

Stay Awake

South Jersey Small Group Guide

Warm-Up Questions

1. When you were growing up, what did you think the end of the world would look like? Did you grow up hearing a lot about end times, the rapture, or prophecy — and how did that shape the way you read the Bible?
2. What is something you do to "numb out" when life gets hard or overwhelming? TV, scrolling, staying busy — what's your go-to, and do you think it actually helps?

Key Passage: Mark 13:1-14, 24-27, 32-37

Recap

In Mark 13, Jesus sits down with his disciples on the Mount of Olives and does something unexpected — instead of giving them a timetable, he prepares them. The disciples have just heard Jesus say that the magnificent Temple they're looking at will be completely demolished, not one stone left on another. They want to know when and what to watch for. What follows is one of the most debated passages in the Bible, but at its heart it is a deeply pastoral word: don't be deceived, don't be surprised by the cost of following Jesus, and above all — stay awake.

Much of what Jesus describes was fulfilled in 70 AD when the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem and burned the Temple to the ground — a catastrophic event that Jesus warned his followers to flee from, and which many of them did. But the passage also points forward, to the end of all things, when the Son of Man returns with power and glory to gather his people. In the meantime, Jesus leaves his disciples — and us — with a single, urgent command: Watch. Not with anxiety or obsession, but with the quiet faithfulness of a doorkeeper who has decided that when the master returns, he will be found at his post. The question this passage presses on all of us is simple and uncomfortable: are we awake?

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. The sermon touched on growing up with a lot of end times theology — Left Behind, prophecy charts, detailed timetables. What was your experience with that? How has your understanding of passages like Mark 13 changed over time, if at all?
2. Jesus' very first warning in this passage is "don't be deceived." He says many will come claiming to be the answer. Where do you see people around you — or yourself — being tempted to put hope in something or someone that ultimately can't deliver?

- 3.** Jesus says "don't panic" in the same breath as describing wars, famines, and earthquakes. How do you personally navigate the line between staying informed about the world and being consumed by anxiety about it? What does that actually look like in your daily life?
- 4.** The sermon used the image of birth pains — the idea that the pain and chaos of this world isn't just an ending, but the sign that something is coming. Has there been a season in your life where pain turned out to be the beginning of something rather than just the end? What did that look like?
- 5.** In verses 9–13, Jesus tells his disciples that following him will cost them — persecution, family tension, being hated. This was reframed as: "the friction of following Jesus is not a malfunction, it is a platform." Where in your life has your faith cost you something? And looking back, do you see it differently now?
- 6.** Over 380 million Christians around the world face real persecution for their faith today. How does that reality sit with you? Does knowing that change how you think about the "low cost" version of Christianity most of us practice?
- 7.** Jesus ends the chapter with the image of a doorkeeper — someone who doesn't know when the master is coming, but simply stays at their post, awake and faithful. What is your version of sleep? Of the examples discussed — numbing out and going through spiritual motions — which one hits closest to home for you right now, and why?
- 8.** The end of the sermon was directed at people who are soul-tired — who have been trying to stay faithful for a long time and are running low. If you're honest, where are you right now? And what would it look like for you to simply "stay" — in your faith, in your relationships, in your pursuit of God — even when you don't have much left?

Pray