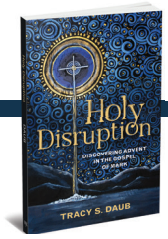
Holy Disruption Bible Study

GUIDE FOR SMALL-GROUP LEADERS

Studying *Holy Disruption* during the four weeks of Advent can shed new light on the coming of Emmanuel. Without a birth narrative, the Gospel of Mark highlights the incarnation's significance beyond the Christmas story to Jesus' whole life, death, and beyond.

Each week's discussion will require around 30 pages of reading, and a one-hour group gathering will allow time to read the focus texts together and discuss the five questions following each chapter. Encourage participants to follow the Daily Reading Guide in order to experience the entire book of Mark in the month of December.

This guide offers insights for the leader and a basic outline to follow for each session.



An Advent Group Study Based on *Holy Disruption: Discovering Advent in the Gospel of Mark*, by Tracy S. Daub

WJK Westminster John Knox Press

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

The End of the World as We Know It

Reading

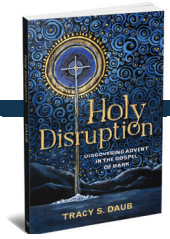
Introduction and Chapter One (pp. 1–32)

Insights for the Group Leader

- In the introduction, Daub explains how there is no birth narrative in Mark's gospel, but that Mark could be seen as using Jesus' baptism as his origin story, or that Mark may have "considered his entire Gospel to be Jesus' 'beginning' story," given verse 1:1 (p. 4).
- While we often think of Advent only in terms of Jesus' first coming (birth), the season of Advent traditionally recalls the "already and not yet" nature of living in the time between Christ's first and second comings.
- Some participants may have been steeped in End Times preaching and writing like that of Harold Camping or the Left Behind series. Remind congregants that most ideas about Jesus' second coming are conjecture with little basis in Scripture, and that Jesus warned his disciples about trying to discern the timing or details of his return.
- The idea of the world ending is more frightening for people living relatively comfortable lives, but for first century Jews, oppressed by the powerful and comfortable Romans, the idea of God's intervention would be hoped-for good news. We can experience that hope by reflecting on the challenges of our own lives and world and working to right wrongs where we can.

Leading the Group Discussion

- Open by reading aloud the focus Scriptures on pp. 9–11.
- Discuss the questions on pp. 31–32.
- Ask if anyone has been following the Daily Reading Guide, and if anything in those readings brings to mind insights relevant to the day's discussion.
- Close by repeating the simple prayer the author mentions on p. 30: "Come, Lord Jesus."



SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Peace on Earth, Goodwill to All

Reading

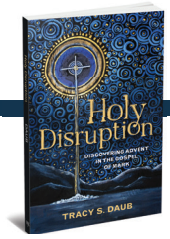
Chapter Two (pp. 33–61)

Insights for the Group Leader

- Many people can resonate with the idea that the cheery sentiments of the holiday season belie a more complicated reality of stress and even deep sorrow. Honor this reality and remind people who are grieving or struggling with depression that they are not alone.
- With its depiction of Jesus as disruptor, Mark emphasizes how the path to true peace often doesn't feel very peaceful. More than just the absence of violence, biblical shalom means well-being for all, which may require conflict and opposition to forces that inhibit that well-being.
- While many of us resist the idea of conflict, confrontation, or even mere discomfort, Daub points out that these may be the crosses Jesus tells his followers that they must take up. Niceness and neutrality might be the life we must lay down to pursue the radical peace that Jesus was born to bring the world.

Leading the Group Discussion

- Open by reading aloud the focus Scriptures on p. 33–35.
- Discuss the questions on p. 61.
- Ask if anyone has been following the Daily Reading Guide, and if anything in those readings brings to mind insights relevant to the day's discussion.
- Close by inviting participants to share the names of people in need of God's true peace. After each name, offer the words Jesus commanded the storm in Mark 4:39: "Peace! Be still."



THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Home for the Holidays

Reading

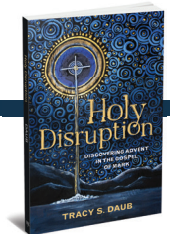
Chapter Three (pp. 63–90)

Insights for the Group Leader

- Despite the feel-good Christmas image of going or being "home for the holidays," many people experience anxiety or grief at the prospect of gathering with their families of origin. People may also engage with existential longings like the need to belong, to be loved, to be accepted, or (sometimes most challenging) to accept oneself. Likewise, you can consider the plight of those without homes—due to homelessness, eviction, refugee status, or being part of a diaspora community far from a beloved ancestral homeland.
- Israel's history of exile and Roman occupation complicated the Jewish people's sense of home. John 1:14's language of "pitching a tent among us" (see p. 75) evokes God bringing "home" to us. In God's kingdom, everyone finds belonging and family."
- Jesus emphasizes that familial relationships do not have to be defined by biology. Many people today have found that a "chosen family" of friends and surrogates embody the love of God's kingdom more than their families of origin do. For those who can't go or dread going home for the holidays, we have a model for seeking home and family elsewhere, and those of us with room around our table can embody God's kingdom by helping ensure everyone has a place where they belong.

Leading the Group Discussion

- Open by reading aloud the focus Scriptures on pp. 63–65.
- Discuss the questions on pp. 89–90.
- Ask if anyone has been following the Daily Reading Guide, and if anything in those readings brings to mind insights relevant to the day's discussion.
- Close with the prayerful words of the song Daub quotes on pp. 78–79. Speak the words of "Draw the Circle Wide" in unison, and if you know the tune, consider singing it together.



FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

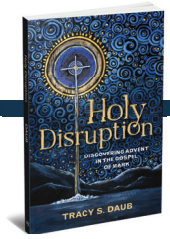
Hidden in Plain Sight

Reading

Chapter Four (pp. 91–111) and part of Chapter Five (pp. 117–121;
"The incarnation is the essence . . ." to "Matthew's cradle is Mark's cross.")

Insights for the Group Leader

- In addition to its lack of a birth narrative, Mark's gospel is also unique in its use of what scholars call "the messianic secret"—Jesus' warning to "tell no one" about his identity or his miraculous works. Some theorize that the purpose of this refrain is so that the revelation of the secret can come at the proper time.
- Jesus offered hints about his identity in his parables, cluing the people in that God's kingdom would not come the way they expected, but rather through the inversion of expectations. God will appear in a way you least expect, he told them, but meanwhile he showed them through his actions. Even today, we can find Jesus in forms we don't expect. (Reference Matthew 25:31–46.)
- While Jesus urges people to keep his identity a secret, there are three instances in Mark's gospel in which Jesus is called "Son of God": at his baptism, the Transfiguration, and—as Daub adds in chapter 5—at his crucifixion (Mark 15:39). These proclamations demonstrate how Emmanuel—God with us—is true not just at birth but throughout the Jesus story.

Leading the Group Discussion

- Open by reading aloud the focus Scriptures on pp. 91–93.
- Discuss the questions on p. 111.
- Ask if anyone has been following the Daily Reading Guide, and if anything in those readings brings to mind insights relevant to the day's discussion.
- Close by meditating on an image or figurine of baby Jesus lying in the manger. As you look at the infant Christ, pray the words said at each "Son of God" proclamation in Mark: "You are my Son, the Beloved;" "This is my Son, the Beloved;" and "Surely this man was the Son of God."