



BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



Summary

This is a book about the life of Jesus, who he is and what he did when he gathered the first followers into a new way of life.

The author shows how Jesus was doing something that Israel had long expected, sent by God to save them from oppression, but in very unexpected ways.

God's intervention through Jesus showed incredible power to amplify small expressions of faith and repentance into major life changes, exploding a small group of followers into a worldwide movement. This was unsettling to people who were comfortable as they were, but good news for everyone who wanted and needed change.

Bern Leckie

Wednesday January 1: Mark 1-2

Mark gets straight to the point – it's good news!

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

1. What did I like about today's passage?

I like how Mark gets straight to the point. God's people have been expecting him to intervene in the world, and Jesus grabs their attention. He sums up the whole point about faith, mission and how we need to respond in one sentence - "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" – and this idea is backed up with power and authority right away.

I know lots of people who worry and fuss about religion, and associate it with so many bad things, but Jesus came to bring good news.

2. What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

I'm sure lots of other people claimed to be something special in Jesus' time, and many have since, but it's a lot easier to talk good ideas than to do the good God wants.

This passage suggests right away how much Jesus meant business and had the power to back up good words with incredible power and authority. He didn't just come with reassurance, though, but with a call for us to "repent" - re-think and change. That feels like the hard or bad part, but Jesus' good news is that change is possible, and good.

3. What am I going to do differently as a result?

This reminds me that there's no point in being "all talk" and no action, and it reassures me that even a little faith can produce big results when amplified by God's power. So I'm not going to make a list of new year's resolutions to do in my own strength. Instead, I will resolve to look for God's kingdom every day, let God reshape my expectations and desires to take faith risks, and trust him more.

4. Who am I going to share this with?

I know lots of people who are interested in the idea of changing the world, and some who have devoted themselves energetically to making a difference. They don't all share faith in God – at least, not yet. I'm going to take a faith risk of engaging some of them in conversation to consider how Jesus might be an unexpected way to bring about the change they are looking for.

Saturday January 4: Mark 3-4

God's love grows beyond our expectations

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

1. What did I like about today's passage?

I can't help notice the huge strength of emotion around Jesus. What made the Pharisees so eager to trip Jesus up? I used to think it was all about pride and jealousy, and that is probably in there, but reading this again I saw that Jesus isn't cool and teacherly, he is angry and "deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts..." (chapter 3 verse 5).

This doesn't sound like the bitterness of a sworn enemy, but the frustration of someone hoping for a relationship which isn't happening. This seems to be a bit of a recurring theme in Mark and Genesis!

2. What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

The biggest surprise for me is, while that this brokenness between people and God needs overwhelming power to fix, Jesus talks about the kingdom of God like a small, fragile, organic thing.

When people work to extend a human kingdom, they build big, powerful battle machines. But God's kingdom is going to grow massively from the smallest seeds. I guess God knows how world works, and how we work, much better than we do, and Jesus encourages disciples who have the seeds of God's word to scatter them and expect growth beyond anything they can understand.

3. What am I going to do differently as a result?

We love our multicultural community. However, it can be tempting to pigeonhole our neighbours by their background, appearance and past culture, and this limits who I think might respond to God. I need to be less limited by my own prejudices and more open to sharing faith and extending family as Jesus did.

4. Who am I going to share this with?

I must admit I still don't feel ready to invite everyone I know with a different faith to come and meet Jesus! But I will look around in our local school community for other people I can pray with, so we can be guided together by God in this.

Wednesday January 8: Mark 5-6

With great power comes great... inconvenience and offence?

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

1. What did I like about today's passage?

I've been seeing from Genesis and Mark that God likes doing incredible things. I love how Jesus' power seems to be increasingly amplified, visible and accessible in this passage. Now his followers can heal people too!

This power isn't just pushing against unbelief, but active opposition. Some people can see what Jesus is doing, but don't want it to affect their lives too much. They are inconvenienced in their work and offended in their hearts. In some cases, the push back against God's kingdom is deadly – John the Baptist lost his head. Nevertheless, God's power is seen to be greater and promises to overcome fear with love.

2. What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

These things show that Jesus wasn't just building a legend around himself. He took followers, through struggle and at risk of their lives, into the better life of God's kingdom. Jesus showed, through miracles, that he had authority to do that, but what he most wants to do is inspire our faith.

There's an intriguing bit in chapter 6 verse 5, when people don't have faith - "[Jesus] could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them." I think this means that God's coming kingdom is not about God showing off more, but us believing more.

3. What am I going to do differently as a result?

Believe more, doubt less. Jesus has already proven that our prayers can be answered.

4. Who am I going to share this with?

I'm going to ask some of my family to carry on some long-ongoing conversation about what they think of Jesus, and see if they identify with anyone in these stories!

Saturday January 11: Mark 7-8

God sees things differently

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

1. What did I like about today's passage?

I love that in the Gospels, through Jesus, I can start to see the world from God's point of view. The shocking thing is how this can be so different from ours. I'm sure the Pharisees thought they were doing a great job showing respect for God through traditions, but only God could see the difference between loving traditions and loving him.

The idea that evil comes from the inside, rather than the outside, is life changing if we engage with it, and it turns religion on its head, but it's not easy. There is still the big gap to address between our point of view and God's. I really love the bit when Jesus is talking about the number of baskets of leftovers, like it should be so obvious what's going on there. Like someone famously said about their quiz show, "It's only easy if you know the answer..."

2. What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God has so much more in store for us than we can understand, and while it's good to get our heads around things, God is more concerned that we engage with him and learn along the way rather than try and impress him with all our great scholarship and traditions.

3. What am I going to do differently as a result?

Keep more alert to what God is trying to show me through life today, especially when it comes to my reactions to stressful situations - these vary a lot depending on how much I'm trusting God.

It's also very liberating in cross-cultural conversations. Too often I get caught up in "mine versus yours" when we talk about different viewpoints. Being able to share about how I'm learning from a very different point of view requires humility, but it's a more faithful representation of faith than trying to defend, explain or excuse "my" culture and history. I want to get better at sharing the experience of learning from God with others.

4. Who am I going to share this with?

This is going to be part of how I talk with believers and others about God in our school community.

Wednesday January 15: Mark 9-10

We couldn't see, but now we can start

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

1. What did I like about today's passage?

Jesus' followers thought they were starting to get what new kingdom life was about, but they hadn't seen Jesus in his full "dazzling white" glory. He was able to share things they could only begin to understand after they had seen the greatest miracle they could not yet accept, that Jesus would suffer, die and rise from the dead.

This crucial passage contains many challenges for believers, including the need to receive God's kingdom like a child and get rid of anything which causes us problems in accepting it. But I'm also encouraged by Jesus that "all things are possible with God," including healing for the physically blind and hope for people like me who want to see more of what God is doing.

2. What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God is totally serious about wanting us to enjoy the best possible life with him and each other. In Jesus' description of marriage, I'm struck by being reminded of God's involvement in bonding people together. I wonder how differently our conversations about defining marriage would be if we made the recognition of "what God has joined together" our main focus. Is that something I can even get my head around?

3. What am I going to do differently as a result?

When I try to get my head around something, I have to contain and therefore limit it. Jesus seems to be consistently challenging my tendency to do that. His word expands, even explodes, the limitations I bring from my expectations and desire to master ideas rather than be mastered by him. To change that, I think I need to say "I understand this!" a lot less, and "I believe you!" a lot more.

4. Who am I going to share this with?

Again, this is liberating in conversations with people who have different cultural backgrounds and views about God. I'm going to share a desire to express faith and learn more with them rather than try to convince them about stuff I don't understand.

Saturday January 18: Mark 11-12

God has prepared us to do incredible things

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

1. What did I like about today's passage?

The fulfilment of the promise of Jesus, to be the suffering servant whose life would be redeemed for the world, is getting near. But as the focus of this story seems to be narrowing, the focus of Jesus' teaching and demonstrations of his power seem to be expanding beyond the observable present and into an unseen eternity.

I love the scope of Jesus' promises to believers, that we can move mountains and receive anything we ask for in prayer. With this power, God also expects things from us which we might think were impossible, like being able to forgive people who hurt us.

2. What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God has massive love, power and expectations for us. He has made extensive preparations to bring us to know him and recognise the life-changing power of two commands: to love him, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. It was a rare teacher who reflected that these were "more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices" – the religious stuff we can get our heads around. Its purpose was only to point towards the saviour who wants to us to blow our minds ("repent") instead and believe his good news about the coming kingdom.

3. What am I going to do differently as a result?

I need to check – have any of my habits or desires to be comfortably churchy limited my faithfulness in being bold in prayer and obedient in radical-sounding things like forgiving people I believe owe me apologies, money or anything else?

4. Who am I going to share this with?

There is some challenging expression of forgiveness I may need to do. I'll need to pray with others for wisdom on how much of this should be private and how much would be better brought up directly with people from past problematic relationships.

Wednesday January 22: Mark 13-14

How can we be near the end already?

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

1. What did I like about today's passage?

Jesus leaves no doubt that he is going to change the world, which will come to an end as we know it, at a time we don't know. This is epic, mysterious but important stuff. What are we supposed to do about it? I like that Jesus isn't talking about this to impress his disciples but to engage them in a big mission - his father's mission - to bring the gospel to the whole world. It's a far bigger job than any of the disciples could have imagined doing.

What I really love most is that Jesus promises that it's not mission impossible for us. God is active on it. Even in the hardest times, when disciples are brought to trial, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will speak through them. I think it's easy to feel overwhelmed by mission and guilty about not doing enough, but at the most difficult moment Jesus is reminding us that it's really God's mission, and he will accomplish it.

2. What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

If God is speaking, not us, why are we asked to do anything at all, especially difficult things which involve suffering and sacrifice? There's only one way I can make sense of this. God isn't prodding us to do his work for him, but neither is he offering to fix the world for us while we do nothing. God wants us to partner with him, join in his work, be the mouths through which the Spirit speaks to the world. The closeness this requires between us and God seems amazing to me, but it is what Jesus is leading us into.

3. What am I going to do differently as a result?

Pause a bit more often before I speak - especially when I'm feeling under pressure - maybe God wants to say something!

4. Who am I going to share this with?

I don't know yet - I'm sure there will be a situation soon when this seems to happen, and I would like to be able to credit God for when he gets involved, whenever that is.

Saturday January 25: Mark 15-16

God's explosive plan beat death and brought life

Every day we're asking four questions about part of the Bible. Today Bern Leckie answers:

1. What did I like about today's passage?

It is God's boldest action in his longest plan to solve our biggest problem. While God could have inaugurated his kingdom by levelling all corrupt sinners to the ground - and there are plenty of them in this passage - he chose instead to lift Jesus up.

Some of the people who refused to believe that Jesus was anything special when he was ministering must have been incredibly humbled by what they saw. Even before Jesus rose from the dead, the way he died was enough to convince the centurion who stood by him that he was the Son of God.

After that, as we've seen a few times in Genesis too, God loves to deliver the most incredible turnarounds which show his power and intentions. It doesn't get any bigger than Jesus coming back to life from death, fulfilling the promises made over centuries and opening the way for our sin to die with Jesus and our lives to be turned around when we follow him.

2. What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

Jesus could not have given any more. I'm always struck by the lowest point Jesus gets to in his life, when it seems like the connection with his Father is broken, and finally he gives up his Spirit. Every aspect of God that we know about shares in the experience of the cross.

This isn't a God who is remote from our experience and judgmental without knowing what it means to be human. God has shared in the worst of what we can go through - not just death, but the suffering and pain caused by our pride and anger, the injustice caused by our corruption, and the agony caused by separation from goodness. He understands, and he overcomes.

3. What am I going to do differently as a result?

I know to be careful what I wish for when it comes to wanting to share in Jesus' life, which also involves sharing his experience of suffering and death. But I do want to get better at seeing the world from God's point of view and understanding better what I'm inviting people into when I share the gospel as Jesus told us to.

4. Who am I going to share this with?

The people I know who have been looking around the edges of faith and religion, but need to know the heart of what Jesus and kingdom life are really about.