



GOD'S WILL FOR LIFE

Studies in Mark

TOGETHER ^{IN} FAITH SERIES
Leader Session Guide

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GOD'S WILL FOR LIFE: STUDIES IN MARK
Leader Session Guide

Together in Faith Series
Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies

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Mark 4:26-34

Leader Session Guide

Focus Statement

We can discover the will of God whenever we discern the impulse for abundant life in all of its forms.

Key Verse

When [a mustard seed] is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade. Mark 4:32

Focus Image



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Seeing God's Will for Life Embedded in Creation

Session Preparation

Before You Begin . . .

In both of the two parables we are studying in Mark 4:26-34, Jesus uses examples from nature to illustrate God's will for life. Consider God's will to be a kind of spiritual DNA that forms the living, breathing, loving, serving kingdom of God on earth. God's will seems hidden at times, but it is expressed whenever and wherever abundant life emerges—whether in a great harvest from field and orchard or from the good fruits of godliness that Christians bear (Galatians 5:22-25). May the Word implanted today germinate and grow to the glory of God and the good of many!

Session Instructions

1. View the Session Prep Video.
2. Read this Session Guide completely and highlight or underline any portions you wish to emphasize with the group. Note also any bonus activities you wish to do.
3. If you plan to do any bonus or special activities, check to see what extra materials or preparation you'll need, if any.
4. The supplies you will need to do the session activities include: Bibles, sketch and writing paper, pencils, a whiteboard or chart paper with easel, markers, a concordance, and some other way to project images if desired. Note: This list does not include the supplies needed for Bonus Activities.

Session Overview

This is the first session of a three-part series from Mark's Gospel. In each session, we will see how Jesus embodies the life-giving will of God. The phrase "the kingdom of God" in Mark also embodies God's will. The kingdom of God exists wherever and whenever God's will and presence are made known. Here in Mark we see how God's will, embedded in the processes and outcomes of creation, teaches us about the emergence of God's kingdom. Martin Luther consistently acknowledged that creation is broken by sin. On the other hand, he declared that God's will acts **redemptively** in and through creation. Creation's processes and outcomes are not only subject to God's will, but are among "the masks of God" behind which God's will is hidden—hidden, but still waiting to be understood.

SESSION ONE

? Redemption:

“The action that leads to the redemption of the sinner is much like that which leads to recycling . . . except the recycled material is not tin or glass but a whole person, the recycled is saved not from the trash heap but from SIN and DEATH (Romans 3:22), and the exchange is not in money but in the blood of CHRIST—the Redeemer” (*Crazy Talk*, ed. Rolf Jacobson, Augsburg Fortress, 2008).

? Messianic:

Of or relating to a Messiah; the anticipated Savior, which for Christians is Jesus Christ.

? Theocracy:

A form of governance over which God is claimed to be the ultimate ruler whose laws are given both moral and civil authority.

? Parable:

A short story that illustrates a moral or religious value.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It was God’s will in ancient times to secure a nation and a people. The call of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 promises the birth of such a nation by the will of God. This promise was initially fulfilled as the Israelites established themselves in Canaan after the Exodus. The fact that Israel was supposed to be “a kingdom of God” is made clear in 1 Samuel 8:4-22 when Samuel learns that the people’s desire for an earthly king is a rejection of God’s divine rule. God’s continued will for a different kind of kingdom is reasserted in passages like 2 Samuel 7:13, where God describes the kingdom as eternal and, according to the prophet Isaiah (2:1-4; 9:1-7; 11:1-9), peaceable. Likewise, Psalm 103:19 asserts the idea that God has been willfully establishing a heavenly kingdom that is very different from any earthly one.

The emergence of this kingdom of heaven—apart from and greater than an earthly kingdom—was connected with **messianic** prophecy and expectation. And yet many in Israel at the time of Jesus still believed in the establishment of God’s kingdom as a sociopolitical reality—a **theocracy** of Old Testament proportions. They were convinced that the Messiah would fulfill the will of God by uniting God’s heavenly kingdom with an earthly reign. Jesus, however, reinterprets the will of God as something linked to the gospel—the good news of salvation. It’s the sower, not the sword, that would best illustrate in Jesus’ parables how this kingdom of God is to organically, graciously, and nonviolently grow. The implanted message of this kind of kingdom takes root, first of all, in hearts and minds, and then becomes visible in acts of “righteousness and peace and joy” (Romans 14:17).

LITERARY CONTEXT

Mark’s Gospel has been called the gospel of discipleship. The disciples in this gospel are flawed human beings in the midst of a growth process. Mark often makes mention of the fact that even those who were with the Savior 24/7 missed much of what he was teaching and how he was living. Jesus uses **parables** to bring his word home to them, to implant it in the soil of their souls. There, in the depths of being, faith intersects with life. Simple, yet profound, the genius of Jesus’ parables is in the way they make you think. Because the parable form is metaphorical, the possibilities of misunderstanding are very real. Only on the other side of Good Friday and Easter will the disciples come to understand the true meaning of these parables and the nature of the kingdom of God (John 2:22).