

Discussion Guide for Mark 6:36 – 7:8

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Icebreaker & Opening

- When have you felt completely overwhelmed or under-resourced by a task in front of you? How did you respond?

Part 1: Compassion and the Feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:35–44)

- **Read Mark 6:30–35.** The disciples are tired and want to send the crowds away. How does Jesus' perspective and gut-level **compassion** for the crowd differ from the disciples' practical solution?
- When do you find yourself wanting to "send people away" or avoid an interruption because you are tired or busy?
- **Read Mark 6:36–44.** Jesus tells the disciples, "*You give them something to eat*" with only five loaves and two fish. What does this miracle teach us about facing **impossible situations** with our own limited resources?

1. Compassion and Provision

- How does the feeding of the 5000 illustrate Jesus' compassion for the crowd?
- What does this miracle reveal about Jesus' ability to meet physical needs?
- In what ways can we reflect Jesus' compassion in our own lives?

2. Faith and Resources

- What does Jesus' question, "How many loaves do you have?" teach us about faith and reliance on God?
- How can we apply the lesson of trusting God with our limited resources in our daily lives?

Part 2: Walking on Water and Hard Hearts (Mark 6:45–56)

- **Read Mark 6:47–52.** Why were the disciples so astounded by Jesus calming the storm, and why does Mark note that their hearts were "hardened" (v. 52)?
- In what areas of life do you struggle to connect God's past faithfulness (like the feeding of the 5,000) to your current trials or fears?

Part 3: Tradition vs. The Command of God (Mark 7:1–8)

- **Read Mark 7:1–5.** The Pharisees focus on the ritual tradition of the elders (hand-washing) rather than a direct command of God. Why is it often easier for people—or religious communities—to police **external traditions** rather than deal with the internal condition of the heart?
 - **Read Mark 7:6–8.** Jesus quotes Isaiah, saying, *"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me"*. What are some modern "traditions of men" or cultural expectations that can unintentionally replace or neglect God's commands in our lives today?
 - How can your small group guard against superficial compliance while cultivating a genuine, heart-level surrender to Jesus?
1. **Inner Purity vs. External Traditions**
 - What does Jesus' response to the Pharisees indicate about the importance of inner purity?
 - How do external traditions sometimes overshadow the core message of faith?
 2. **Application to Modern Faith**
 - In what ways can we ensure that our practices do not become mere traditions but reflect genuine faith?
 - How can we encourage others to focus on inner purity rather than just outward appearances?

COMMENTARY

6:35, 36 As **the day** wore on, **His disciples** became restless about the crowd—so many people and **nothing to eat**. They urged the Lord to **send them away**. The same crowd that drew out the compassion of the Savior annoyed the disciples. Are people an intrusion to us, or the objects of our love?

6:37, 38 Jesus turned to the disciples and said, **"You give them something to eat."** The whole thing seemed preposterous—five thousand men, plus women and children, and nothing but five loaves and two fish—and God.

6:39–44 In the miracle that followed, the disciples saw a picture of how the Savior would give Himself to be the bread of life for a starving world. His body would be broken that others might have eternal life. In fact, the words used are highly suggestive of the Lord's Supper which commemorates His death: **He had taken**; He **blessed**; He **broke**; He **gave**.

The disciples also learned precious lessons about their service for Him:

1. Disciples of the Lord Jesus should never doubt His power to supply their needs. If He can feed **five thousand men** with **five loaves and two fish**, He can provide for His trusting servants under any circumstances. They can labor for Him without worry as to where their food is coming from. If they seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, every need will be supplied.
2. How can the perishing world ever be evangelized? Jesus says, **“You give them something to eat!”** If we give Him what we have, however trivial it may seem, He can multiply it in blessing to multitudes.
3. He handled the work in a systematic way by seating the crowd **in groups of hundreds and fifties**.
4. He **blessed** and **broke** the loaves and fish. Unblessed by Him, they would never have availed. Unbroken, they would have been utterly insufficient. “The reason we are not more freely given to men is that we are not yet properly broken” (Selected).
5. Jesus did not distribute the food Himself. He allowed **His disciples** to do this. His plan is to feed the world through His people.
6. There was enough for **all**. If believers today would put everything above current necessities into the work of the Lord, the whole world could hear the gospel in this generation.
7. The **fragments** that were left over (**twelve baskets full**) were more than He started with. God is a bountiful Giver. Yet notice that nothing was wasted. The surplus was gathered up. Waste is a sin.
8. One of the greatest miracles would never have happened if the disciples had stuck to their plan to rest. How often that is true with us!

O. Jesus Walks on the Sea (6:45–52)

6:45–50 The Savior can provide not only for His servants’ sustenance, but for their safety as well.

After sending the disciples back to the west shore of the lake by **boat**, Jesus went up into a **mountain to pray**. In the darkness of the night, He saw them **rowing** hard against a contrary **wind**. He went to their assistance, **walking on the sea**. At first, they were terrified, thinking **it was a ghost**. Then He spoke reassuringly to them and boarded the boat. **The wind ceased** immediately.

6:51, 52 The account closes with the comment: **“They were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled. For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.”** The thought seems to be that even after seeing the power of the Lord in the miracle of the loaves, they still did not realize that nothing was impossible for Him. They shouldn’t have been surprised to see Him walking on the water. It was no greater a miracle than the one they had just witnessed. Lack of faith produced hardness of heart and dullness of spiritual perception.

The church has seen in this miracle a picture of the present age and its close. Jesus on the mountain represents Christ in His present ministry in heaven, interceding for His people. The disciples represent His servants, buffeted by the storms and trials of life. Soon the Savior will

return to His own, deliver them from danger and distress and guide them safe to the heavenly shore.

P. The Servant Healing at Gennesaret (6:53–56)

Back on the west side of the lake, the Lord was besieged with **sick** people. **Wherever He** went, people carried needy cases to Him on mats. **Marketplaces** became improvised hospitals. They wanted only to get close enough to Him to **touch the hem of His garment**. All who **touched Him were made well**.

Q. Tradition Versus the Word of God (7:1–23)

7:1 The Pharisees and ... scribes were Jewish religious leaders who had built up a vast system of rigidly enforced traditions so interwoven with the law of God that they had acquired almost equal authority with the Scriptures. In some cases they actually contradicted the Scriptures or weakened the law of God. The religious leaders delighted in imposing the rules and the people accepted them meekly, satisfied with a system of rituals without reality.

7:2–4 Here we find the Pharisees and scribes criticizing Jesus because **His disciples ate with unwashed hands**. This doesn't mean that the disciples didn't wash their hands before they ate, but that they didn't go through the elaborate ritual prescribed by tradition. Unless, for instance, they washed up to the elbows, they were considered ceremonially **defiled**. If they had been in the market place, they were supposed to take a ceremonial bath. This complex system of washing extended even to the dipping of pots and pans. Regarding the Pharisees, E. Stanley Jones writes:

They came all the way from Jerusalem to meet Him, and their life attitudes were so negative and faultfinding that all they saw was unwashed hands. They couldn't see the greatest movement of redemption that had ever touched our planet—a movement that was cleansing the minds and souls and bodies of men.... Their big eyes were opened wide to the little and marginal, and blind to the big. So history forgets them, the negative—forgets them except as a background for this impact of the positive Christ. They left a criticism; He left a conversion. They picked flaws, He picked followers.

7:5–8 Jesus quickly pointed out the hypocrisy of such behavior. The people were just what **Isaiah** had predicted. They professed great devotion to the Lord, but were inwardly corrupt. By elaborate rituals, they pretended to worship God, but they had substituted their traditions for the doctrines of the Bible. Instead of recognizing the Word of God as the sole authority in all matters of faith and morals, they evaded or explained away the clear demands of the Scripture by their **tradition**.¹

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