



CHRISTIANITY|**EXPLORED**

WHAT'S THE BEST NEWS  
YOU'VE EVER HEARD?

**LEADER'S HANDBOOK**



# SESSION 1

## **GOOD NEWS**

- *Welcome the guests to Christianity Explored and introduce yourself. Make sure everyone has been introduced to each other. Try to remember names ready for next week.*
- *Give a brief introduction. If you have more than one discussion group, this is best given by the course leader or speaker to everyone together. (The wording below is intended only as a general guide.)*

As we begin, I want to reassure you that:

- you won't be asked to read aloud, pray, sing or do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- we aren't going to take your phone number and pester you. If you decide not to come back, we are still delighted you made time to come today.
- you can ask any question you want, or alternatively feel free just to sit and listen.

Over the next seven sessions we will explore three questions that cut right to the heart of Christianity: Who is Jesus? What did he achieve? How should we respond?

We also want to spend time addressing whatever questions are important to you. As well as having times of discussion in groups, we will be available to chat at the end of the evening.

We want to give you the opportunity to encounter the real Jesus. That's why we are going to work our way through one book of the Bible, Mark's Gospel.

We want you to be able to check out the facts for yourself. That's why we will give you a reading plan that will take you right through Mark in manageable sections, so that you can examine the evidence for yourself.

Please feel free to make notes and list questions you may have as you listen to the Bible talk. There is space for notes in your Handbook.

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*Give each guest a Mark's Gospel or Bible and a Handbook.*

*Ask the group to turn to Session 1 on page 7 of the Handbook.*

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- Explain the four sections of the Handbook:

**Explore** = we read the Bible together and talk about what we've read (different in Session 1).

**Listen** = we listen to the Bible talk, or watch the video, and make notes in the talk outline in the Handbook.

**Discuss** = we discuss some of the points from the Bible talk.

**Follow up** = you read some of Mark for yourself; then bring any questions you have to the group.

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*Show the group how to find Mark in their Bibles (if you're using full Bibles), and the verse and chapter divisions, e.g. Mark 1:1 – 3:6. You may want to explain that Mark didn't divide his book into chapters and verses. These were added later to help us find our way around.*

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 **EXPLORE**

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*Ask your group the following questions. The first one is not in the Handbook.*

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**What's your name and what made you come on *Christianity Explored*?**

This question is designed to help the group members get to know each other, and to help you begin to understand why they have come on the course.

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*Ask your group to turn to the question on page 7 of the Handbook.*

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**What's the best news you've ever heard?**

This question acts as an icebreaker, and also introduces the subject of "good news" before the talk/video.

 **LISTEN**

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*(Page 8 in the group members' Handbook.) Encourage the group to make notes and list questions they may have as they listen to the Bible talk or watch the video. There is space in the Handbook to make notes.*

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*"The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ..."*

(Mark 1:1)

- When we see the order and beauty of the world and the human body, the question is: Did this all happen by chance? Or did someone create it?

- The Bible says God is the One who created the universe we live in and the bodies we inhabit. So how can we know him?
- We can know what God is like by looking at Jesus Christ.
- Christianity is about Christ – a title that means “God’s only chosen King”.
- Christianity is the “gospel” – the good news – about Jesus Christ.
- When Jesus was baptized, God the Father announced, “You are my Son”.
- God has revealed himself in human history through Jesus Christ. When we look at Jesus, all the guessing games about God stop.

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*Note: Christianity Explored is based on the 1984 version of the New International Version (NIV). If you are using the 2011 revised NIV, you will find that “Jesus Christ” in Mark 1:1 has been changed to “Jesus the Messiah”. The change from “Christ” to “Messiah” does not change the meaning of the verse, since the terms mean the same. They speak of the King whom God promised to send into the world. “Christ” is from the Greek word; “Messiah” comes from the Hebrew.*

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## DISCUSS

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*(Page 9 in the group members’ Handbook.) Ask your group if there was anything that stood out or particularly struck them from the talk/video. This will help them to respond specifically to what they have just heard, before moving on to the group discussion questions.*

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### **1. Is there anything that intrigues or puzzles you about Jesus?**

The answers to this question will help you to get a feel for the members of

your group and their current thoughts about Jesus. Don't feel that you need to comment on everything that is said. There's plenty of time for thinking to be challenged over the course of seven sessions. However, if you know that something will be looked at in a future session, do let the group members know that you will be discussing it at that point.

## **2. How do you feel about reading Mark's Gospel?**

Have the group members understood from the talk that Christianity is about Jesus Christ, and that Mark tells us the "good news" about Jesus? This means that reading Mark's Gospel is a great way to explore Christianity.

Some of your group may be unsure or worried about reading through a whole book of the Bible. Reassure them that you will help them with any questions they have about what they've read.

## **3. If you could ask God one question, and you knew it would be answered, what would it be?**

Ask your group to share their answers if they're happy to do so. Note down what they are so that you can deal with them at some point during the course. Do listen carefully to every question and assure your group that there will be an opportunity to return to them during *Christianity Explored*. (Some questions will be answered by the Bible studies and talks/videos and some – like questions about suffering – are best dealt with after the talks about sin or the cross.) See page 121 for guidance on common questions.

As a supplementary question, ask your group:

### **Think about the god you are asking that question to. What is that god like?**

This will help you to get a feel for people's current views of God. You may want to refer back to some of these views later on in the course as the character of God becomes clear through his Son, Jesus.

## ➔ FOLLOW UP

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*(Page 10 in the group members' Handbook.) Let people know that they have a section called "Follow Up" in their Handbook, which they should read through before the next session.*

*If you have time, show the group how to approach their personal reading plan by doing Question 1 with them. This will reassure any who are nervous about studying the Bible in this way – and will also reduce the amount of home study they need to do for this first week.*

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### **Read Mark 1:1-20**

**1. The word "gospel" means "good news". Mark begins his book of good news with three statements about Jesus:**

- a) by the Old Testament prophets (messengers) (Mark 1:2-3)**
- b) by John the Baptist (Mark 1:7)**
- c) by God himself (Mark 1:11)**

**What do they each say about Jesus?**

- a) The Old Testament prophets pointed to Jesus as the Lord. They said someone would come before him to prepare the way for him.
- b) John the Baptist, himself a great prophet, said that Jesus is "more powerful" than him.
- c) God described Jesus as his own Son, whom he loves and with whom he is pleased.

### **Read Mark 1:21 – 2:17**

**2. In chapters 1 and 2 Jesus shows his authority in different situations. (See Mark 1:16-20, 21-22, 23-28, 40-45; 2:1-12.) When Jesus speaks or acts, what sorts of things happen?**

- He calls people, who immediately drop what they are doing and follow him (Mark 1:16-20).
- People are astonished because he teaches with authority, and not like their religious leaders (Mark 1:21-22).
- He rebukes evil spirits, and they leave (Mark 1:23-28).
- He heals sickness, even the most serious illnesses (Mark 1:29-34, 40-45).
- He forgives sins (Mark 2:1-12).

**Read Mark 2:18 – 3:6**

**3. Even at this early stage, Jesus divided opinions. Some people were amazed by him, while others were enraged. What are your early impressions of Jesus?**

Mark's design in writing the first part of his Gospel is to prompt the question: "Who is Jesus?". Question 3 is designed to encourage group members to reflect on what they have learned about the identity of Jesus.

**Do you have any questions about Mark 1:1 – 3:6?**

The next session will start with group members being asked if they have any questions about the section of Mark they read at home. You will find help in answering difficult questions from Mark's Gospel in the appendix on page 113.