

## **Prepare the Way (Guide)**

### **Small Group Guide**

**Warm-up Question:** (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. If you were going to take a week-long trip, when would you start packing and preparing to leave?
2. What are some of your favorite events in the Olympics?

**Read the following passages:** Isaiah 40:1-5; Mark 1:1-5.

The role of a prophet in ancient Israel was to speak God's words to God's people. When Isaiah began prophesying in the middle of the 8th century, the people of Israel and Judah had lost their way. Although God had formed them into a people to represent God's kingdom on earth, they had fallen short of this vision. How would God rescue and restore them? The answer came in an astonishing vision: God, himself, would come to earth. And he would send a messenger to prepare the way. John the Baptist's ministry shows us how we can prepare the way for God's presence in our communities, our church, and our own lives: We need to repent. We need to be honest about the sin in our own hearts so we can move forward with God.

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

1. How does Mark implicitly identify Jesus with Yahweh, the God of Israel, in Mark 1:1-8?
2. Why might John the Baptist's message of repentance have felt offensive to Jewish people in the first century?
3. Read Luke 7:29-35. Why do you think so many of the religious leaders rejected John's ministry? What are some reasons we may hesitate to respond to God's command to repent?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-13a. Describe "godly sorrow" and contrast it with what you think Paul likely means by "worldly sorrow." A different, but related, distinction people sometimes make is that between "conviction" and "condemnation." How are these concepts different and why is this important? How do we know when we're sinning and not just making a mistake or feeling down or expressing our emotions?
5. Read Mark 1:5 and James 5:14-16. When is the last time you confessed a sin to another person? Why is confessing our sins to one another important?
6. In what areas of your life do you find yourself most prone to commit sin?

7. Read Romans 8:1-4. How do Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and the work of the Holy Spirit help us overcome the power of sin? What else can help us live faithful lives of obedience to God?
8. Have you been baptized since making a decision to repent of your sins and trust in Jesus? If not, are you ready to take that step now?

**Pray**