

# START

## The Start is the Hardest Part



**T**he 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.



## START • Mark 1:21-28 • Tim McConnell • February 11, 2018

The Olympics are underway. We were downtown Friday night for the kickoff celebration. It's fun to be part of Olympic City USA. And I learned that Colorado sends more Olympians than any other state, so that's awesome. But have you noticed something about these races? The start is only part of it. I've noticed that the finish line is actually pretty important. The start is big. I heard a story about a guy who failed to check his blocks when he was running track in high school, so he pushed off for a sprint, the blocks pulled out, and he landed on his face—very quickly, but that was not what was timed. The start is critical but the finish also counts. When we opened up this series, Start: The Start is the Hardest Part, a friend said to me, "Actually, starting isn't that hard for me. I love starting. It's finishing that gets tougher!" After the start, can we keep going to the end?

This is our last message for this series in Mark 1. We know God is calling us to start something. We know if we don't make a start we are making an end. We know we can't afford to lose all we will lose if we fail to start what God wants us to start. We've seen how a good start will face ups and downs. How a good start needs vision and a mission statement. How a good start includes friends and moves with urgency. Finally we want to recognize, if we want to start like Jesus, we recognize that Jesus builds the resolve to carry on into the beginning. Jesus starts with a no quit attitude. Persistence is part of the start. The beginning includes the resolve to keep on until the finish. Jesus put heart into the start. (That's so cheesy I don't know if that helps you or hurts you; but maybe you'll remember it on Tuesday). Jesus puts heart into the start.

Jesus has found a beginning and taken the first steps. Mark 1:1, "The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God." The start. He made a start. He defined the mission, back in verse 15. The mission is proclaiming the "good news of God," the Gospel of God: "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15) Now Jesus has called others forward into the mission, and they start in earnest with proclaiming, teaching, the truth. Jesus walks into a synagogue in Capernaum. Synagogues were not temples. There was one Temple, in Jerusalem. Synagogues were places for the people of God to gather and pray, read the Torah, talk about the Word of God, and remember what was happening in the Temple. Jesus enters one of these places and begins to teach. He wasn't interrupting normal operations there; that was actually how it happened. Ordinary men would stand and teach, or lead discussion. It was very open. So here is Jesus really beginning. He has preached to

crowds around John the Baptist, crowds who didn't mind what He was saying. Now Jesus begins to teach where there might be some resistance. But something odd happened with Jesus opened His mouth: "They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law." (Mark 1:21-22)

"The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law." (Mark 1:22) The people were amazed. They were amazed at his teaching. Why? They had heard teaching before, but they were amazed because Jesus taught the Word of God with authority. Listen, there are those who teach you what is in the Bible and think they have done their job. That's what's in there. That's it. There are other well-intentioned teachers who give you the six simple steps to living the good life and sometimes scatter a few relevant scripture verses over them. Jesus teaches the Word of God with authority—and at this, the people are amazed. Let me give you four ideas about this before we move on to talk about beginning with resolve. The people were amazed because Jesus taught "with authority." They had heard scribes before. They had heard charlatans before. But never had they experienced this. Why did Jesus' teaching have "authority"? (1) Jesus' teaching applies to life. Somehow when Jesus taught what was in the Bible it sounded like it mattered to people's lives. It wasn't an empty academic exercise. In another Gospel, when people were amazed as His teaching with authority, Jesus says "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." (Matthew 7:24) Jesus teaches with application. (2) Jesus' teaching makes a difference. The ideas, the words, the preaching of Jesus makes an impact on the community. It makes a difference. The world starts to change when His ideas are spoken.

(3) Jesus' teaching has spiritual power. Next verse, "Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!' 'Be quiet!' said Jesus sternly. 'Come out of him!' The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, 'What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.'" (Mark 1:23-27) Jesus' teaching has power in realms you and I do

not. It has power to win spiritual battles. It resonates in spiritual places. (4) Jesus' teaching sets people free. Never forget that. Jesus didn't come to bind up and burden. Jesus came to set people free. If you are still wrestling with how some teaching of Jesus sets you free, you're not done wrestling yet. Jesus said the truth will set you free. Error and confusion are chains, but the teaching of Jesus is freedom. Jesus teaches with authority.

This kind of teaching is going to meet resistance. Anytime you start something, anytime you begin to do something of significance that leads to change, someone is going to be upset. You can't lead without making people upset. Ed Stetzer is a church researcher. He studies a lot about church growth and decline. He spoke to our national gathering last month. Ed said, "At any given moment there should be people upset with you in your church. In fact," he said, "if you don't have at least ten percent of your church mad at you, you're probably not leading them into anything significant." So I thought I'd take a poll this morning... Raise your hand if you're mad at Tim. Just kidding! Don't do that! Anything you start of significance will cause friction, will face resistance. Jesus built in the resolve to keep going right into the beginning. He baked the persistence right into the cake from the start.

Now, I can give you some inspiring quotes. Winston Churchill said, "Kites rise highest against the wind, not with it." Frederick Douglass said, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress." John F. Kennedy said, "Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future." We must accept change and lead through change. But looking for those quotes I also found this: "When asked 'would you rather work for change or just complain?' Eighty-one percent of the respondents replied, 'Do I have to pick? This is hard.'" Not sure that's real research. We can find these inspiring quotes about overcoming resistance, but resistance is difficult and it may just tempt you to give up. Keep on. If you quit early it's like the start never happened. Jesus put heart into the start.

A friend told me the other day about losing his car in the airport parking lot. He travels to Europe all the time for work, but this time he traveled with a friend from the office, so they were chatting the whole way up and in deep conversation when they parked the car. When they got back they realized they had no idea where the car was. So they walked around for an hour pushing that panic button on the keypad. Finally they went back to the airport where they found out that there's an office with all the license plate numbers filed along with where the vehicle is parked. Helpful info! When they got to the car, here's the point, they

realized they were probably fifty feet from reaching it when they lost confidence and turned back. When you quit, you don't know how close you are to the end, to the breakthrough.

Remember Joshua's army in the battle of Jericho? In Joshua chapter six is the story of the fall of Jericho with its great wall. God told the people to walk around the walls of Jericho once a day for six days. Can you imagine, by the way, how foolish they felt? "Are you going to attack our wall?" "No, we're just going to walk...around...here..." Six days. Once a day. All the way around the city with no results. Nothing. Not a crack in the wall, not a tremor, no signs of progress at all. On the seventh day it got worse. On the seventh day, God said, go around the city seven times. They did it. And when they shouted, the walls came tumbling down, and the people moved into all the promises of God the Lord had prepared for them. But what if they quit early? I might have quit on the second day. Maybe even the first, halfway around. They might have quit on the fifth day, or the sixth. But they didn't. They might have quit on the sixth time around on the seventh day. But they didn't. They had seventh lap on the seventh day resolve. Jesus had seventh day, seventh lap resolve. We know this is just the start, but Jesus is resolved to make the finish. If we want to start like Jesus we need to build the persistence to keep going into the start.

What gives you seven day, seven lap resolve? I'll suggest three things out of Mark chapter one that got built into the start. Jesus had (1) A Call, a purpose. F.B. Meyer referred to the three lights of divine direction, the internal light of God's call on your heart is matched by the external light of scripture and trusted counsel, and then there is a third light, the light of providence, as God's plan starts unfolding before you. It starts with God calling you to do something, and that call matches with scripture, and that call matches with wisdom and with voices of trusted elders and friends, and you know with confidence it's something God wants you to do. Well then it's just a matter of obedience. The obedience is yours; the results are God's. You have a call. (2) A Vision. You can see the preferred future this action is going to bring about. For Jesus, it's the good news of God we've talked about, the Kingdom of God. It's out in front of Him. He can taste it. It includes healing, freedom, things being set right, truth, goodness, beauty...all that stuff. Time spent on vision at the start is not wasted time. Take time to fill out the vision. Smell it. Taste it. Roll around in it. It's going to be worth the sacrifice. How do you bake heart into the start like Jesus? Have a call, have a vision, and third (3) Go with friends. Jesus called disciples into the start right away. Who are

you running with? Who is going to keep you going when the opposition comes along?

Pastor Mark Batterson has written a lot about one of David's mighty men, Benaiah. You may not recognize the name Benaiah, but the Bible says, among all the military battles that made him famous, he went down into a pit to kill a lion on a snowy day. Just, by the way. Batterson says once you have a friend who killed a lion in a pit on a snowy day, the stuff you're facing just looks a little smaller! The obstacles before you feel a little less scary. I'm so inspired by the people in this church. I'm inspired by men and women who take time to teach week after week even when their other responsibilities are enormous. I'm inspired by choir and worship volunteers who give so much time so sacrificially to ensure we offer our best in worship week by week. I'm inspired by nursery workers and children's ministry shepherds and middle school youth leaders—good heavens! I'm inspired by marriages hitting the forty, or fifty, or sixty year mark. I hope you are inspired by the people you are running with here at First Pres. I mean, if you don't have someone around here who inspires you, you're just not paying attention. Running with a strong group helps build heart into the start to persevere past the resistance.

Nick Foles led the Philadelphia Eagles to victory last week in the Super Bowl. What a game, by the way. I'm not going to cast it in terms of good defeating evil—that speaks for itself. Just kidding. But Nick Foles, a strong Christian, strong believer, said after the game that he was on the edge of giving up football just a few months ago. He was frustrated and wasn't getting anywhere. Now here he is. From backup, second-string, about-to-quit, QB-two to Super Bowl MVP. Can the Broncos give him a call by the way? Sixth lap. Don't give up. Keep on. If God has called you, He will be faithful to complete it. Yours is the obedience; His are the results. Don't quit now. Build heart into the start and resolve to carry on and see it through. There is a start for each of us, something God is calling you to do. Find the beginning again. Stick out your foot again and lean forward. Resolve to carry it out, knowing as it says in Philippians, that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6) He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it. Keep going.

## STUDY GUIDE

### START • Mark 1:21-28

#### **UP:** Connect With God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read our passage for the week, Mark 1:21-28. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Read it one more time. Pray for your study of God's Word.

1. What do you notice about our passage? What stands out to you? What questions do you have after reading the passage?
- 2 Re-read verse 22. What does it mean that Jesus teaches as one with authority? Where did Jesus' authority come from?
3. What opposition did Jesus face in the course of His ministry? How did Jesus respond to this opposition?
4. When we face opposition, why are we tempted to quit?
5. Has there been a time in your life when you started something and faced opposition? What did you learn from that situation?
6. What gives you strength to keep going in the face of opposition?
7. What is a word, phrase, or thought from today's passage or from our time together 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

We want to respond to God's Word for the sake of others. As we close out our sermon series, what do you think the Lord has been saying to you? What are one or two takeaways that you have? How is the Lord calling you to respond?

#### **IN:** Connect With the Family of God

Is there someone around you that you can encourage to keeping going and not give up? In concrete ways, how can you share that encouragement with them? Name one thing you can do this week.