhedrin was the supreme Jewish “Council of Elders” (or Presbytery). It consisted of 71 members, mostly of the local aristocracy, along with leading scribes and learned lawyers. Since the nobility were mainly Sadducees and the lawyers were predominantly Pharisees, the

sessions were often enlivened by stormy debates. The Sanhedrin was largely responsible for the internal government of the province, and we see its authority in Mark 14. The high priest acted as president and convener, but the Roman authorities could call it together to deal with cases at any time. Of the eighteen high priests who held office in New Testament times, *sixteen* represented only *five* families. Strictly speaking, there was only one high priest, or chief priest, at a time, but the expression could be used in the plural to refer to the priesthood as a whole (see Luke 23:13). According to Mark, Jesus was arrested at the order of the Jewish authorities, but executed at the order of Pilate. This may infer that the Sanhedrin was not authorized to inflict the death penalty without the procurator's consent.

3. *Re-enactment: The Trial (20 minutes)*

If you did not assign roles beforehand, quickly distribute the slips indicating roles now. Suggest members keep their Bibles handy as scripts.

Give I. D. cards for participants to wear. Invite participants who represent the "Sanhedrin" (High Priest, Sadducees, Pharisees) to take the chairs behind the table. Begin the re-enactment by having the High Priest call the first witness. Allow free improvisation for 10 minutes (no spitting, no striking, no beating!)

Bring the re-enactment to a conclusion. Ask the participants: What did you feel during the re-enactment? Why did the High Priest react with such rage? What was the charge against Jesus?

Exploration (15 minutes)

4. *Discussion: Courage and Cowardice*

Ask: What phrases in the text show Jesus' courage? What phrases show Peter's cowardice? Then discuss questions 3 and 4 on pp. 100–101 of the study book.

Response (10 minutes)

5. *Word Clusters*

On newsprint, write the word "Betrayed" and circle it. Ask for feeling words that emerged from the sharing experience at the beginning of the session. Write these words around "Betrayed"; circle them and connect them to "Betrayed" with lines. On a separate sheet of newsprint, repeat the exercise with the word "Lonely." Ask: Which of these feelings might Jesus have had? Which might Peter have had? What does this tell us about Jesus? About discipleship?

Closing (5 minutes)

6. *Prayer*

Ask the members to offer sentence prayers, or use a prayer of your own.

7. Assignment

Have the participants read Mark 15:16–41 and Unit 9 in the study book. Ask them to bring to class an artist's portrayal of the crucifixion. Possible sources are art books, church school curriculum, church bulletin covers, religious magazines, print-outs from web sites, and so on.

Unit 9: The Mystery Solved (Mark 15:16–41)

Key Idea: In Mark’s account of the crucifixion, the abandonment of Jesus reaches its climax.

Advance Preparation

Gather art prints or art books that contain pictures of the crucifixion. (Check your church and local library for these.) Number each picture with post-it slips, and display the collection on tables around the room. Have additional post-it slips for the pictures that participants will bring. Provide slips of paper for each person for a picture vote and for a group poem. Also, prepare sheet of newsprint with three columns. Label the first column, “Physical Abandonment”; label the second, “Psychological Abandonment”; label the third, “Theological Abandonment.”

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Prayer

Read in unison the words of the hymn “Throned Upon That Awful Tree.” If you cannot find this hymn, use “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.”

2. Picture Study

Invite participants to walk around the room, studying the pictures of the crucifixion. Ask them to write on their slips of paper the number of the picture that best conveys a feeling of abandonment. After all participants have voted, tally the votes for each picture, recording results on chalkboard or newsprint.

Presentation (15 minutes)

3. Listening to Scripture

Introduce the scripture reading in this way: “The theme of the unit is abandonment. As you hear the words of scripture, listen for words that indicate physical, psychological, or theological acts of abandonment.” Ask for volunteers to read the scripture passage. At the end of each paragraph, halt the reading and ask for the words or phrases of abandonment. List them on the prepared newsprint sheet under the respective category, and indicate who is doing the abandoning.

Exploration (15 minutes)

4. Gospel Comparisons

Divide the participants into three groups. Ask one to compare Mark’s description of the crucifixion to Matthew 27:24–56; the second to Luke 23:26–49; the third to John 19:16–30. Ask: What details are distinctly Mark’s? How do those details help shape Mark’s Gospel? (See question 4 on p. 111 of the study book.)

Response (15 minutes)*5. Creating a Group Poem*

Using question 1 on p. 110 of the study book, ask the group as a whole to reflect on the meaning of the crucifixion and what it reveals about God, humanity, and the future of the world. Then ask participants to complete on a slip of paper one of the following phrases: “The cross is . . .” or “The cross is like . . .,” using poetic words or symbolic language. As they finish, ask them to hand you their slips. Share the writings with the larger group anonymously, reading the slips consecutively as one long poem.

Closing (5 minutes)*6. Prayer*

Close with the benediction in Ephesians 6:23–24.

7. Assignment

Distribute slips of paper on which you have written one of the following references: Matthew 28; John 20:1–25; Luke 24:1–53. Ask the participants to read the passage indicated on their slips and answer this question: What impressed you most about this Gospel writer’s version of the resurrection?

Unit 10: The Mystery Precedes (Mark 16:1–8)

Key Idea: Mark’s brief account of the resurrection is provocative, leaving it to us to discover the truth of the resurrection in our own experience of the risen Christ.

Advance Preparation

Provide hymnals for each participant and a concordance for each two or three to share. On the wall, post four newsprint sheets with headings as follows: Matthew 28; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 14:1–53; John 20:1–25. Provide also slips of paper, pencils, and copies of the Apostles’ Creed for all class members.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Prayer

Begin with sentence prayers of thanksgiving for the resurrection of Christ.

2. Singing a Hymn

Sing or read aloud an Easter hymn such as “Jesus Christ Is Risen Today” or “Thine Is the Glory.” Ask: How is the hymn similar to or different from the passage you were assigned as homework?

Presentation (20 minutes)

3. Reflection on the Assignment from Last Session

Ask participants to write their answers to the assignment question (found at the end of the previous session) on the appropriate sheet of newsprint. If there are some who did not complete the assignment, ask them to choose one of the Gospel passages to read silently while the others are writing.

4. Experiencing the Scripture

When all have finished, read the comments aloud. Invite someone to read aloud Mark 16:1–8. Discuss these questions:

- How is Mark’s account different from the others? What does the author of the study book say is Mark’s aim? (See p. 118.)
- When does the church experience the resurrected, crucified Messiah?
- The title of this unit is “The Mystery Precedes.” In what way does Christ precede us?
- If the ending of Mark as we have it is correct, and we are left dangling with an unfinished thought, what are some ways you would complete the wording of v. 8? (See question 2 on p. 120 of the study book.)

Exploration (20 minutes)*5. Concordance Exercise*

Have the participants look up *fear*, *fright*, and *terror* in a concordance to see where else these words occur in Mark's Gospel. Discuss question 3 on p. 120 of the study book.

Response (10 minutes)*6. Sentence Completion*

Remind participants that, in the first unit, they were asked to complete the sentence, "The good news of Jesus Christ is good news for me because" Now at the end of the study, ask them to complete this sentence: "The basic message of the Gospel of Mark is" Have them share their answers with one other person. Ask for a few volunteers to read aloud their sentences.

Closing (5 minutes)*7. Affirmation of Faith*

Say together the Apostles' Creed.

8. Prayer

Allow the group to spend a few moments in silent prayer, reflecting on the question, "How is the risen Christ visible in your following?" Follow the time of silent prayer with sentence prayers. After a few minutes, close with a prayer of your own.