

START

The Start is the Hardest Part



The first step can be the most frightening; the start can be the hardest part. We are “maintain” people. We can keep stuff going. But how do we get moving on something different? Maybe God is calling you to start something new—to take a new step in a new direction in the new year. The first chapter of Mark gives us the Gospel version of “Start.” It shows how the Jesus started his ministry. This series will encourage you to give it a try. To start.

What can you make? What will you make in 2018? I can't make much. I make sermons—I actually think about most of the words that spill out of my mouth (not all, but most). I thought I remembered an ad for the NBA, "We make baskets." But I couldn't find anything when I researched it. Maybe I made that up. What do you make? Jesus made things. Jesus was a carpenter. We don't really know what He made, but He made stuff. Nobody claims to have anything made by Jesus. Nobody has any of His furniture. No reliquary I know of houses the end-table Jesus made and sometimes I wish we could find something. Imagine what it would go for on eBay? For the church! For thirty years, Jesus made things. He learned again and again that after all the planning, after all the preparation, there comes a time when the hammer hits the chisel and the wood is cut. There comes a time when you have to take a swing. There comes a time when you have to start. Or else it's never done. But the start takes commitment. Once you hit the wood there is no turning back. Sometimes the start is the hardest part. The fear of it can make us stuck, but you have to start. Think of what you'd lose if you don't.

Every great endeavor requires a first step, a beginning. Just imagine what we would have lost without starts. Imagine if General Palmer and Spencer Penrose didn't bother to start a city, or if Sheldon Jackson and Henry Gage gave up on starting First Pres. What if Jim Rayburn didn't start getting kids together to learn about Jesus and create Young Life and just remained a normal Presbyterian pastor—how boring! What if Gary Haugen didn't give up his position with the DOJ to start International Justice Mission? What if Katie Fowler and Yemi Mobolade decided it was too hard to start CityServe? What inspires you? Somebody started it. Somebody began at the beginning—there was nothing, then there was something. What if Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., gave up when he was told "It will be too hard, Martin. There's no hope. You will never see a day where people are judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. You will never see kids of all kinds playing together on the hillsides of Alabama, and the red clay creeks of Georgia." What if he failed to start? We can't afford to lose everything we will lose if we fail to start what God is calling us to start.

I believe every one of you has something to start. I don't know what it is, but you do. Jesus has had it in front of your nose for a while now, but you just haven't taken that step. What are you supposed to start in 2018? Is it a relationship you need to start to improve? I need to start a new relationship with my daughter, my grandson. I need to start the book or the blog. I need to start fixing my finances—start giving smarter, investing in what Jesus is doing. What is it? I need to start serving in children's ministries, start exploring that mission trip, start looking for a Life Group. Start worshipping regularly, praying daily... What is it? It's been there for a while now, and you have been waiting for it to get easier, for the right time to come along, or the right set of circumstances. Something has kept you from the start. Enough. It's time. Jesus is making a start for you. It's scary. It's existentially frightening, actually—like Tom spoke about last week. It's that moment when the skis are directly downhill to make the turn. But you can do it. Stick out your foot and lean forward. There's a next step for you.

For the next five weeks we will study the first chapter in the Gospel of Mark studying, how does Jesus make a start? Of all that Jesus made we never get to see, this is one thing He made we get to see. Jesus made a beginning. He made a start. We can follow Him and learn just how we can get over our fear and step forward, and start. It starts right here with verse one, the beginning. In fact, the first word is "begin." The first word of the first verse of what we think was the first Gospel begins with the word "Begin." "The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1) The beginning, the start. It's the same language as the opening line of the Gospel of John. It's the same language as the Greek translation of Genesis 1:1. In the beginning. There always must be a start; there must be a first moment; there must be a beginning. I was watching a documentary about the Hubble telescope. What an amazing adventure that whole thing was. But Hubble allowed scientists to verify with certainty the expansion of the universe. Every known galaxy is moving away, so they reverse this and postulate that everything had to come from one point of dense singularity of matter. The Big Bang. I might call it something else. All that is has its beginning. The coming of Jesus is a re-beginning. A new beginning of just as cosmic and univer

sal significance as the beginning of creation itself. It's the beginning of the "good news." That where we derive our word "gospel." Good news. About Jesus Christ, Jesus Messiah, the Son of God. We'll return to this verse through the series. In Jesus is a new beginning. Jesus knows how to make a start.

So, we want to look at these opening verses and see what we can say about how Jesus makes a start. If the start is scary, if the start is the hardest part, but we don't want to lose everything we lose by never making a start, then let's start with Jesus. Let's start like Jesus. Jesus makes a start. Three things I see here, three movements. Number one, to make a start, **(1) Jesus looks back.** Does that surprise you? To move ahead, look back. Look at the passage, "The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God," (Mark 1:1). Boom. We're off. Mark is the go-go Gospel. It's fast-paced. It hits the ground running. "The beginning." Actually there is no "the" there. Translators put the "the" there just for us. Mark just says "Beginning! The gospel of Jesus Christ Son of God." Boom! Go! Catch up. You're already behind. Mark skips Christmas, he skips it entirely. Let's go. Let's get started. The faster you get this the better off you'll be. That's what Mark is about. Let's hit it! So it's jarring when verse two slams on the brakes: "as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way' — 'a voice of one calling in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" (Mark 1:2-3) Screech! What? We're looking back now. Way back. Back to Isaiah with a little intro from Malachi. How do you make a start? You look back. Jesus looks back. Sometimes you have to look back to find the way ahead. A new beginning is founded on the past. Some say you can only see as far ahead as you are willing to look behind. Winston Churchill said, "The farther back you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see." Sure. A new beginning is founded on a strong past. But even more, a new beginning is founded on the Word of God. "As it is written," says Mark. It is written. Not just it once was. How do you make a start? Look back, found it wisely on the Word of God. God has prepared you for this.

Number two, how does Jesus make a start? **(2) Look for a forerunner.** Not the SUV. Jesus, even Jesus, in beginning the new beginning to restore all things and turn the corruption of all creation around

on its head, even Jesus looks to see someone out ahead of Him. God sent someone ahead. John the Baptist. "And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey." (Mark 1:4-6) John the Baptist "appeared." Not like a ghost or something. He came to be. It came to be that John the Baptist was there doing what John the Baptist was supposed to do. Something wasn't there, and then it was. It happened. John preceded Jesus. John's message was about repentance, confession of sin, new beginnings; you are not going to get very far carrying around all that guilt and shame and bondage to past mistakes. Wash it off. Leave it behind. Jesus was about to bring a total new beginning and John prepared the way in people's hearts. And John is a picture of boldness, isn't he? He wore clothes of camel's hair and a big leather belt, reminiscent of the prophets of old, but not too comfortable. He ate wild honey, so he was probably covered with welts and bee stings, and his favorite protein? Locusts—because they're so delicious, obviously. If John asked you to lunch you might just suggest coffee. John was bold. There was a certain amount of reckless abandon to him. John, we can say, was not addicted to social acceptance. He wasn't checking his Instagram for likes and follows. If you're going to do something new, if Christ is calling you to start something, it takes a little boldness and courage. But look around. There might be someone else doing something very similar. God rarely makes you go alone.

(1) Look back. God has prepared you for this. (2) Look around. God rarely makes you go it alone, then number three. How do you make a start like Jesus? How do you make a start with Jesus? **(3) Step forward with courage.** Here's what our passage gives us today, "And this was his message: 'After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'" (Mark 1:7-8) There is power. There's power in the name of Jesus. There's power in Jesus Christ. Step forward. Jesus is calling you to find the beginning to make the start. Step forward in the power of the Holy Spirit, in the

power of His name. You don't need to be afraid. God is with you every step. There's something we do every day that's filled with risk; when you risk your whole body, your most vital organs are vulnerable to damage, your head is pitched forward and you start to fall and you have to toss your foot out in front of you quickly and catch yourself or else you might suffer brain damage and all kinds of internal injuries. Know what that's called? It's called "walking." You can do it. It's scary at first, but you can do it. God will be with you every step.

An elder said to me last week, "Tim, if we can find a way to unleash the talents and potential of every member of this church the impact will be felt coast to coast." I believe it. Imagine if every one of us began to do the next thing Jesus is calling us to do. What would that look like? The impact of that would be felt coast to coast. I've seen it. Later this month we'll celebrate what we saw happen just in 2017 as we took next steps with Jesus here in this church. But we'll also celebrate some slightly older stories of faithful ministry when people of this church saw Jesus putting the next step in front of their feet, and even though it was scary and uncertain, they stuck out their foot and leaned forward, and there was the explosion of the Pathfinder's class, and there was the Greenhouse ministry internship, and there was Young Life College Ministry, and there was this and that, things came to be that were not there before, beautiful things. And it can happen again. It can happen in you. If the story of the universe is roughly: God created everything, we broke everything, Jesus came to fix everything—which is about how I see it—well, then, isn't the next step something like: "Jesus uses you to stitch something together"?

Everything good must start somewhere. Every great journey begins with the first step. But the start can be the hardest part. How many things have you intended to do, wanted to do, planned to do, and regret that you have never done? It takes courage to take a first step. God is calling you to start something and you have been afraid to take the first step. Now is the time. You have to start somewhere. Find the beginning and start.

STUDY GUIDE

START • Mark 1:1-8

UP: Connect with God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read our passage Mark 1:1-8. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Read it one or two more times.

- What do you notice about our passage? What stands out to you? What questions do you have after reading the passage?
- How does Mark's gospel begin? Why do you think Mark begins his gospel this way?
- How is the gospel of Jesus about a new beginning?
- What has John the Baptist been sent to do? Why is this task important?
- Every great journey begins with the first step. Why can the start, that first step, be the hardest part?
- What is a word, phrase, or thought from today's passage that God seems to be lifting up as being significant for you? How does it speak to a current situation in your life? How is God inviting you to respond?

OUT: Connect with the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

Is there anything you have been wanting to start but have been putting off? Why do you think you have been putting it off? What do you think the Lord is saying to you about it?

IN: Connect with the Family of God

Share with someone this week the one or two new steps you feel God is calling you to take in the new year. Ask them to pray for you.