

DELTA GROUPS LENT BIBLE READING PLAN

Based off of N.T. Wright's *Lent for Everyone, Year B*

Day	Date	Scripture	Day	Date	Scripture
1	3/2	Mark 1:1-20	23	3/28	Mark 9:30-50
2	3/3	Mark 1:21-45	24	3/29	Mark 10:1-16
3	3/4	Mark 2:1-17	25	3/30	Mark 10:17-31
4	3/5	Mark 1:9-15	26	3/31	Mark 10:32-45
	3/6		27	4/1	Mark 10:46-52
5	3/7	Mark 2:18-28	28	4/2	John 12:20-33
6	3/8	Mark 3:1-19		4/3	
7	3/9	Mark 3:20-35	29	4/4	Mark 11
8	3/10	Mark 4:1-20	30	4/5	Mark 12:1-17
9	3/11	Mark 4:21-41	31	4/6	Mark 12:18-44
10	3/12	Mark 8:31-38	32	4/7	Mark 13
	3/13		33	4/8	Mark 11:1-11
11	3/14	Mark 5:1-20	34	4/9	Mark 14:1-15:47
12	3/15	Mark 5:21-43		4/10	
13	3/16	Mark 6:1-29	35	4/11	Mark 14:3-9
14	3/17	Mark 6:30-44	36	4/12	Mark 14:32-52
15	3/18	Mark 6:45-56	37	4/13	Mark 14:53-65
16	3/19	John 2:13-22	38	4/14	Mark 14:12-26
	3/20		39	4/15	Mark 15:1-41
17	3/21	Mark 7:1-13	40	4/16	Mark 15:42-47
18	3/22	Mark 7:14-23		4/17	Mark 16
19	3/23	Mark 7:24-37			
20	3/24	Mark 8:1-30			
21	3/25	Mark 9:2-29			
22	3/26	John 3:14-21			
	3/27				

WEEK 1

March 2 (Ash Wednesday)

Mark 1:1-20

John the Baptist was telling the people to “Get ready! The Messiah, the King, the Lord is coming!” This is why John was calling the people to repent. He was telling them to clean up the house because someone very important was coming over to stay!

Reflect on this image of preparing the home of your heart for Jesus’ coming. Why do you think Jesus has decided to come to stay with you?
What “clutter” in your heart do you need God to clean up?

March 3, Thursday

Mark 1:21-45

Jesus came teaching with authority.

What does “authority” mean in this passage — authority over what?
What about Jesus’ teaching seemed authoritative to those hearing it, do you think? How else do you see Jesus’ authority demonstrated?
Have you experienced Jesus — not church, religion, a pastor — not the “teachers of the law” — but *Jesus* as an authority?

March 4, Friday

Mark 2:1-17

What surprises you about Jesus’ reaction to the man being lowered down through the roof while he is teaching?
Jesus connects his authority to forgive sins with the physical healing of the paralyzed man. (One is given as a sign of the other.) As Christians, is this an important connection for us to keep in mind, as well?
When Jesus calls Levi, he bids him, even as a sinner, to “Follow me.” The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, “When Jesus calls someone, he commands them to come and die.” In other words, Jesus calls the sick, but he calls them so that they can be made well, for their old life of sickness to be dead and gone. How is Jesus calling you to “follow,” to “come and die,” during this season of Lent?

March 5, Saturday

Mark 1:9-15

Why do you think Jesus was baptized?

The words that God speaks over Jesus at his baptism echo those recorded in the prophet Isaiah

42:1:

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.”

March 6, Sunday

March 7, Monday

Mark 2:18-28

Why were Jesus and his disciples not fasting? Simply put, fasting is a symbol — a way of pointing to our spiritual hunger through our physical hunger. We fast as a way of saying to our hearts, “I need God more than I need anything else.” This is why it makes no sense for the disciples of Jesus to fast — because the very thing that fasting is pointing toward is right there with them.

Lent has traditionally been a time of fasting in the church — a time when we recognize that though we know Christ is with us, our hearts often stray away.

Do you feel hungry for God? Do you trust that God will satisfy your hunger?

March 8, Tuesday

Mark 3:1-19

We read that Jesus felt “anger” and “deep distress” over the stubbornness in the hearts of those at the synagogue. Do Jesus’ emotions surprise you?

What stubbornness or hardness do you struggle with in your heart? What does Christ’s heart look like? How would you describe it?

March 9, Wednesday

Mark 3:20-35

This passage drives us to consider the only real options we have to explain who Jesus is and what he is doing. His family worry that “He is out of his mind.” The scribes declare that “He is possessed by Beelzebul!” So, Jesus is either crazy, he is evil, or he is the Son of God. There are really no other options. The question then becomes, if Jesus is the Son of God, what does that mean for us?

The name “Beelzebul” or “Beelzebub” literally means “Lord of the house.” It was a term used in Judaism to refer to the prince of demons. Jesus says that he has come to plunder the strong man’s house — to liberate those who are held captive by the strong man.

What does it mean for you that Jesus is the Son of God?

March 10, Thursday

Mark 4:1-20

Jesus' parable gives both hope and warning. The seed is being sown, but what soil will that seed land upon? What kind of tilling (weeding, taking away rocks, loosening the soil, etc...) does your heart need? Pray for God to till the soil of your heart.

When asked about the parable, Jesus cites Isaiah 6:9-10:

“they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!”

In Isaiah, the prophet is talking about how the hearts of the Israelites will be hardened, and this will bring about the judgment of the Babylonian Exile. By citing this passage, Jesus is saying that his teaching will also be met with hardness of heart — and this hardness of heart will also lead to judgement and exile. However, the judgement would be the judgment of the cross, which Jesus would bear for us. The exile would be the exile of death, and the forsakenness of sin, which Jesus would pass through for our sakes.

How have you “seen but not perceived” Christ’s love for you? How have you “heard but not understood” his call to follow him?

March 11, Friday

Mark 4:21-41

N.T. Wright, reflecting on verses 35-41, observes:

Part of the point of Christian discipleship is to have our minds and imaginations challenged, opened, stretched, reshaped. The world — God’s world! — is quite different, and a lot more unpredictable and interesting, than we often suppose. And at the heart of it is Jesus himself, sometimes apparently asleep but ready to wake up, transform our scary situations, and bounce the question back to us. When we pray, ‘Wake up, Lord!’ we need to be prepared for him to reply that it is we who have been asleep. Our wake-up call to God is often the moment when God’s wake-up call to us is finally getting through.

Is there anything in the parables that Jesus tells that is a “wake-up call” to you today? Jesus asks his disciples, “Why are you scared? Don’t you believe yet?” Reflect on this question in your own heart.

March 12, Saturday

Mark 8:31-38

Jesus reveals to his disciples that “the Son of Man must suffer...be killed and after three days rise again.” This is the mystery of the Gospel — the good news that Jesus has died the death that we deserve in order to give us life.

And yet, immediately after this, Jesus also makes it clear that the life he gives us is not

identical to a “regular” life. We are called to “take up our cross,” as well – to put to death our “old” life as we now are clothed in the new life of Christ.

What does it mean to “deny yourself” and “take up your cross?”

WEEK 2

March 13, Sunday

March 14, Monday

Mark 5:1-20

On the surface, this is a passage about a desperate, possessed man, living as if he is dead, being freed from his oppression by the power and love of Jesus. That is amazing enough. However, the healing that lies under the surface is even more astonishing. The demons identify themselves as “Legion,” would every Jew would have understood as a reference both to the number of demons, but also to the occupying forces of the Roman military. The pigs, also, were a sign of Roman occupation. Jews would never keep pigs, themselves, as they were forbidden to eat pork by the Law.

So, when Jesus casts the Legion into the pigs, which then hurl themselves over the cliff, Jesus is not only declaring freedom for the man, but for this whole region, Jesus is declaring that his ministry and power is not limited just to Jews and Jewish areas, but even to the Gentiles of the Roman occupation.

Do you think that Jesus made this journey across the lake just for this one man?
The forces of sin can seem so strong — like we are going up against an entire legion all on our own. What legions do you struggle with?
Why do you think Jesus did not allow the man to follow him into the boat? What mission is he given instead?

March 15, Tuesday

Mark 5:21-43

Often Jesus’ timing is different from ours. Have you ever felt like Jairus, asking and pleading with Jesus to hurry, only to see him stop in the middle of the crowd to ask a seemingly nonsensical question?
Jesus tells the woman, “Your faith has healed you” (v34). How do you see the woman’s faith in action? How do you put your faith into action?

March 16, Wednesday

Mark 6:1-29

Jesus’ homecoming is not quite what we might expect. The very people who should have known Jesus the best end questioning and taking offense at who Jesus has been revealed to be. This is in stark contrast to the beginning of the previous chapter (Mark 5:1-20), where Jesus is immediately recognized for who is by a complete stranger in a strange place.

Why do you think Jesus’ hometown struggled to recognize and understand who Jesus

really was? In what ways might we, even today, struggle with being “too familiar” with Jesus?

March 17, Thursday

Mark 6:30-44

N.T. Wright makes this comment on this passage:

Mark’s point is that, in God’s kingdom, there is indeed a new creation, bursting out in all directions. The generosity of spirit that made Jesus react with sympathy and compassion when the crowds invaded his quiet, private time alone with his friends is the same generosity of spirit that we associate with God, the creator. And since everything we know about God we know most securely because of Jesus, it shouldn’t surprise us that sometimes, always surprisingly but always characteristically, Jesus does what God does, providing richly for those who have come to be with him. Even when they’d crashed in on his evening off.¹

Jesus saw the crowds and “had compassion on them.” How have you felt the compassion of the Lord in your life?

Jesus unscripted the disciples to be his hands and feet — vehicles of his compassion.

How is God calling you to be a vehicle of his compassion?

What do you notice about the specific instructions Jesus gave in organizing the people to be fed? Why did he gather them into smaller groups? Why did he specifically have them sit “on the green grass”?

March 18, Friday

Mark 6:45-56

Sometimes Jesus asks us to do things that are unexpected and maybe don’t even make sense. Like in this passage, when Jesus tells his disciples to get on the boat and start sailing without him. I often wonder what the disciples thought Jesus was going to do. Why was he sending them away? Would he meet them, days later, across the lake?

And yet, in doing this unexpected thing, the disciples got to experience something even more unexpected, more miraculous.

What unexpected thing(s) has Jesus asked you to do?

Consider some of the Jesus’ teachings and commands (like “Love your enemies”). These commands can sometimes feel like Jesus telling us to take off across the lake without him. How can we begin to expect the unexpected in following Jesus’ commands?

March 19, Saturday

John 2:13-22

Yes, we are shifting away from the Gospel of Mark and into the Gospel of John for a brief

¹ N.T. Wright, *Lent for Everyone*, 54

moment. (We'll do this a few times in our readings.)

The temple was the center of Jewish life. It was an identity marker. It was the place where heaven and earth communed. While a place like that is pretty rare in our society today, we all have places, spaces in our lives and in our hearts where we seek to have those needs of identity, belonging, forgiveness, and recognition from something outside of ourselves met. These are our temples.

What are your temples? Where have you sought identity, belonging, forgiveness, and recognition?

Jesus saw how this temple had become a burden, or gross distortion of God's mercy and love. And so he turned over the tables of the money changers, and he pointed to the redemption that he would bring through his death and resurrection.

Pray that God would tear down the temples in your heart.

What does it mean that Jesus has become the one in whom we can ask for our identity, belonging, forgiveness, and recognition?

WEEK 3

March 20, Sunday

March 21, Monday

Mark 7:1-13

It should be noted that the hand and dish washing “tradition” that is discussed in this passage was not the simple washing that any culture should embrace for good hygiene. This was hand washing made into an art form. An analogy might be the difference between making some tea with a Lipton tea bag and a tea ceremony in Japan. At the end of both you’ll drink your tea, but the process and the purpose between the two really cannot be compared.

The issue that Jesus raises cuts through the question of the rules of dishwashing. Jesus’ concern is about how the tradition ultimately points to the coming of the Kingdom. In other words, the Pharisee’s concern for the purity of the law and their cultural traditions has actually led them to undermine the very purpose and meaning of the Law in the first place — to point toward the coming of the Kingdom of God, which is now present in Jesus.

What rules and/or burdens have you placed on yourself that are keeping you from experiencing the love and freedom of Christ?

March 22, Tuesday

Mark 7:14-23

On the surface level, Jesus seems to be declaring freedom from the oppressive rules of Jewish religiosity. And, to a certain extent, he is. (v19: “In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.”) Yet, as Jesus often does, he frees us from a difficult rule only to identify the real, deeper, problem that we have. The problem, Jesus says, is not with the food you are eating — it’s with what’s in your heart. It’s one thing to eat clean food, but how does one get a clean heart? It is this need that Jesus has come to fulfill.

Rules — both religious and social — often help to protect us from our worst tendencies (vv. 21-22). They provide guardrails that keep us from steering too off course.

Prayerfully consider what are some guardrails that you could talk about putting in place with your Delta Group. (For example, the guardrail of accountability to regular scripture reading, limiting your time on your phone, etc...)

Even with guardrails, the cure we need is a clean heart. Pray to Jesus asking him to clean your heart, and to convict you of those areas of your heart that you have kept hidden.

March 23, Wednesday

Mark 7:24-37

The story of the Greek woman just seems so out of character for Jesus. Why did he reply to her in this way, seemingly unconcerned about her or her daughter. Again, it just doesn't seem to jive with what we've seen of Jesus so far in the Gospel of Mark.

Part of the issue here is understanding how Jesus' ministry relates to God's plan. As the Apostle Paul makes clear in Romans, "God's plan in sending the Messiah was a plan conceived in two quite distinct stages. First, the Messiah had to come to God's ancient people, Israel. They had to hear the message of the kingdom. But then, as the ancient prophets and Psalms had often declared, once God had fulfilled his promises to Israel in sending their king, then — and only then! — the non-Jewish nations would be brought in."²

The miracle of this exchange is that Jesus gives the woman (and us) a foretaste of the fulfillment of His kingdom — a mercy that would only truly be present after Jesus' death and resurrection. The woman's faith, expressed in great humility, was able to receive the gift that Jesus would freely give in ultimate humility.

Sometimes it can be difficult for us to see that the feasts of the world are incomparable to the glory of even the crumbs of the Lord's table. What glimpses (crumbs) of God's kingdom have you seen? Have you asked for any?

Though it may seem crass, pray that the Lord would give you such a hunger and longing for God's kingdom as we see in the Syrophenician woman.

March 24, Thursday

Mark 8:1-33

This chapter marks the very middle of Mark's Gospel. And, within it, we find two stories that illustrate the shift from the beginning of the Gospel as it now heads toward its end — Jesus' death on the cross. The first story is Jesus' healing of the blind man (vv22-26). Oddly, this healing happens in two stages. Knowing that Jesus could have done anything, the two-stage healing must have meaning. And, indeed, with the later story of Jesus asking the disciples who he is (vv27-30), we see the deeper meaning. Just like the blind man, the disciples were also experiencing a two-stage opening of their eyes. They were beginning to see that Jesus was not just a great healer or a prophet, but something (someone!) even greater. But even with this revelation, the disciples could not see completely, and they would not see until after Jesus' resurrection.

How do you struggle to see who Jesus really is at times?

² N.T. Wright, *Lent for Everyone*, 75.

March 25, Friday

Mark 9:2-29

How do you think you would have reacted to seeing what Peter, James, and John did on the mountain?

Have you ever had an experience of profound worship?

Sometimes our worship of God can feel rote or mundane. Why? Pray that God would give you an experience of profound worship.

March 26, Saturday

John 3:14-21

The words of John 3:16 have become so well known they are, as N.T. Wright puts it, “in danger of forming part of a Christian’s mental wallpaper, the pattern so familiar that we no longer notice it.” How difficult it is to truly accept that God loves us. Spend time meditating on this truth today. God loves you. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

WEEK 4

March 27, Sunday

March 28, Monday

Mark 9:30-50

How absurd it seems, at least in retrospect, that the disciples would be arguing about “who was the greatest.” What standards were they using? The number of miracles they had each performed? The number of people they had brought to Jesus for healing or teaching? Of course, as silly as it sounds, our hearts turn the same way. “Who is the greatest” is just another way of saying “Who’s the most right?” or “Who is in/who is out?”

This point is driven home by the disciples’ concern over the stranger who was driving out demons in Jesus’ name. *They* were Jesus’ chosen disciples! What right did that stranger have to be doing such miracles? He must be stopped!

In all this, Jesus points his disciples back to an attitude of humility — to keep focused on him, and on the work of service that he had set before them.

What are ways that you might get distracted from Jesus and from the work of service he has called you to?

How do you see God at work in places outside of your church / your denomination / your culture?

March 29, Tuesday

Mark 10:1-16

In his response to the Pharisees, Jesus notes that Moses wrote the law on divorce in this way “because your hearts were hard.” He then points to a deeper interpretation of the law — one that goes all the way back to the beginning, to Genesis and God’s original creation. In effect, Jesus is saying that he is bringing a change — a cure for the hardness of heart that has pulled us away from who God created us to be.

We still struggle with hardness of heart. How has your heart been hard against God and his will for you?

March 30, Wednesday

Mark 10:17-31

A poem by Karsten Piper:

He spread his blanket on the sand, kneeled and arranged his bowls and tools: hook, mallet, clamp, chisel, rasp, razor.

His smile glinted in the rongeur’s claws, and upside down in the curette’s spoon. Light shone

out of the needle's eye.

"Hoosh," he said and began plucking hairs, paring calluses, shearing wool, shaving to the follicles, cutting to the quick.

He sorted these, trimming skin with skin, hair with hair, into rows of clay bowls, and set a large basin to catch each sour drip

as he sliced the hide and used both fists to yank back the whole stubbled, gray pelt, as wet and red on its underside as afterbirth.

He piled this heavily away, draping it in clean linen, and turned to the meat and bone heaving under sheer, tight membrane.

Sawteeth chewed into femur, rib and shoulder. Pliers twisted and wrenched away tendons until everything softened, canted, and collapsed—

yet not one sliver dies. Each ribbon and shard bawls for the horror and hurt of their missing, wishing for the old braying wholeness.

Pain bloodies evening and morning, stabbing day after day from even the first cuts, like the slow light of far stars.

Eyeballs and heart float alone in the last bowl, dark and defenseless, quavering when he leans down and they recognize in his eyes how little is left.

"Easy now, Camel," he says and lifts me in his fingertips, one quivering strand at a time, through the eye of the needle.

March 31, Thursday

Mark 10:32-45

Once again, the disciples show just how blind they are (and how blind we tend to be!). James and John want to be enthroned on Jesus' right and left. But, they haven't been listening — and they don't understand what that would mean.

Jesus lets them know that the places at the right and left of his throne have already been taken. Of course, what they don't know is that Jesus is referring to the thieves that would hang on crosses to right and left of Jesus' own. The cross was to be Jesus' throne, the place where his power would be fully revealed. To be great in Jesus' kingdom means to bear the cross — to become a servant, a "slave of all."

What does it mean to "be a servant," to be "slave of all" for Jesus' kingdom?

April 1, Friday

Mark 10:46-52

Jesus asks the blind man, "What do you want me to do for you?" What a strange thing for Jesus to ask. Shouldn't it be obvious? Doesn't the blind man want to see? But, in truth, it is not so simple. As N.T. Wright points out:

We might think: well, of course he'll want to be able to see again. But will he? To see again would mean that his livelihood, such as it was, would be gone. No more begging. To ask for his sight would mean not only having the faith that Jesus could and would do it. It would mean having the faith that he could set off on a whole new life, a life set free by Jesus from the prison where it had been kept, but free to do . . . what? A new, strange, dangerous world opened up. How easy for him to back down, to say, "Teacher, I need money." Play safe. Don't be extreme, don't build your hopes up.³

How do you answer Jesus' question: "What do you want me to do for you?"

April 2, Saturday

John 12:20-33

It is a strange response that we see from Jesus. A group of Greeks, non-Jews ask to see him, and Jesus launches into this soliloquy about his death. But, while it may not seem connected at first, the truth is far deeper. How will the world, Jews and Greeks alike, be able to see Jesus? They will see him because of his death and resurrection — because through his death on the cross, he ushered in the Kingdom of God that was for all people. This is a mark of the kingdom, and a mark of the church to come — a church that would spread all over the world.

How does Jesus' death and resurrection break down the divisions of our human kingdoms (nations, states, political parties, cultures, neighborhoods, etc...)?

³ *Lent for Everyone*, 108.

WEEK 5

April 3, Sunday

April 4, Monday

Mark 11

In verses 12-14, Jesus curses a fig tree for not bearing any fruit. The clear expectation is that this tree should be bearing fruit by now — it is covered in mature leaves. But, instead, as hungry travelers come to it, hoping to get a quick snack to aid them on their journey, they find nothing. Only disappointment.

While this may seem like a strange thing for Jesus to get upset about, it becomes clear as the passage moves along that this really isn't about figs at all. Jesus' mind is on the temple — this place meant to produce fruit of God's forgiveness, mercy, and majesty — and yet, Jesus is fully aware that there is no such fruit to be found at the temple. Instead, those who are hungry for God's presence and grace find only barriers and judgment put in their way.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, we are also called to bear fruit — love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

- How have you experienced God working and tilling the soil of your heart to produce the fruit of the Spirit?

April 5, Tuesday

Mark 12:1-17

In the parable, the tenant farmers ignore the messengers that are sent, one after another. This is a clear allusion to the many prophets of the Old Testament. At last, though, it is not just another prophet that is sent, but the son, the cornerstone.

- How do you find the attitude of the tenant farmers reflected in your own heart?
- In what way is Jesus the cornerstone? In what way is Jesus the cornerstone *for you*?

April 6, Wednesday

Mark 12:18-44

The example that the Sadducees give — this unfortunate woman who had seven husbands — was meant by the Sadducees to demonstrate the logical ridiculousness of something like the resurrection or even eternal life. There is a lot that seems illogical and ridiculous about Jesus' teaching. (Think of all that we have read in the Gospel of Mark so far!) It runs so counter to the teaching of the world — of those striving to glorify themselves and to justify their own power. But, as Jesus notes, this type of thinking only seems ridiculous when God's power is taken out of the equation. God's power is able to take something as absurd as dying for one's enemies — a man's death on a cross — and turn it into the greatest victory over all the powers of sin and

death.

- What are some of Jesus' teachings that you struggle with — either to understand or to practice?
- How does knowing God's power help to overcome some of those struggles?

April 7, Thursday

Mark 13

There are many different ways that the words of Jesus in this chapter have been interpreted over the centuries and years — whether this is a prophecy of the end times, or a prophecy of the fall of the temple in the 1st century, and everything in-between. Just like the disciples, we often focus on the question of *when*. But perhaps we should focus more on the work that Jesus said his followers should participate in, and the warnings of how we might be led astray from this work.

- What work do you have as Jesus' follower? Do you think there should be an urgency to this work? Why or why not?
- What are ways that you have found yourself led astray from this work?

April 8, Friday

Mark 11:1-11

We return today to Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem.

- What does it mean that Jesus is King or Lord for you? What power does he have in your life? What privilege does he deserve?
- How does Jesus' Lordship surprise you — how is it different from your own expectations of power and privilege?

April 9, Saturday

Mark 14:1-15:47

Going into the final week of Lent, we begin by reading the whole of the passion story. The chapter begins with one more foreshadow of what was about to happen — Jesus is anointed, as one would have anointed a body for burial in Jesus' time. Even now, after all the preparatory words that Jesus has given to his disciples, they still don't really understand.

We can be the same, but maybe for the opposite reason. Especially for those who have grown up in the church, having heard the story of Jesus' death many times, the significance of the events can be lost to us.

- Pray for the Lord to prepare your heart for the final week of Lent. How can you anoint Jesus in your heart today?