

Supernatural Power

Stories from Mark’s Gospel

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Week 8 | Mark 8

### Chapter 8 Summary:

Throughout this Gospel, Mark draws our attention to people’s reactions to Jesus. Those who should have recognized their Messiah — the scribes, Pharisees, and teachers of the law — rejected him completely. Those who were “outsiders” — the sick, demon-possessed, and Gentiles — came to him believing he could restore them. What about the disciples? What did they believe about Jesus? In Mark 8, this issue is brought to a head.

# Day 1

## Read

### Mark 8:1–10 (NIV)

**8** During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 2“I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. 3If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”

4His disciples answered, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?”

5“How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.

“Seven,” they replied.

6He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people, and they did so. 7They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. 8The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 9About four thousand were present. After he had sent them away, 10he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

## Study

* Getting déjà vu? Yes, we’ve seen Jesus feed a large crowd before in [Mark 6:35–44](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk6.35-44)! Compare that account to this one. What differences do you note? What similarities do you find? Particularly in the way the disciples initially respond? Let’s pay attention to their reactions as we move through Mark 8.
* The Faithlife Study Bible notes for [Mark 8:1–10](https://biblia.com/books/fsb/Mk8.1-10) show us how to connect this passage with Mark 7 and Jesus’ overall message.

## Think about

N.T. Wright helps us recognize an important similarity in both accounts, “It is noticeable that in both stories Jesus not only feeds the crowds; he involves his disciples in the feeding. The closer we are to Jesus, the more likely it is that he will call us to share in his work of compassion, healing and feeding, bringing his kingdom-work to an ever-wider circle…The Christian life, as a disciplined rhythm of following Jesus, involves not only being fed but becoming in turn one through whom Jesus’ love can be extended to the world.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

## Pray

Do your actions toward those in need show that you share Jesus’ compassion? How is Jesus calling you share in his work? Ask him today in prayer and look for opportunities in your community. Pray that he will give you a heart of greater and greater compassion.

# Day 2

## Read

### Mark 8:11–21 (NIV)

11The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. 12He sighed deeply and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.” 13Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

14The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. 15“Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”

16They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.”

17Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? 19When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

“Twelve,” they replied.

20“And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

They answered, “Seven.”

21He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

## Study

* According to Garland, the Pharisees were asking for a specific kind of sign when they ask for a “sign from heaven.” “This generation, represented by the Pharisees, asks Jesus to do something that will signal Israel’s deliverance from her enemies and their crushing defeat…Ironically, this request comes after the miraculous feeding, a miracle that pointed to the blessing, not the destruction, of Gentiles. Jesus refuses to give the Pharisees a sign from heaven because God has sent him to give his life on the cross for all humanity, not to smash the enemies of Israel or to give the nation political mastery of the world.”[[2]](#footnote-3)
* Given the feeding of the 4000, why is it ironic that the disciples are concerned about how much bread they have? Think back to other times Jesus has called out “hard hearts” ([Mark 6:52](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk6.52)) or wondered aloud who has ears that are able hear ([Mark 4:9](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk4.9), [23](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk4.23)). What does Jesus want them to understand? Why might fear be keeping them from understanding?

## Think about

Recall what have we learned about the Pharisees and about Herod in Mark’s Gospel. The Pharisees and Herod seem to have little in common. We might say the Pharisees are uptight, self-righteous prigs and Herod a power-hungry murderous degenerate. “But they do share one poisonous fault that can infect others. Jesus does not explicitly identify what that toxic flaw is, but the context points to their obstinate refusal to believe in spite of the evidence.”[[3]](#footnote-4) What do you think? Is Jesus worried that this might be the fate of the disciples?

The feedings of the multitudes ([Mark 6:35](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk6.36), [8:6](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk8.6)) and the adventures on the lake [Mark 4:39](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk4.39), [6:47](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk6.47), 8:13) have given the disciples a unique opportunity “to learn who Jesus is, to understand the nature and source of the power that comes through him.” But the disciples remain thoroughly confused by it all. They know Jesus possesses supernatural power and authority, but they still don’t understand who he is and what he’d come to do.

How well do we really understand Jesus and his mission today? What would the “yeast of the Pharisees and Herod” look like in this generation?

## Pray

Ask the Spirit to strengthen your faith and to be able to see Jesus clearly. Pray for wisdom, endurance, and courage to respond to Jesus’ call on your life.

# Day 3

## Read

### Mark 8:22–26 (NIV)

22They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. 23He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?”

24He looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.”

25Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26Jesus sent him home, saying, “Don’t even go into the village.”

## Study

* The Faithlife Study Bible gives us helpful notes on [Mark 8:22–26](https://biblia.com/books/fsb/Mk8.22). Pay close attention to the note on verse 25. This story of an actual healing also points to a spiritual problem that the disciples have.
* According to Gombis, this story serves as a hinge in the Gospel of Mark because it closes the first half of the Gospel and opens the next major section. This story and the healing of the blind man, Bartimaeus in 10:46–52, form bookends (or an *inclusio* in literary terms). “These two healings of blind men frame a section in which Jesus predicts his suffering and death three times, and each time the disciples misunderstand him, ignore him, and display astonishing selfishness.” At this time Jesus will also teach them about discipleship.[[4]](#footnote-5) The disciples need to see and understand because Jesus is headed to the cross.

## Think about

We shouldn’t be too hard on the disciples. They did not see Jesus coming. Yet, throughout Scripture, God is seen moving in unexpected ways. He extends his grace and mercy again and again to sinful humans. Now, with the coming of Jesus, he is revealing the most astonishing part of his plan — the eternal Son will sacrifice himself on the cross out of love for people.

How has Jesus surprised you and disrupted your understanding of the world? Did you see him coming?

## Pray

Pray for sight and greater understanding of Jesus. Pray for opportunities to share the understanding you have to help others see Jesus. Pray that your life would be an example that points people to Jesus.

# Day 4

*If you haven’t already, give the Pastors Pregame podcast a try. New episodes every Thursday at* [*CFhome.org/pregame*](https://subsplash.com/christfellowship-tx/lb/ms/%2Bhg732gk) *or through* [*Apple Podcasts*](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/pastors-pregame/id1582563644)*.*

## Read

### Mark 8:27–33 (NIV)

27Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

28They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

29“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

30Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

31He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

33But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

## Study

* Remember the story from yesterday? Of the blind man receiving sight? Take another look at [Mark 8:22–26](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk8.22). Notice the striking comparison with 8:27–30. Jesus takes the blind man away from the village; Jesus takes the disciples away from the crowds. The blind man sees partially at first and the disciples are still seeing only partially who Jesus is. Both stories tell of a two-stage process of illumination. At the end, he insists in both cases on secrecy.
* For the disciples, a picture of Jesus may have begun to come into focus, but verses 31–33 show they don’t yet have a clear vision of Jesus’ mission. In fact, Peter rebukes his Messiah when Jesus talks about his coming death. He is completely baffled that God’s purposes could be worked out this way.

## Think about

Gombis offers an insightful reflection on this passage that’s worth considering:

“Peter and the disciples had clear ideas about the sort of Messiah Jesus would be. After all, they had imaginations filled with what constituted a ‘successful’ leader, especially the chosen agent of God’s kingdom rule…Jesus, however, refuses to be pressed into the mold of these expectations. His identity and mission run in precisely the opposite direction. And it is important to keep in mind that the expectations that Jesus is going to reject *are those found among his followers*.

Jesus’s refusal to reflect or endorse these expectations represents a powerful challenge to the contemporary church. Jesus’s identity, mission, and message—along with the realities of the kingdom of God—confront worldly norms of how things ought to be done and what constitutes “success.” And they aim to reconfigure the church’s imagination to see God, themselves, culture, and community through the lens of the cross-shaped gospel as the people of a cross-directed Messiah. It is especially relevant for churches set within cultures that define success in terms of prestige, social status, political power, and numerical growth. Jesus tells Peter that he is going to Jerusalem to suffer, be rejected, and to die. This is the way that God works and the manner in which the kingdom of God comes in power. This runs directly counter to Peter’s conception of how the victory of the kingdom of God should come about.”[[5]](#footnote-6)

What standard of “success” do we apply to individual Christians and the church at large? Whose measure are we using? Do we have imaginations so formed by Christ that we would recognize true kingdom work when we see it?

## Pray

In a spirit of prayer, evaluate how you measure the success of Christians and Christian ministry. Pray that your church would strive to meet Jesus’ standards and not the world’s. Pray that you will be shaped by the cross and not the culture.

# Day 5

## Read

*Most commentators include Mark 9:1 in the passage starting with 8:34, so even though we’re doing a chapter a week, we’re going to sneak 9:1 in today.*

### Mark 8:34–9:1 (NIV)

34Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

**9** And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.”

## Study

* According to Garland, “When Jesus lays out the demands and expectations of discipleship, he calls the crowd along with the Twelve and therefore opens it to anyone willing to accept his conditions. He presents them with three demands (8:34), a rationale for accepting these demands (8:35–37), a solemn warning (8:38), and a confident promise (9:1).”[[6]](#footnote-7) Look back at the passage to see what Garland is referencing. What are the three demands, the rationale, the warning and the promise?
* You will sometimes hear opponents of Christianity using 9:1 to discredit Jesus and the gospel. “Look” they’ll say, “Jesus prophesied that his kingdom would come during the disciples’ lifetimes, but obviously it didn’t.” Jesus does anticipate that “some will be able to see his powerless death transformed into glorious vindication and give evidence of God’s powerful reign in Jesus.” But, Jesus may not be referring to a single event “but to a series of events—Jesus’ transfiguration, death, resurrection, and ascension, Pentecost, and the destruction of the temple. As one sees the seed develop into a stalk, head, and full kernel, some of Jesus’ disciples will see the fulfillment of his prediction in stages. The kingdom’s power will be undeniably visible.”[[7]](#footnote-8)

## Think about

Jesus is calling us to a cross-shaped life. Here’s how Garland describes it:

“Every day we must open ourselves up to God’s initiatives and control. Self-denial takes shape in many ways…For the proud, it means renouncing the desire for status and honor. For the greedy, it means renouncing an appetite for wealth. The complacent will have to renounce the love of ease. The fainthearted will have to abandon the craving for security. The violent will have to repudiate the desire for revenge. On it goes. Individuals know best what hinders them from giving their lives over to God.”

Is there something hindering you? If so, what is it? Pray over your answer.

“Disciples must do more than survey the wondrous cross, glory in the cross of Christ, and love the old rugged cross, as beloved hymns have it. They must become like Jesus in obedience and live the cross.”[[8]](#footnote-9)

## Pray

This is a pivotal chapter in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus’ call to the disciples is his call to us. Reflect on [Mark 8](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Mk8). What is the Spirit saying to you through these stories of Jesus? What are you grateful for? How is he prompting you to think or behave differently? Pray over your answers.

1. Tom Wright, [*Mark for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry62mk?ref=Bible.Mk8.1-10&off=4560&ctx=.%0aAt+the+same+time%2c+~it+is+noticeable+tha) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. David E. Garland, [*Mark*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nivac62mk?ref=Bible.Mk8.10-12&off=3122&ctx=it+from+slavery.%E2%80%9D11%0a~Ironically%2c+this+req), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Garland, 310. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Timothy G. Gombis, [Mark](https://ref.ly/logosres/strygdcm62mk?ref=Bible.Mk8.22-26&off=682&ctx=Ephesians+1:15%E2%80%9323.%0a%0a~This+is+a+striking+e), ed. Scot McKnight and Tremper Longman III, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Gombis, 295–296. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Garland, 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Garland, 329–330. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Garland, 333–334. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)