



One life. Pure and simple.

## Introduction

Welcome to the Universal Edition of *Christianity Explored*.

This eight-session course of Bible study and discussion aims to introduce people to Jesus Christ through Mark's Gospel, in an environment where they are free to ask any questions they like.

What makes this course – and the Christian gospel – distinctive is its insistence on God's remarkable grace: the clear teaching that although we have rebelled against God, we are deeply loved by him. Loved with an outrageous, costly and incomprehensible love that was poured out for us on a little hill just outside Jerusalem.

This second edition has been reworked from the previous "English made easy" edition. Over a series of eight Bible studies and discussions, group members will discover the identity, mission and call of Jesus – who Jesus is, what he came to do, and how he calls us to respond.

This Universal Edition is written with a concern to make the language crystal clear and accessible to the widest range of potential users throughout the world. Many of the words in the Bible are complex and difficult to understand for those who have been believers a long time, let alone those who are just taking their first tentative steps. So these studies are designed to be suitable for a wide variety of groups, including those for whom English is a second language.

This Leader's Guide is divided into two sections. The first will train you to use the course, and the second will be your guide each week as you lead the studies, giving answers, background and other helpful information to encourage you as you lead your group through Mark.

If you are running a *Christianity Explored Universal* course, please register it on our website **[www.ceministries.org](http://www.ceministries.org)**, so that we and others can pray for you, or even send other people along.

May God richly bless you in all you do with this course for the honour and glory of Christ.

The Christianity Explored Team, March 2012

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# Getting started

Telling people about Jesus Christ is a stunning privilege and a huge responsibility. It's a stunning privilege because Almighty God is pleased to call us his "fellow workers" (1 Corinthians 3:9) as he seeks and saves the lost. And it's a huge responsibility because it can be tempting to present a watered-down gospel that has no power to save and is "no gospel at all" (Galatians 1:7). Our evangelism must always be careful, prayerful and faithful.

*Christianity Explored Universal* has been developed to let the gospel tell the gospel. It takes your group members on an eight-session journey through Mark's Gospel to discover who Jesus is, why he came and what it means to follow him.

You may be someone who usually skips introductions, but can we please encourage you to read through these notes carefully. They will help your journey run smoothly.

## WHO WILL COME?

*Christianity Explored Universal* is a course that helps people discover the life of Jesus together. It doesn't make assumptions about knowledge of the Bible or any religious background people may have. The course uses simple, clear English, which makes it ideal for those who have English as a second language as well as anyone who will appreciate crystal-clear language. It will also suit any group that prefers to take a Bible-study approach to exploring Christianity.

Because the course involves discussion, it is best to limit the size of a group to a maximum of 12 (6-8 if you are working with internationals). More than this, and the quieter people in the group will not feel able to participate. It may be best to have separate groups for those with English as a second language, as this will allow everyone to go at a pace they are comfortable with – but don't worry if this is not possible.

## HOW WILL I INVITE THEM?

Advertise the course in your church bulletin, during the Sunday services and at events you run for internationals. Explain who the course is for, and what will happen at it.

You may want to organize a guest event such as a sports afternoon, a Christmas carol service, a campus mission, a picnic and so on. At the end of the event, give an invitation to join *Christianity Explored*.

Tell people that it is an opportunity to be part of a group that will discuss parts of the Bible together to explore the life of Jesus. There will also be plenty of opportunities to ask any questions they like. Reassure people that no one will be expected to pray, sing or do anything that will make them feel embarrassed.

People are often more likely to join a group if they are invited personally. You can make your own invitations and posters using downloadable logos (available at [www.ceministries.org](http://www.ceministries.org)).

### WHERE WILL WE MEET?

Try to find a place where you will be able to meet every week at the same time. The important thing is that the environment should help people relax so that they will be encouraged to discuss freely. Sharing a meal together will help with this.

Comfortable church premises provide a neutral meeting ground that is also free of distraction.

Homes are another option, but be aware that some may not be used to visiting other people's homes. Alternatively, some groups may meet in a hired room. Be careful of choosing a place that is too exposed to the public, where there can be many distractions or people may feel embarrassed.

### WHEN WILL WE MEET?

It's important to meet as regularly as possible. Most groups meet once a week on a midweek evening. However, your group and situation may be different. Eg:

- a daytime women's group
- a fortnightly home group
- a church houseparty
- a Sunday group running at the same time as the regular church service
- a college Christian Union or fellowship
- a few people meeting round a kitchen table

The course material can be adapted to suit your situation, including meeting one-to-one with a friend or neighbour. However, you will find it helpful to meet as regularly as possible – and please don't skip any sessions or change the order. You should be able to complete each study in 1½ to 2 hours, depending on the ability of the group.

Choose the time to suit the particular group of people you are aiming at. Often Christians can get into a rut when planning meetings. We may have become used to meetings that start at 7.30pm and end by 9.30pm. That may or may not be the best time for the guests. Have you considered that lunchtime may be best for some kinds of groups, or even early morning, mid morning or afternoon? Be imaginative but realistic about the people being invited, and ask them what might suit them best.

You may also want to spend time with the participants outside of the course in order to have the time to deal effectively with issues that come up during the studies. Time spent with individuals is also the quickest way to develop a trusting relationship.

A caution: it is completely inappropriate to be meeting up one-to-one with members of the opposite sex. There may also be important cultural differences that you are unaware of if you are meeting with someone from another country. See the section on Cross Cultural Evangelism on page 33 for more about this.

### WHO WILL LEAD?

Ideally, you should have two leaders for every six participants. The leaders are responsible for guiding the studies and discussion. In a mixed group, it is desirable to have both a male and a female leader so that they can deal with pastoral situations appropriately.

Leaders should be Christians who are able to teach, encourage discussion and care for participants. They should be able to teach the Bible faithfully and clearly, and handle pastoral situations with care and sensitivity.

### WHAT WILL WE NEED?

- **Food.** If you are able to share a meal together, it will make the whole experience better. On a practical level, people will talk and participate more if they spend more time together, and they will open up to you as the leader more as they spend more time with you. If it is impractical to serve a meal, provide light refreshments (coffee and cake, for example).

- **Bibles.** Everyone on the course – leaders and participants – will need a Bible. There are downloadable sheets of the relevant passages from Mark in the NIV version available at [www.ceministries.org](http://www.ceministries.org), or you can download and print out other versions of the Bible, including foreign-language versions (from [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)).

For the sake of clarity, it is important that everyone uses the same version. (The version used throughout the course material is the New International Version.) If they do not already have one, participants should be given a Mark's Gospel or Bible at the start of the course, preferably one they can take away with them. In many cases it will also be essential to provide participants with a copy of the Bible in their own language. Go to [www.ceministries.org](http://www.ceministries.org) for information on locating Bibles.

- **Handbook.** Make sure you have enough copies of the Handbook so that every group member has their own copy. Provide pens as well.
- **DVD.** It is not essential to use the DVD for the Universal edition of *Christianity Explored*, but you may find it useful to show it as a kind of summary at the end of the study. Certainly, watching the programmes yourself will increase your understanding of Mark's Gospel, and help you to explain it more clearly to your group.



# Preparing yourself and your co-leaders

A well-prepared *Christianity Explored* leader will be committed in three particular areas:

1. Committed to the Bible
2. Committed to prayer
3. Committed to people

## 1. COMMITTED TO THE BIBLE

The Bible is God's word. Whenever we open the Bible, God speaks to us. In Hebrews 4:12 we read: "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Nothing else can do this.

God's word is where the power is. Whatever his personal circumstances, Paul knew that if the word were preached, it would do its work: "I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained" (2 Timothy 2:9).

In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul urges Timothy to devote himself to the study of God's word: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

Because we're convinced of the power of God's word, every group member should be given a Mark's Gospel or Bible of their own at the beginning of the course – and our focus as leaders should consistently be on the Bible, specifically Mark's Gospel.

- **Read Mark's Gospel all the way through** – not just the passages that will be looked at during the course. It is vital that you study Mark for yourself and think about its application in your own life. If the message of Mark doesn't excite you, it won't be exciting for those who attend the course.
- **Think about each passage from your group member's point of view.** What might they not understand? What questions and problems might come to their mind? (You will find a list of common questions from Mark's Gospel on page 125.) Which words will you have to explain to people learning English? (There are word lists for each session in both the Handbook and this Leader's Guide.)

- **Think about different ways of explaining things.** Although this is a Bible study, some people think visually, so you might want to get a whiteboard or a large sheet of paper to write on. This is also useful for writing up new words (for those learning English). You may be able to think of some diagrams / illustrations which will help people to understand an important point.
- **Know the course material.** Go through the questions in the Handbook and read the notes in this Leader's Guide. This will help you to be clear where each session is heading so that you can guide the group through it.

## 2. COMMITTED TO PRAYER

Prayer is essential before, during and after the course. Paul opens his letter to Timothy by saying: "Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers" (2 Timothy 1:3). We, too, need to be constantly remembering the guests and our fellow leaders in our prayers.

Being dedicated to the Bible and prayer means being single-minded. As 2 Timothy 2:4 says: "No-one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs – he wants to please his commanding officer". Because the work of evangelism is so important, we must be ruthless in organizing our schedules to that end. The course will have a huge impact on our time.

Again and again, as we seek to make time to lead, to study Mark, to pray and to meet up with group members, the good will be the enemy of the best, and the urgent will be the enemy of the important. We may find temptations or feelings of inadequacy creeping in. Sometimes, leading will be a real struggle: physically, emotionally and spiritually. After all, our enemy Satan hates the work we are doing.

But as Paul's illustration of the soldier makes clear, we must remain dedicated. If people stop attending, we keep praying for them. If they don't seem interested in the discussions, we keep studying and teaching Mark. We must not be discouraged, because we do it all for our "commanding officer", the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the main reasons why we don't pray is that we don't plan to pray. As you set aside time to prepare for your *Christianity Explored* group, include time for praying for the other leaders, hosts and guests.

- **If you are a lone leader** – then ask someone else to pray with you each week.
- **If there are a number of leaders** – then meet up and pray.

- **Why not organise a prayer group?** Recruit people from your church to pray for you as you meet together with your group for each session.
- **And remember to pray yourself.** Keep a list of the people who come, other leaders and even other groups. Put the list where you will see it daily (in your Bible?) and pray for them.
- **Use the word of God to pray** – this helps avoid mental drift and ensures biblical praying. It allows God to set the agenda for your prayers. Pray for people along the lines of the main point of each session.
- **Pray specifically and expectantly.** God loves to answer prayers, and, if you pray for specific things to happen, and for particular problems to be resolved, you will be encouraged as you see God answering.

### 3. COMMITTED TO PEOPLE

God's plan is for the gospel to be communicated life to life. It is not just a matter of us delivering a series of arguments or ideas, brain to brain. We must be prepared to share our lives with this group, and to love them for the sake of Christ. Paul shows us the way in 1 Thessalonians 2:8:

*"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us."*

We are not the gospel (Jesus is), but our lives should make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive (see Titus 2:10).

And that means that we need to show genuine concern for people's lives, their struggles and their questions – and not dismiss them as irrelevant. It means we need to respect them, even when they disagree with us. It means we need to open up our own lives to their inspection, and talk about our own weaknesses and failures, as well as the ways that Christ has changed us. Such genuine love and honesty are the marks of a true disciple of Christ, and in and of themselves they can be a compelling answer to many of the doubts that people have.

Guard against the *Christianity Explored* course being perceived in your church\* as the interest and responsibility only of those who are directly involved. The care of our guests on *Christianity Explored* needs to be a matter for the whole church family. Only a comparatively few will be actually running the course. But everyone should take ownership of the project as they pray, invite friends, keep up to date with how

the course is going and are ready to welcome and share the on-going care of the guests. This will help to spread the excitement of evangelism, and will be a great encouragement to the whole church family.

But love is never without cost. It will involve us in the complex and messy lives that people have. We must understand that mission means mess. It may require us to offer someone practical help. We should do this willingly, but wisely and prayerfully, and in consultation with other Christians. But don't shrink back because of the cost.

\* If you are running *Christianity Explored* as part of a college Christian Fellowship or other non-church group, the above still applies. Every Christian in your group should be prayerfully supporting the course, inviting friends, and welcoming guests when the opportunity arises.



## Study Guide



# Introduction

This Study Guide section contains notes on the eight Bible studies to help you lead *Christianity Explored Universal*. It includes all the material in the group members' Handbook. However it also contains specific instructions for leaders, additional notes and the answers to each question.

- Don't worry if you don't have time to go through all of the questions with your group – the most important thing is to listen to the group members and answer their questions.
- Try to avoid using "jargon" that might alienate group members. Bear in mind that words and phrases familiar to Christians (for example, "pagan," "washed in the blood," "house group," "the Lord" and so on) may seem strange to those outside Christian circles.
- If group members miss a week, take time to summarize briefly what was taught the week before. There are short summaries at the start of each session in the Handbook to help you do this.
- Some guests may believe that the Bible is not reliable as a source of history. If this issue arises during a group discussion, there is a section on the reliability of Mark's Gospel on page 139 of this Leader's Guide.

# What is Christianity?

1

## THE BIG IDEA

Christianity is the good news about Jesus Christ.

🗣️ *Welcome the group members to Christianity Explored and introduce yourself. Make sure everyone has been introduced to each other. Try to remember names ready for next time.*

🗣️ *Give a brief introduction. The wording below is intended only as a general guide – please adapt it to your particular situation (see pages 31 and 33).*

As we begin, I want you to know 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 if you prefer, feel free just to sit and listen.

🗣️ *Give each person a Mark's Gospel, Bible or printout of the Bible passages (in their own language if needed) and a copy of the Christianity Explored Universal Handbook.*

🗣️ *Ask the group to turn to "Before we begin" on page 4 of the Handbook. Read it out to your group and point out the map (see opposite). You may want to explain that Mark didn't divide his book into chapters (the large numbers) and verses (the small numbers). These were added later to help us find our way around.*

🗣️ *Ask the group to turn to Session 1 on page 5 of the Handbook.*

### Leader's checklist

#### Have you...

- ☐ Made it clear to people the time and place where you will meet?
- ☐ Prepared food and drinks?
- ☐ Enough Gospels, Bibles or sheets with the Bible passages on them (see page 12)?
- ☐ Christianity Explored Universal Handbooks for each person?
- ☐ Name labels, if appropriate?
- ☐ Thought through your answers to each of the questions?
- ☐ Prayed for each group member and yourself as the leader?
- ☐ The optional Christianity Explored DVD ready to play?

## OPENING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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

### **What's your name and why have you come to *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.

### **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 eight sessions. Don't try to answer all the questions now, but do listen carefully to every question and assure group members that there will be an opportunity to return to them during *Christianity Explored*. (Some questions will be answered by the Bible studies and some – like questions about suffering – are best dealt with after the sessions about sin or the cross.) See page 133 for guidance on common questions.

You may also like to ask your group:

### **Think about the god you are asking that question to. What do you think that god is 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.

### **What do many people think Christianity is about?**

- ☐ Christianity is about being a good person
- ☐ Christianity is about going to church
- ☐ Christianity is a western religion
- ☐ Christianity is about following the teachings of Jesus Christ
- ☐ Christianity is \_\_\_\_\_

This question asks what most people think Christianity is about. Don't make your group members feel uncomfortable by asking what they think personally.



Explain that you will be looking at the Gospel of Mark, part of the Bible, to see what Mark says Christianity is about. This is explained at the bottom of page 5 of the Handbook which says:

***Christianity Explored* takes us through the Gospel of Mark so that we can discover the real answer to the question: “What is Christianity?”**

You may want to read aloud the section “Who was Mark?” from page 5 of the Handbook. It says this:

**Mark was a friend and companion of Peter, who was one of Jesus’ closest friends. Peter was an “apostle”, someone chosen to tell other people about the life, death and resurrection (rising from death) of Jesus.**

**Peter wrote two of the letters in the Bible (known as 1 and 2 Peter). In his second letter he said: “I will make every effort to see that after my departure (death) you will always remember these things” (2 Peter 1:15). He meant the things he saw and knew about Jesus. He passed them on to others like Mark.**

**Peter died about 30 years after Jesus died. The evidence tells us that Mark wrote his book around then. Mark’s Gospel is one of four books in the Bible telling the life story of Jesus. The others were written by Matthew, Luke and John.**

## **BIBLE DISCUSSION**

 *Ask the group members to turn to Mark 1:1 in their Gospels, Bibles or printed sheets.*

### **Read aloud Mark 1:1**

 *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 both words mean the same. They are titles for the King who God promised to send into the world. “Christ” is from the Greek word; “Messiah” comes from the Hebrew.*

 *If your group members have English as a second language, encourage them to read the verse a second time in their own language. This will help them to understand the passage better. It will also help them if and when they return home – see page 33.*

 There is a list of Bible words from this week's passages (NIV) on pages 6-7 of the group member's Handbook. Depending on your group, it may be appropriate to go through some or all of these words at this point. The word list for this study is also shown below.

| Bible words                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Mark 1:1</b><br><b>v1 gospel.</b> Good news.<br><b>v1 Christ/Messiah.</b> God's only chosen King, who God promised to send into the world.           | <b>v9 Galilee.</b> The northern area of the country of Israel. See map on page 4 (of the Handbook).<br><b>v9 baptized.</b> John baptized people in the Jordan river by dipping them under the water. Baptism is a symbol or picture of turning away from sin and being washed clean on the inside.<br><b>v10 Spirit.</b> The Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that there is one God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son (that's Jesus) and God the Holy Spirit. |
| <b>Mark 1:9-11</b><br><b>v9 Nazareth.</b> A town in the north of the country of Israel. Jesus grew up in Nazareth. See map on page 4 (of the Handbook). |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

 **Re-read Mark 1:1**

**1. What do we learn about Christianity from this verse?**

Christianity is about Jesus Christ. You may want to explain that "Christ" isn't Jesus' surname. It is a title that means "God's only chosen King".

The word "gospel" means "good news", so Christianity is good news about Jesus Christ.

**2. Some people criticise Christianity. They say:**

"It is a list of rules."

"It is about going to church and pretending to be a good person."

"It is boring."

**How does Mark answer these criticisms in Mark 1:1?**

Christianity is none of these things. It is good news about a person, Jesus Christ.

This is the “big Idea” for this session (see page 49) so make sure your group members have grasped it. For this reason the rest of the course will be exploring what Mark tells us about Jesus.

### **Read aloud Mark 1:9-11**

 *If your group members have English as a second language, encourage them to read the passage a second time in their own language.*

 *Depending on your group, it may be appropriate to go through some or all of the Bible words listed on page 7 of the Handbook at this point. The word list for this study is also shown opposite.*

### **Re-read Mark 1:9-11**

**Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan river. As Jesus came up out of the water, God the Holy Spirit came down on him in the form of a dove, and God the Father spoke.**

## **3. What did God the Father say about Jesus?**

God said three things about Jesus:

- 1) Jesus is his Son
- 2) He loves Jesus
- 3) He is very pleased with Jesus.

Mark has already told us that Jesus is the Christ, God’s only chosen King. The important thing we learn here is that Jesus is also the Son of God. We will find out more about both of these in the next session, which looks at who Jesus is.

**Note:** For Muslim group members, Jesus being the Son of God is a huge barrier and massive question. You will need to discuss this further in session 2.

## **4. Is there anything that surprises, interests 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 they say – there will be plenty of time during the course to address any wrong ideas. 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. This will encourage them to keep coming.

## TO FINISH

 Read the summary printed on page 7 of the Handbook. It says:

**Christianity is the good news (the “gospel”) about Jesus Christ.**

**Mark tells us that Jesus is God’s chosen King, known as the Christ or Messiah. Mark also shows that Jesus is the Son of God.**



-  *If you feel it is appropriate for your group, you may like to show episode 1 of the Christianity Explored DVD at this point. The DVD can be used as a summary or a refresher for the main teaching point of this session. However, it also includes Bible passages and concepts that have not been covered in this Bible study, so please watch it in advance to judge whether or not your group members would find it helpful.*
-  *If it’s appropriate for your group, ask them to read Mark 1:1 – 3:12 before the next session. There’s space at the back of the group member’s Handbook, on page 37, for them to write down any questions they have. Group members will benefit from reading through Mark’s Gospel while doing Christianity Explored – but this may be too much for some to attempt. It’s more important that they feel able to come back to the group next time, rather than worrying that they’ve been unable to do their “homework”.*
-  *Thank your group members for coming and encourage them to come back next time. Tell them: We’ve seen that Mark says that Christianity is all about one man, Jesus. Next time we’ll find out about some of the things that Jesus did and said, and why Mark says that Jesus is “good news”.*

## **AFTERWARDS**

-  Did you manage to keep the focus on the big idea of this session?
-  Write down the questions that people have come up with, so that you can be sure to look at them in the coming sessions. It may be helpful at this point to prepare a plan of which question you deal with each session.
-  Think about the people who came. Make a list so that you can pray for them.
-  Are there any practical arrangements you need to do differently next time? (Eg: did you have enough Bibles/Gospels/printed sheets?)