



Stay Alert to
the Spirit

Small Group Leaders Notes

Week 1: Preparation
Theme Setting the Scene

Last update 08.09.2020

WELCOME



Welcome the group and offer background information to the *Stay Alert to the Spirit* programme. Explain the small group meetings are part of an integrated seven week programme including weekly congregational worship, and intergenerational material for adults, children, and young people. Distribute copies of the SATS summary leaflet and invite everyone to look at the programme we'll be following. Explain five of the seven weeks will have themes around JSP's emphasis on five core ministry priorities of Jesus. The other two weeks begin with *Setting the Scene* and conclude with *Pressing On*. If people bring their own Bible try to harmonise translations, for those with smart phones or tablets Bible Gateway is an excellent free resource with all translations available. The NIV has been used for SATS. Otherwise distribute a print off of the key passages today. (We recommended those involved in leading small groups refer to our training document *How to lead a JSP Group*.) If the group is new, spend some time sharing how the group will work best and be sensitive to anyone who has never been in this type of a small group.

Also highlight the following:

- ▶ **Confidentiality:** the group should be a safe place to share our spiritual search, hopes and concerns.
- ▶ **Sharing:** the best small groups are ones where everyone is able to contribute in the group freely.
- ▶ **Commitment:** we'll get the best benefit from the group if we make attendance a high priority.
- ▶ **Timescale:** we'll always aim to begin and close each session promptly.

STARTER



Invite group members to share one learning experience that's happened during the pandemic and had a significant impact. Encourage everyone to take part and introduce people to one another as you are doing this.

Briefly explore any similarities and differences, explain in the coming weeks we're going to grapple with learning lessons from the crisis, with the question 'What is the Spirit saying to the Churches?'

Explain we're keen to hear what others are thinking. We'll be offering opportunity to chat with others to find out what they are feeling about it. Open with prayer, particularly praying for the coming weeks and for our meeting today.

Include any matters that naturally lead to prayer from the information that people have shared. Explain like the JSP Main Programme, we'll be mostly using Mark's gospel during *Stay Alert to the Spirit*. Briefly summarise some background info around Mark, for example he can be known as 'John Mark'.

FOCUS



- ▶ Mark was not an apostle, but was an early disciple.
- ▶ His home was in Jerusalem, and becomes a base for the early church. (Acts 12.12).
- ▶ A young man who teamed up with Paul and Barnabas in Antioch (Acts 12.24) and joined them briefly on their first Missionary Journey (Acts 13.13), and later teamed up with Barnabas. (Acts 15.37-39)
- ▶ Later when the rift with Paul is resolved he supports Paul in prison (Colossians 4.10). Note: Barnabas is his cousin.



Reading: Mark 1.1–8

Highlight the word 'gospel' in verse 1, and explain it means 'good news'. The Greek word is *euangelion*. 'Evangelist' and 'evangelical' come from this word.

Explore these questions:

- ▶ What is our Christian 'good news'?
- ▶ What has been your experience of this 'good news' in recent weeks?

Recognise the different ways the four gospels begin their record of the 'Good News' of Jesus. Matthew and Luke use different but complimentary accounts of the story of his birth, with Luke also giving additional information about John the Baptist's birth. John's gospel begins like Mark, except for a remarkable prologue painting the bigger picture: 'In the beginning was the Word...' Mark is probably the first gospel written, or perhaps gathered as many of the stories may have existed separately. Matthew and Luke deployed Mark's Gospel as a foundation for their accounts adding other material they had gathered.

John the Baptist

Check out what we already know about John the Baptist using the following questions.

- ▶ What do we know about his life story?
- ▶ What was he trying to do?

Write answers down on a large sheet of paper (or a flip chart). Reiterate John came from a priestly family, born of two elderly parents (Zechariah and Elizabeth). Following in his dad's footsteps would be standard practice. However Luke 1.80 tells us he 'grew up and became strong in spirit; he lived out in the wilderness until the day when he appeared publicly before Israel.' Note the location of John's ministry in the Jordan valley, John 1.28 locates it at Bethany beyond the Jordan in the southern part of the Jordan close to Jericho and the Dead Sea. Maybe some map print offs (or use online maps) that include Galilee and Nazareth could be useful.

DISCUSS



Consider our reading with these questions:

- ▶ What kind of character does John the Baptist present?
- ▶ What does 'repentance' mean?
- ▶ Why were people so attracted to him?
- ▶ What might have led you to be baptised by him?

Make sure the group get a good grasp of repentance especially: 'making a new beginning' or 'taking a new direction', emphasis. Invite everyone to consider why John was known as a prophet and how he used scripture. Clearly John could not be accused of misappropriating or misusing scripture while living an austere life in the desert.



Reading: Isaiah 40.1–11

Remind people that this was written 500 years earlier. Jesus found special prophetic significance in Isaiah, and quotes Isaiah 61 when he goes to Nazareth (Luke 4.8).

Discuss these questions:

- ▶ What has John found in Isaiah that inspired his work ?
- ▶ Which of these verses speak to you in our current situation?
- ▶ Have there been other Bible verses that have spoken to you recently? What are they?

Reading: Mark 1.9–12

Using a map, reflect on the following questions together:

- ▶ Describe what Jesus may have been feeling that day?
- ▶ Why was it important for him to be baptised?
- ▶ What would John the Baptist have been feeling?

Note that this was a 'Kairos' moment (as reflected in Mark 1.15)

- ▶ Are we living in a 'Kairos moment' now?
- ▶ What do we need to do to ensure that we are alert to the Spirit?

PRAYER



Close in prayer giving thanks for all we have discovered from our meeting.

- ▶ For all those struggling with different loss and change to have a strong spirit.
- ▶ That through our *Stay Alert to the Spirit* journey we might be able to speak to the times we are in and the Good News of the Gospel heard.



SHAPED PEOPLE