



LENT COURSE 2018

Week 1 – Fresh start

As we start the Lent course, we will be getting to know Jesus better by reading his life story. We will also read how lives are changed when people get to know him.

We are taking a journey with Jesus from the River Jordan, where he was baptised, to the city of Jerusalem, where he was crucified and buried, and where he rose from the dead. The events happened 2,000 years ago, but you can still visit the places Jesus lived.

The prison stories in this course and associated book are up-to-date. They have been written about the hope found by people in the past few decades – almost all of them are still living today. As you read the stories and verses, ask God to speak to you about your life and expect to hear from God through what you read. Each week in the course there's a story written about a prisoner or an ex-prisoner, as well as a few verses from the Bible.

The course is designed to be used weekly during Lent. The optional *40 Stories of Hope* book can be used daily, starting on Ash Wednesday. The weekly Lent course is taken from the 'Looking back, looking forward' sections from the book, including questions for groups to discuss.

You can read the short Bible sections or if you prefer, you can read the whole chapters in Mark's Gospel to put the story into context.

READ: MARK CHAPTERS 1-3

Key verses

'At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee. John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. Jesus was coming up out of the water. Just then he saw heaven being torn open. Jesus saw the Holy Spirit coming down on him like a dove. A voice spoke to him from heaven. It said, "You are my Son, and I love you. I am very pleased with you."

At once the Holy Spirit sent Jesus out into the desert. He was in the desert 40 days. There Satan tempted him. The wild animals didn't harm Jesus. Angels took care of him.'

Mark 1:9-13

THINK

1. Our relationships help to shape the people we become. Which relationships have shaped you for the better?

2. Looking at the description of Jesus' baptism, how would you describe Jesus' relationship with his Father in heaven?

3. When Jesus began preaching, he talked about the 'good news of God'. What does God's good news look like in your world? What is your experience of God's good news?

4. Jesus offers hope and healing. Where is this hope and healing needed today in your life or the lives of those around you?

LIFE LESSONS

1. When we become Christians, we are adopted into God's family. What difference would it make to your life to hear God say: 'You are my child, and I love you. I am very pleased with you'?

2. Jesus was tested and tempted. When we decide to follow Jesus we are tested and tempted too. What could you do to find the support you need to stay on course when life gets difficult?

3. In Mark's Gospel we see that Jesus gives his followers a new sense of purpose. What sense of purpose or direction has God given you? Is there a promise in the Bible that stands out for you?

4. Forgiveness is an important part of a Christian's journey. We accept God's forgiveness for all the wrong we have done, and we find freedom when we forgive others. What stops you forgiving others and receiving forgiveness?

LOOK AHEAD

In the first chapters of Mark's Gospel, Jesus' identity is being established. We see God fleshed out as a man who is tempted, just like we are tempted, but who doesn't sin.

The prison stories show that Jesus gives people the power to change. When someone's life is changed, they want others to discover God's love too.

Is there someone who needs you to introduce them to Jesus?

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Rebuilding relationships

I was in prison in 2014 when I saw a green flyer on a noticeboard that said, 'Caring for Ex-Offenders'. They claimed that they could link you to a local church in an area, and help you with employment and housing. So I wrote these people a letter. We were writing back and forth, but they needed to know where I was going to be situated before they could link me with a church.

It was getting close to my release date and I was so scared. I really didn't want to go back to Bristol where I was brought up. Everyone I knew was in addiction - family members, friends - I had nothing to occupy my time. My daughter was living in Wales. I had loads of conditions that restricted where I could go in Bristol. In all honesty, once out I just wanted to go back to prison.

Finding hope

I had been in a Bristol probation bail hostel for a few months and had started drinking again, but not heavily. I was not banned from drinking, but I wasn't allowed to 'blow over 35' (the drink-driving breathalyser limit). I remember telling my key worker that my drinking was going to get out of hand. I recall sitting down on the pavement one day with a can of beer and I just broke down, sobbing. I could see that my life was going to deteriorate again through drink and drugs.

A few days later I was told by the hostel that someone had been in contact with probation and wanted to meet me. His name was Silas, and he was a pastor of a church called Hope Chapel. I discovered from Silas that Caring for Ex-offenders had contacted him and asked if he would meet up with me. When we met, Silas gave me directions to his church, which also ran a foodbank that day. The church was about a mile and a half away. After I had met Silas, I bumped into three people who asked if they could pray for me. I said I was in a bit of a rush, but they prayed for me anyway. I went back to the hostel, got my bike and cycled to Hope Chapel.

New connections

When I got to Hope Chapel I was given some food by the foodbank, and some people chatted to me. I didn't find it easy to chat, but meeting these new people was vital in keeping me away from my old life. I was told that there was a recovery group in the church every Wednesday, and I was eager to see what that was about, so I got involved straight away. Then I linked up with MentorMe. By engaging with positive people, I was able to keep away from my old haunts. With the help of MentorMe I can now be around family members, even if they are still in addiction, but I am strong enough for it not to adversely affect me.

I have now re-established my relationship with my daughter. I travel to Wales every weekend to pick her up and she comes to stay with me, which makes me feel brilliant. I am able to be a daddy as much as I can. I am also slowly rebuilding a relationship with my dad,

which I have never found easy. But the Man Up course that I am doing, which is run by one of the churches, is really helping me to do this.

One of the guys at Hope is now mentoring an old childhood friend of mine who has also been in prison and addiction. We are able to encourage one another. I have now done the training course with MentorMe so I can mentor others. I have some work as well, driving care worker staff to addresses where they are able to care for elderly, disabled, and vulnerable people.

Contributed by an ex-offender.

MentorMe is a Bristol-based project that mentors men and women coming out of prison and relocating in the Bristol area. The mentors come from local Bristol churches.



MARK 3:31-35

'Jesus' mother and brothers came and stood outside. They sent someone in to get him. A crowd was sitting around Jesus. They told him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside. They are looking for you."

"Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" he asked.

Then Jesus looked at the people sitting in a circle around him. He said, "Here is my mother! Here are my brothers! Anyone who does what God wants is my brother or sister or mother."



SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

As Christians we are adopted into God's family. It's a family that links us with millions of Jesus' followers throughout history and around the world. One day, countless numbers of people from every tribe and nation will stand before God, worshipping him (Revelation 7:9).



Prayer

Dear God, thank you for making it possible for me to know you as my Father. I am sorry for ignoring you sometimes. Please help me to follow your Son Jesus. Amen.



'Give praise to the Lord.
Give praise to God our Savior.
He carries our heavy loads day after day.
Our God is a God who saves.
He is the King and the LORD.
He saves us from death.'

PSALM 68:19-20

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