

Mark 9

Continued from page 1061

**Slow Learners: A most unpromising group of recruits****9:19** "How long shall I put up with you?"

At first, Jesus' disciples do not distinguish themselves—to put it mildly. Their most obvious trait is denseness: "Are you so dull?" Jesus asks more than once. Mark 9 shows the disciples bungling a work of healing, misunderstanding Jesus' hints about his coming death and resurrection, squabbling about status and trying to shut down the work of another disciple. Obviously, there is much in Jesus' mission they fail to understand.

In spite of the disciples' erratic performance, Jesus devotes much of his time to them. Outsiders still gather to watch and listen, but Jesus concentrates on training the Twelve, preparing them to carry on his work after his departure.

How do the disciples handle the increased attention? If anything, they prove even more inept. When Jesus refers to his coming death, they either miss the point or foolishly protest his plans. Sometimes they bicker over who deserves the most favored position. They obviously do not understand the dazzling events going on around them. In short, the disciples amply demonstrate the mixture of good and bad present in all of us.

After Jesus' arrest, despite vigorous pronouncements of loyalty, each one of the Twelve sneaks quietly and ashamedly away from Jesus in his moment of deepest need.

**A Decisive Change**

One event, however, will dramatically alter the Twelve. Something passes through their lives like a flame: Jesus' resurrection. After that incredible event, Jesus' patient hours of training seem to bear fruit at last.

The disciples' change in behavior is astonishing. Of the proofs for the resurrection of Jesus, one of the most compelling is simply to compare these cowering disciples as portrayed in Mark with the bold, confident figures in the book of Acts. There, in a remarkable irony, we see the incredible advance of the early church being led by the two disciples who earned Jesus' strongest reprimands: John and Peter.

To continue the Guided Tour reading plan, turn to page 1097. You can find the overall plan on the bookmark or on pages x-xi.

**Life Questions**

Mark 9 includes both highs and lows in the disciples' experience. What would a graph of your spiritual journey look like?