Mark 2:13–28 Leader's Guide

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Overview for the leader

Big idea: Jesus calls sinners as they are, brings a new covenant rather than patching the old one, and rules even over the Sabbath — so following Him is about relationship, not rule-keeping.

This session covers Mark 2:13–28 in three parts: the call of Levi, three pictures Jesus uses to explain His ministry, and the Sabbath controversy. If time runs short, Part 3 can carry over to next week, since the following chapter continues the Sabbath theme.

Session flow

1. Welcome
2. Opening prayer
3. Recap of last week
4. Read Mark 2:13–28 aloud
5. Part 1 — Jesus calls Levi (vv. 13–17)
6. Part 2 — Three comparisons: physician, bridegroom, wineskins (vv. 17–22)
7. Part 3 — Lord of the Sabbath (vv. 23–28)
8. Closing summary
9. Closing prayer

Before you lead

- Read Mark 2 several times, and skim the cross-references listed in each part.
- Pick two or three discussion questions per part; there are more than you will need.
- Note that Levi and Matthew are the same man (compare Matthew 9:9). The guide uses both names.
- The appendix holds extra Sabbath and covenant background if the group goes deeper.

Opening

Welcome the group and open in prayer.

Recap of last week (Mark 2:1–12): We focused on forgiveness, asking which is easier — to say "your sins are forgiven" or to heal. That passage linked sin with sickness and forgiveness with restored health, a theme that returns in today's physician comparison.

Today's preview: First we look at how Jesus carries out His ministry. Then, if time allows, the freedom we receive from the Sabbath.

Read aloud: Mark 2:13–28. Consider having one or two group members read.

Part 1 — Jesus calls a despised man (vv. 13–17)

Key verse: *"Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.* (v. 14)

Background: tax collectors in Jesus' day

- Seen as corrupt and dishonest.
- Collected taxes for Rome and often overcharged to line their own pockets.
- Considered ritually unclean, because they dealt constantly with Gentiles and handled "unclean" money.
- Socially lumped in with "sinners" — people outside the moral and religious community.

Teaching points

- Jesus is teaching by the lake with crowds pressing in, yet He notices Levi at his tax booth.
- Levi was comfortable and secure. He had means and was simply going about his day — then Jesus came along.
- Levi doesn't negotiate or delay. He gets up and leaves a secure, lucrative job.
- *Leader's note:* Verses 15–17 tell how Jesus ate with "tax collectors and sinners" and was criticized for it. You can skip lingering here; Part 2 picks up His answer.

Discussion questions

1. What "tax booth" might you still be sitting in — a comfort zone or sin pattern that holds you back?
2. What does Levi's immediate obedience say about how men should respond when God calls?
3. Who in your life do you avoid because you think they're "too far gone"?

Takeaway: Following Jesus often means leaving something behind — comfort, income, reputation — but the trade is worth it.

Part 2 — Three pictures of Jesus' ministry (vv. 17–22)

After calling Levi and eating with sinners, Jesus answers His critics with three comparisons. Each one teaches both critics and followers who He is and what He came to do.

1. The physician (v. 17)

- Jesus always considers His audience. Levi's friends were people in need of a physician.
- Earlier in the chapter, sin was pictured as sickness; forgiveness is health restored.
- Jesus didn't treat the people around Him as rejects. Does an ER doctor refuse to treat patients?
- Jesus is the physician who comes to our need, makes the perfect diagnosis, provides the final cure — and pays the bill. The best medical plan ever invented.

Discussion questions

1. Staying with the theme: are there patients who cannot be healed? *(Leader: three kinds — those who don't know Him, those who know Him but refuse to trust Him, and those who refuse to admit they need Him.)*
2. Which category are the Pharisees and scribes in? *(Leader: unless we admit we are sinners deserving God's judgment, we cannot be saved. Jesus came to save sinners — Luke 19:10, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Note the word* seek *: Jesus went to Levi's house to reach people who may never have come to the lake.)*

2. The bridegroom (vv. 18–20)

The first question was about who Jesus spent time with. The second is why He was having a good time.

Background: fasting

- The Pharisees fasted twice a week, on Monday and Thursday.
- In the Old Testament, fasting was tied to repentance, mourning, or seeking God in crisis — not a routine display of holiness.
- By Jesus' time it had often become a mark of self-righteousness.

Teaching points

- Verse 18 mentions John's disciples alongside the Pharisees. Setting aside that Jesus is Savior, how did John and Jesus differ? John lived off the beaten path; Jesus was social.

- Jesus uses the wedding picture often. It echoes the Old Testament image of Israel as "married" to the Lord (Isaiah, Jeremiah).
- When Israel turned to foreign gods, as it did more than once, it committed spiritual adultery and needed discipline. A major theme of Hosea is God's love for His unfaithful wife and His restoring her.
- John had already told his disciples that Jesus was the bridegroom (John 3:29). So this comparison was precisely aimed at the audience at Levi's house.
- Jesus says a time for fasting will come, but not now.
- *Leader's reflection:* The Pharisees fasted "on the clock," which drains it of meaning. Fasting means most when it comes from real need.

Discussion questions

1. What is the difference between dating and marriage?
2. What does commitment to your spouse look like to you?
3. What does commitment to Christ look like to you?

3. Garments and wineskins (vv. 21–22)

- In those days, a new patch on an old garment shrank when washed and tore it. New wine in old wineskins burst them, ruining both the skin and the wine — a double loss.
- The Mosaic system was growing old and ready to vanish away (Hebrews 8:13).
- Jesus establishes a new covenant in His blood (Luke 22:19–20). It is written in blood, not on stone, and the Holy Spirit enables God's people to fulfill the righteousness of the law (Romans 8:1–4).
- *A note on replacement theology:* the church does not replace Israel, which has its own path (a study in itself). We share a new covenant in Christ, not a replacement.
- Jesus is not adding rules to Judaism — He is bringing the fulfillment of God's promises.

Discussion questions

1. How can Christian traditions become "old wineskins" that hinder spiritual growth?
2. Do you ever measure your spirituality by outward performance rather than your relationship with Jesus?
3. What "new thing" is God trying to do in your life that you've resisted because it doesn't fit your old patterns?

Takeaway: We must let Jesus reshape our lives, not just patch up old habits.

Summary of Part 2

Jesus teaches three things about His ministry:

1. He came to save sinners, not to call the religious.
2. He came to bring gladness, not sadness.
3. He came to bring in the new, not patch the old.

Part 3 — The Lord of the Sabbath (vv. 23–28)

Key verse: v. 25 — David acted when he was "in need."

Teaching points

- Verse 23 switches gears and starts a new scene.
- A recurring theme: the Pharisees try to paint Jesus as a lawbreaker. If He breaks the law, how can He be the Messiah?
- Jesus' disciples pick grain to eat, and the Pharisees call it "work."
- Recall from 1 Timothy 1 some of the extreme Sabbath rules of the day:
  - No spitting, because it could count as plowing.
  - No looking in a mirror, since pulling a gray hair would count as harvesting.
  - If the wind blows your door open and an animal wanders in, you may not close the door, since that counts as trapping.
- Jesus points to David eating the consecrated bread when he was hungry (1 Samuel 21).
- His conclusion: the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. It exists to serve us, not to be a legalistic obstacle.
- Jesus declares Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" — the ultimate authority over God's law. Ask the group: why is this important, and why does He say it here?
- Connect to Hebrews 4, studied earlier:
  - Hebrews 4:3 — "Now we who have believed enter that rest."
  - Hebrews 4:9–11 — "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience."
  - When we enter that rest, our works stop. We enter it by faith and grace. This rest exists for our good.

Discussion questions

1. Do you treat God's commands as life-giving or as a burden?
2. How do you intentionally rest, both physically and spiritually?
3. In your work life, do you trust God enough to stop and rest?

Takeaway: Rest isn't laziness — it's obedience and trust. As leaders of their homes, men should model Sabbath rhythms to avoid burnout and refocus on God.

Closing

Sum up with four points the group can carry into the week:

- **Jesus calls you as you are** — but doesn't leave you as you are.
- **Influence like Jesus** — be willing to engage people others avoid.
- **Faith over religion** — following Jesus is about relationship, not rule-keeping.
- **Rest is godly** — stop running on empty; the Sabbath is a gift, not a burden.

Closing prayer.

Appendix — Leader's background notes

Use these if discussion goes deeper. The next chapters of Mark build on the Sabbath topic.

The Sabbath

- A command from God (Exodus 20:8–11) to rest on the seventh day.
- Meant as a blessing — physical rest, spiritual focus, and family renewal.
- By the first century, the Pharisees had added 39 categories of prohibited work, turning a gift into a burden.
- Possible follow-up to v. 25: if David's need overrode the rules, what about circumcision on the eighth day, which Jews performed even on the Sabbath?

Was the Sabbath given to us?

- Exodus 31:12–13, 16–17 presents the Sabbath as a sign between the Lord and the people of Israel throughout their generations, a covenant forever.
- It belongs to the covenant of the Mosaic Law.
- Some teach that the church is "spiritual Israel." This guide's view: Paul repeatedly says there is neither Jew nor Gentile; we share a new covenant in Christ.

- The world keeps trying to merge the old and new covenants, but the two are not compatible and were never meant to be.

Old and new covenant

- Jesus defends His disciples, teaching that the Sabbath was made for man, and asserts His authority as Lord even of the Sabbath.
- His teaching represents a new covenant based on grace and relationship rather than legalism and ritual.
- The old covenant, rooted in Mosaic law, is insufficient for the transforming work Jesus brings.
- The new covenant invites believers to rest in Christ's finished work, finding peace and joy through faith rather than religious performance.

Cross-references

Passage	Where it's used
Matthew 9:9	Levi is Matthew
Luke 19:10	Physician — Jesus seeks and saves the lost
John 3:29	Bridegroom — John's testimony
Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea	Bridegroom — Israel as God's wife
Hebrews 8:13	Wineskins — old covenant fading
Luke 22:19–20	Wineskins — new covenant in His blood
Romans 8:1–4	Wineskins — the Spirit fulfills the law
1 Samuel 21	Sabbath — David and the consecrated bread
Hebrews 4:3, 9–11	Sabbath — entering God's rest
Exodus 20:8–11; 31:12–17	Appendix — Sabbath command and sign