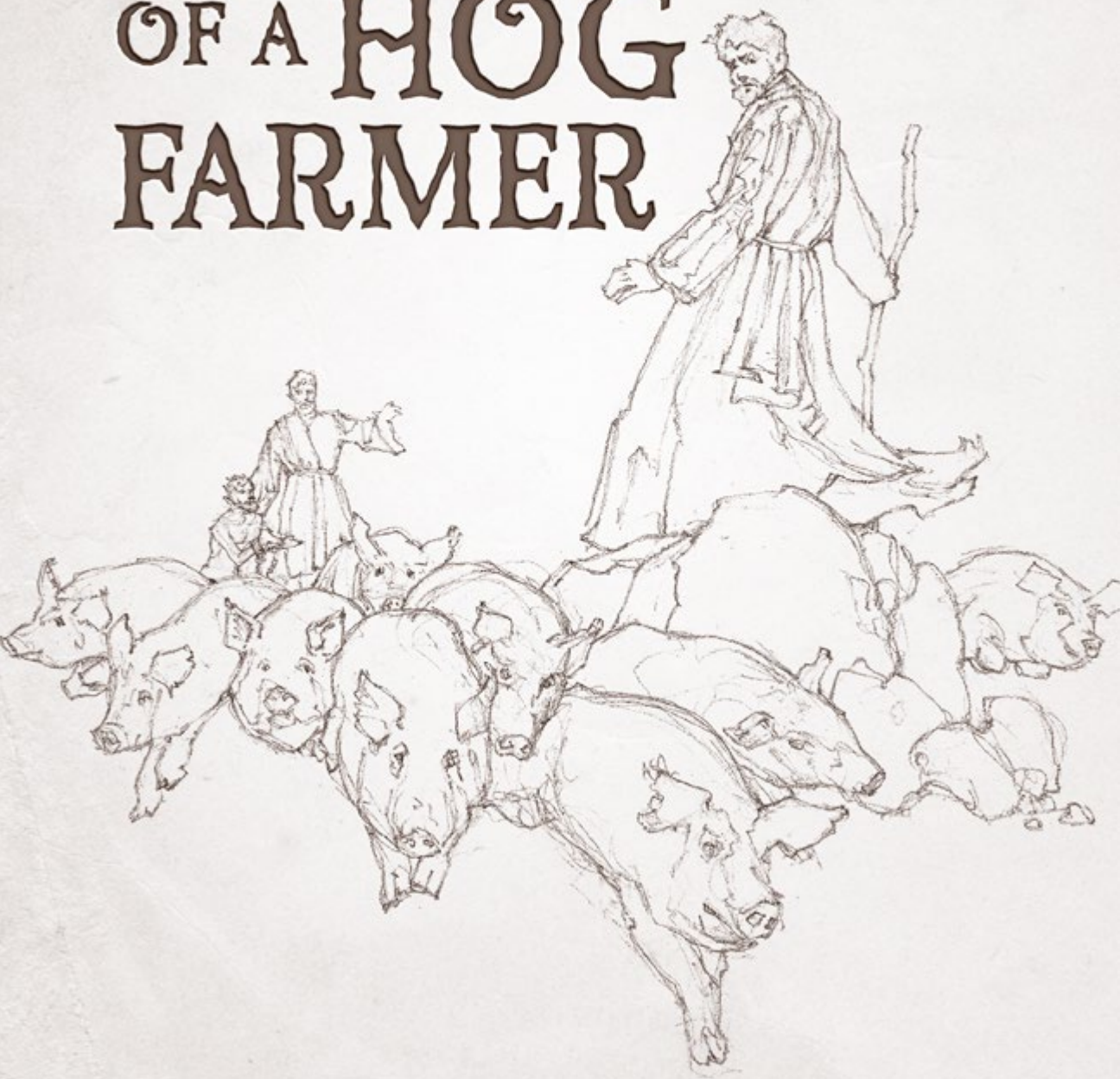


L E S S O N O N E

# TROUBLES OF A HOG FARMER



## Part 1: Research

In Mark 5:1–20, you’ll find an amazing story of Christ’s grace. Whether you’re already familiar with it or not, read the passage now, taking time to appreciate the narrative and its message.

Got it? For your first writing project, you will tell this story as if you were one of the hog farmers whose herd drowned in the sea. You’ve returned to your town, and your master, the man who owns the pigs, has asked you where his property went. You, still dazed by what you saw, tell your story.

*No one can write decently who is distrustful of the reader’s intelligence, or whose attitude is patronizing.*

—E.B. White

Naturally, the hog farmer will relate to Christ’s actions a bit differently than Mark did, but that’s fine. Most of what we call creative writing simply describes something familiar from a unique perspective. For this lesson, your perspective is right next to a herd of stampeding, demon-possessed pigs.

Today you’ll start your project by performing some research. You’ve already read the account in Mark 5, but go ahead and read the same story as told in Luke 8:26–39.

Are there any extra details in Luke’s account? Any additional observations?

Now that you’ve read your primary sources, it’s time to focus your attention by asking some basic questions.

### What?

What happened here? Summarize the entire story in just a sentence or two below. Imagine you’re writing a brief snippet for a news ticker—what is the essential information?

### Who?

Who did this? Who caused this to happen? To whom did it happen? What other people were involved?

## Where?



I'll give you a little help on this one. Mark tells us that this story takes place in the land of the Gedarenes—the name varies slightly by Bible version—which lay on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. The name for the area probably comes from the city of Gadara, which was part of the Decapolis, a league of ten Greek cities that banded together around 60 BC to promote trade and fight off marauders. The people of Decapolis, even if they had to acknowledge Roman rule, didn't like outsiders, including Jews like Christ and His disciples. But they shared the Sea of Galilee

with everyone else, gaining much from it—like trade, information, a ton of fish, and in this story, a certain Man who could drive away evil spirits.

You'll also notice that both Mark and Luke mention tombs. These were natural limestone caverns and rock-chambers that crept deep into the ridges and mountains facing the sea. Many people buried their dead there, and if that wasn't creepy enough, the place was also home to criminals, rebels, and other outcasts afraid of the government. Christ's disciples might have known they landed on the wrong side of town, so to speak, but their Master brought them there anyway.

What other details can you gather about the location of the story? Use your Bible and, if available, a commentary, Bible atlas, or other trustworthy source.

## When?

The events at the end of Mark 4 occurred in the evening, so we can surmise that this story took place either late at night or early in the morning. Jesus and His disciples probably reached land while it was still dark—which could only make the location that much creepier.

Can you find any other details about when this story took place? If not, keep moving.

## How?

How did Christ accomplish this work? How did He make it happen? What does that tell us about His power?

## Why?

For this story, we'll divide the *why* into two parts. First, write from the hog farmer's perspective. Why do you, a proud citizen of the Decapolis, think this Jew cured the demoniac and sent your pigs into the sea?

Now from your perspective: why do you think Christ did what He did? What do you want the reader to come away from the story thinking about Him?

Sometimes writers will employ what they call *unreliable narrators*, fictional storytellers who believe something that isn't true. For instance, you could write a story from the perspective of a soccer player who got benched by her coach the day before a big tournament. The player might say it was because she was the best person on the team, which made the coach's daughter, also on the team, look bad. But you, the writer, could include hints in the story to let your readers know what really happened—the soccer player simply missed one too many practices.

Consider making your hog farmer an unreliable narrator in your story. Include the details you find relevant, but let the farmer come to his own conclusions, and the readers to theirs.

Of course, you want your readers to come away from the story with something good and edifying. But you will not want to spend the majority of the narrative writing with a *didactic* tone—that is, writing which teaches factual or moral lessons explicitly. It's the moral at the end of the story, the explanation at the end of the parable. The majority of this book is didactic, but a story that includes only lessons and platitudes—without plot or characters or conflict—can seem too preachy and boring.

## Meditation

Now that you've gotten most of your raw data together, read Mark 5:1–20 one more time, slowly, asking God to show you Himself through the work of His Son.

Finally, if you have any unanswered questions that pertain to your story, research them and jot your notes below.

## ~Part 2: Rough~

*The best way to become acquainted with a subject is to write about it.*

—Benjamin Disraeli

Today you'll rough out a basic outline to your story, using Freytag's pyramid as a starting point. If you haven't already read the overview of the pyramid in this book's introduction, do so now.

After you've completed your outline, you'll write a few small blurbs that will make your first draft easier tomorrow.

## Outline

### Conflict

What is the primary conflict in your story? What forces create tension for the hog farmer?

### *Exposition*

Where does the story start? What is your hog farmer doing as the narrative begins?

### *Incitation*

What moment starts the real action? When does the hog farmer realize this won't be a normal day?

### *Rising Action*

List briefly the events that lead up to the most important point in the story.

### *Climax*

What moment does this story revolve around? What is the most important work Christ performs?

### *Falling Action*

What's the fallout from Christ's actions? List the events that happen next.

### *Resolution and Denouement*

What does the hog farmer think of all this? Where does he go from here? What's the last thing the readers hear from him?

## Descriptions

Now let's add some detail to your story—even though it isn't written yet. If you can put some good prose onto paper today, all you'll need to do for your draft tomorrow is link it all together. For the questions below, refer to your research as necessary.

### *Setting*

We'll start with your setting, the place where your story occurs. Paint your readers a backdrop for the day's events.

Describe the shore on which Christ and His disciples landed. Paint with light, sound, scent, and feeling. Describe the caves overlooking the water, and what might be hiding in them.

Tell the readers about your pig herd. What did they look like, smell like, sound like? How were they behaving when the story begins?

### *Characters*

Who was this fearsome man that no one could bind? Why was he this way? Describe his features. Describe his reputation.

Who was this Jew followed by twelve students? To a hog farmer who had never before heard of the Messiah, what was He like?

What about you and your fellow pig herders? How would you describe yourselves?

Describe any other characters you might include.

### *Events*

Relate the conversation between Jesus and the demoniac. Use your own words and paraphrase if necessary, but include the essential details.

What happened when Christ finished his conversation? Describe the pigs fleeing, jumping, and crashing into the sea. What did it look like? Where were you when all this occurred?

### *Thoughts and Reactions*

What did you think when this Jesus told the demons they could go possess your pigs?

You're a simple man with one job—watch over the pigs. How do you feel after losing perhaps your only livelihood?

Who will you blame this on? Why did this happen?



If you have any additional snippets or blurbs that you think might fit into your story, write them down here before you forget.

When you draft your story tomorrow, use what you've roughed out today to help. You might only include half of the snippets you wrote today, and you may have to edit most of what you do use, but you'll find that the first draft moves along a lot easier when you have more material to work with.

### **Important Tips for Tomorrow**

Reserve at least an hour of quiet time to write, preferably after you've eaten a good meal and before your brain is too tired to think. Find a place you can be at least somewhat alone, and make sure you have any writing tools that might be required—pencils, paper, computer, or whatever else. Include snacks, if necessary. Before drafting, silence your phone, disable your internet connection, and do whatever it takes—short of locking your family out of the house—to remove all distractions. This will be the hardest part of the writing process—the actual writing part.

## **Part 3: Write**

As the hog farmer, inform your master what happened to his pigs. Unlike the original hog farmers, you can use a notepad or a word processing program. No minimum or maximum word count needed for this project. Write as much as you feel is necessary. Also, don't worry about making each sentence perfect. Turn off your inner critic and just get the story down—you'll have every chance to go back and revise later.

Pray for God's wisdom and grace, even in a simple project like this, and begin.

After you've completed the first draft, go do something fun. Take a short walk, throw a ball around with your sibling, play a video game, chat with a friend, make a puzzle—anything that doesn't require a great deal of concentration. Recharge your brain for a little while, and then get on with your day.

## Part 4: Apply

For today, take a break from your writing project and let the story age a little. Tomorrow you'll look at it with fresh eyes.

Mark 5 gives us a glimpse of what spiritual warfare looked like in Christ's day. Let's examine a few other passages in the New Testament that can expand our understanding of this topic.

In Ephesians 6:10–20, how does Paul describe our struggle with the devil's schemes? Are our enemies physical or spiritual?

What is our primary duty in this spiritual battle, as stated in verses 11 and 13?

Starting with verse 13 and going through verse 18, list what we must do to prepare ourselves against spiritual assault. What are our tools?

God asks us to guard ourselves against assault—from forces on the outside and from our own weaknesses. Only by relying on His strength and grace can we stand.

According to Revelation 20:8–10, who exercises ultimate authority over Satan?

In Luke 10, Jesus used the ministry of around seventy disciples to heal the sick, cast out demons, and teach others about the coming of His spiritual kingdom. When the disciples returned, they were excited about all they had seen—especially the power Christ gave them to cast out demons.

But in verses 17–20, Jesus told them that they hadn't seen anything terribly special—especially compared to the demonstrations of power He had witnessed as God's Son. Instead, the disciples should have been excited about something far more amazing. What was it?

If you have accepted Christ's forgiveness for your sins, you have a much greater gift than the power to identify and push back satanic activity. You have a Father in heaven that loves you, that will protect you from darkness, and that will one day banish all evil.

In Mark 5, the former demoniac was excited about the radical change in his life. What was the difference from before? What did he do now?

What has God done for you? How can you show your excitement about His love?

## ~Part 5: Revise~

Now that your story has settled in the back of your mind, reread it and revise as you feel necessary. Ask someone you trust to read it and give you feedback.

### Revise for Economy

Cut out any sections you feel distract from the point of your story. Combine sentences where you can. Smooth over any passages that slow down the action. If you have another person reading your story, ask if there are any parts that seem boring.

### Revise for Variety

Look at your sentence structures and ask yourself if there's too much repetition. Mix things up a little, with short sentences and long sentences, with lots of active verbs and clear detail. Read your entire story out loud twice, and adjust whatever strikes you as unnatural.

## Revise for Clarity

Did you make your point well? Did you maintain a consistent tone and voice? Are there any inconsistencies in your story—any gaps in the narrative or unexplained events? Is your paper free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors? Proofread your story carefully, and ask your reader if he or she found anything awkward, as well.

## Tools of Grammar

### Be-Verbs, Active Verbs, and Passive Verbs

In this first Tools of Grammar section, note the difference between three general types of verbs.


#### Be-Verbs

*Be-verbs* link a noun to a certain state, position, or quality. They do not necessarily show action—they just connect a subject to a predicate.

Some *be-verbs* are part of a larger category called *linking verbs*, which express equality between the subject and another word in the sentence, as in the example below:

#### Be-Verb Forms

be	is
am	are
was	were
been	being

Richard **is** a police officer.

*Be-verbs* can also be used as *auxiliary verbs*. These add meaning to other verbs, like voice, tense, and mood. An auxiliary *be-verb* can change a verb to its passive form—more on that later—or it can show continuing action, as seen in the example below:

He **was** running down the street.

And sometimes, a *be-verb* simply means “to exist.”

And Jesus said, “I **am**.”

#### Active Verbs

*Active verbs* show a noun performing an action.

Richard **squinted** at his notes, wondering how anyone ever read his handwriting.

Fingers clenched tight around her bat, Therese **smacks** the ball up over the far fence.

## Passive Verbs

*Passive verbs* show a noun being acted upon. Sentences with passive verbs involve a *be*-verb followed by a past participle form of another verb.

Richard's notes **were read** aloud by his teacher.

The ball **is returned** by an amused passerby.

## Revising with Stronger Verbs

Beginning writers often rely heavily on sentences with *be*-verbs and passive verbs, since active verbs can be more difficult to construct. But clear English prose depends on strong, active verbs. Notice the difference between the two paragraphs below. The second one is much clearer.

### *With Be-Verbs and Passive Verbs*

Therese was struggling to keep her excitement to herself. She walked the bases. Her teammates were held back by the umpire, who was smiling at her as she was stepping onto home plate. The game was called by the announcer. There were screams, hugs, and a shiny gold trophy, but Therese didn't notice. She was hungry.

### *With Active Verbs*

Struggling to keep her excitement to herself, Therese walked the bases. Her teammates crowded behind the umpire, who smiled at her as she stepped onto home plate. The announcer called the game. Screams, hugs, and a shiny gold trophy barely caught Therese's attention—she was hungry.

That's not to say you should never use *be*-verbs or passive verbs. Sometimes your paragraph's context and flow will dictate that you use a non-active verb form. Read the paragraph below.

Rachel was excited. She thought about all the things she and her friends would do tomorrow up on Bluestone Mountain. The place was known for its scenic hiking and biking trails.

The paragraph features all three types of verbs. The first sentence, a short one with a *be*-verb, introduces the paragraph's topic. The second sentence, which supports and explains the first, includes a simple active verb. The third sentence is passive, but only so it can pick up where the second sentence left off with "Bluestone Mountain." "The place" refers back to the mountain, so the writer keeps the reader's focus steady from one sentence to the next.

As you revise your story, look for ways you can change some of your *be*-verbs and passive verbs into active ones. Fill your prose with clear, strong, active verbs that drive your reader along. And wherever you rely on passive verbs, make sure they improve the flow of your text.

For more information on different types of verbs, consult the index or table of contents in your grammar textbook.