Discussion Guide Mark 8:1-33

By: Pastor Tim Dodson, October 28th, 2026

Part 1: Feeding the Four Thousand (Mark 8:1–10)

- **Compassion in Action:** In verse 2, Jesus says, *"I have compassion on these people."* How does Jesus' compassion here differ from a simple feeling? What does this teach us about how we should respond to the physical needs of people around us?

- **Short Memories:** The disciples ask, *"Where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?"* Given that Jesus already fed 5,000 people in Mark 6, why do you think the disciples struggled to remember His power? How do we show the same "spiritual amnesia" in our own lives when facing new problems?

- **The Leftovers:** Jesus satisfies the crowd, and seven baskets of pieces are picked up. What is the significance of God providing *more* than enough?

Part 2: Demand for a Sign & The Yeast of the Pharisees (Mark 8:11–21)

- **Testing God:** The Pharisees ask for a sign from heaven to test Jesus (v. 11). Why do you think Jesus refuses them, considering He just performed a massive miracle? What is the difference between asking God for guidance and demanding a sign to "prove" Himself?

- **Spiritual Yeast:** Jesus warns against the "yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod" (v. 15). Yeast spreads secretly and influences the whole batch of dough. In what ways can hypocrisy, legalism (Pharisees), or political idolatry (Herod) secretly infect a believer or a church community today?

- **Hard Hearts:** In verses 17–21, Jesus asks a rapid-fire series of questions (*"Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?"*). How can someone be physically close to Jesus (like the disciples) but spiritually blind? How can we keep our own hearts soft to His teaching?

👁️ Part 3: The Two-Stage Healing of a Blind Man (Mark 8:22–26)

- **Progressive Healing:** This is the only miracle in the Gospels where Jesus heals someone progressively in stages rather than instantly. Why do you think Jesus chose to heal this man in two steps?

- **A Living Parable:** How does this physical healing serve as a perfect metaphor or visual aid for the disciples' spiritual journey at this exact point in Mark's Gospel?

Part 4: Peter's Confession & The Cost of Discipleship (Mark 8:27–33)

- **The Ultimate Question:** Jesus asks, *"Who do you say I am?"* (v. 29). Why is it not enough to just know what *others* say or think about Jesus? How would you answer this question in your own words today?

- **The Clash of Expectations:** Immediately after Peter declares Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus explains that He must suffer, be rejected, and die. Peter rebukes Jesus for this (v. 32). Why was the idea of a suffering Messiah so offensive to Peter? Where do our own expectations of what God *should* do clash with what His Word says He *will* do?

- **Human vs. Divine Focus:** Jesus tells Peter, *"You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns"* (v. 33). What is the danger of prioritizing human comfort, success, and safety over God's divine purposes? How can we recognize when we are doing this?

COMMENTARY

Feeding of the Four Thousand (8:1–10)

8:1–9 This miracle resembles the feeding of the five thousand, yet notice the differences in the chart above:

The less Jesus had to work with, the more He accomplished and the more He had left over. In chapter 7, we saw crumbs falling from the table to a Gentile woman. Here a multitude of Gentiles is fed abundantly. Erdman comments:

> The first miracle in this period intimated that crumbs of bread might fall from the table for the needy Gentiles; here they may be an intimation that Jesus, rejected by His own people, is to give His life for the world, and is to be the living Bread for all nations.

There is a danger in treating incidents like the feeding of the four thousand as insignificant repetition. We should approach Bible study with the conviction that every word of Scripture is filled with spiritual truth, even if we can't see it at our present state of understanding.

8:10 From Decapolis, Jesus and **His disciples** crossed the Sea of Galilee to the west side, to a place called **Dalmanutha** (Magdala in Matt. 15:39).

U. The Pharisees Seek a Sign From Heaven (8:11–13)

8:11 The **Pharisees** were awaiting Him, demanding **a sign from heaven**. Their blindness and boldness were enormous. Standing in front of them was the greatest Sign of all—the Lord Jesus Himself. He was truly a Sign who had come from heaven, but they had no appreciation for Him. They heard His matchless words, saw His wonderful miracles, came in contact with an absolutely sinless Man—God manifest in the flesh—yet in their blindness asked for **a sign from heaven**!

8:12, 13 No wonder the Savior **sighed deeply**! If any generation in the history of the world was privileged, it was the Jewish **generation** of which those Pharisees were a part. Yet, blind to the clearest evidence that the Messiah had appeared, they asked for a miracle in the heavens rather than on earth. Jesus was saying, "There won't be any more signs. You've had your chance." **Getting into the boat again**, they sailed eastward.

V. The Leaven of the Pharisees and Herod (8:14–21)

8:14, 15 During the journey **the disciples had forgotten to take bread** along. Jesus was still thinking of His encounter with the Pharisees, however, when He warned them against **the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod**. Leaven in the Bible is a consistent type of evil, spreading slowly and quietly and affecting everything it touches. **The leaven of the Pharisees** includes hypocrisy, ritualism, self-righteousness and bigotry. The Pharisees made great outward pretensions of sanctity but were inwardly corrupt and unholy. **The leaven of Herod** may include skepticism, immorality and worldliness. The Herodians were conspicuous for these sins.

8:16–21 The disciples completely missed the point. All they could think of was food. So He directed nine rapid questions to them. The first five reproved them for their obtuseness. The last four rebuked them for worrying about the supply of their needs as long as He was with them. Had He not fed **five thousand** with **five** loaves, leaving **twelve baskets** over? Yes! Had He not fed **four thousand** with **seven** loaves, leaving **seven** hampersful over? Yes, He had. Then why did they not understand that He was abundantly able to supply the needs of a handful of disciples in a boat? Didn't they realize that the Creator and Sustainer of the universe was in the boat with them?

W. Healing of the Blind Man at Bethsaida (8:22–26)

This miracle, found only in Mark, raises several interesting questions. First, why did Jesus lead the man **out of the town** before healing him? Why didn't He heal by simply touching the man? Why use such an unconventional means as saliva? Why didn't the man receive perfect sight immediately? (This is the only cure in the Gospels which took place in stages.) Finally, why did Jesus forbid the man to tell about the miracle **in the town**? Our Lord is sovereign and is not

obligated to account to us for His actions. There was a valid reason for everything He did, even though we might not perceive it. Every case of healing is different, as is every case of conversion. Some gain remarkable spiritual sight as soon as they are converted. Others see dimly at first, then later enter into full assurance of salvation.

X. Peter's Great Confession (8:27–30)

The last two paragraphs of this chapter bring us to the high water mark of the training of the twelve. The disciples needed to have a deep, personal appreciation of who Jesus is before He could share with them the pathway ahead and invite them to follow Him in a life of devotion and sacrifice. This passage brings us to the heart of discipleship. It is perhaps the most neglected area in Christian thought and practice today.

8:27, 28 Jesus and His disciples sought solitude in the far north. On the way to **Caesarea Philippi**, He opened the subject by asking what public opinion said of Him. In general, men were acknowledging Him to be a great man—equal to **John the Baptist, Elijah** or other **prophets**. But man's honor is actually dishonor. If Jesus is not God, then He is a deceiver, a madman, or a legend. There is no other possibility.

8:29, 30 Then the Lord pointedly asked the disciples for their evaluation of Him. **Peter** promptly declared Him to be **the Christ**, that is, the Messiah, or the Anointed One. Intellectually, Peter had known this. But something had happened in his life so that now there was a profound, personal conviction. Life could never be the same again. Peter could never be satisfied with a self-centered existence. If Christ was the Messiah, then Peter must live for Him in total abandonment.

Y. The Servant Predicts His Death and Resurrection (8:31–38)

Thus far we have watched the Servant of Jehovah in a life of incessant service for others. We have seen Him hated by His enemies and misunderstood by His friends. We have seen a life of dynamic power, of moral perfection, of utter love and humility.

8:31 But the path of service to God leads on to suffering and death. So the Savior now told the disciples plainly that He **must** (1) **suffer**; (2) **be rejected**; (3) **be killed**; (4) **rise again**. For Him the path to glory would lead first to the cross and the grave. "The heart of service would be revealed in sacrifice," as F. W. Grant put it.

8:32, 33 Peter could not accept the idea that Jesus would have to suffer and die; that was contrary to his image of the Messiah. Neither did he want to think that his Lord and Master would be slain by His foes. He rebuked the Savior for suggesting such a thing. It was then that Jesus said to Peter, **"Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."** Not that Jesus was accusing Peter of being Satan, or of being indwelt by Satan. He meant, "You are talking like Satan would. He always tries to discourage us from wholly obeying God. He tempts us to take an easy path to the Throne." Peter's words were Satanic in origin and content, and this caused the Lord's indignation. Kelly comments:

> What was it that so roused our Lord? The very snare to which we are all so exposed: the desire of saving self; the preference of an easy path to the cross. Is it not true that we naturally like to escape trial, shame, and rejection; that we shrink from the suffering which doing God's will, in

> such a world as this, must ever entail; that we prefer to have a quiet, respectable path in the earth—in short, the best of both worlds? How easily one may be ensnared into this! Peter could not understand why the Messiah should go through all this path of sorrow. Had we been there, we might have said or thought yet worse. Peter's remonstrance was not without strong human affection. He heartily loved the Savior too. But, unknown to himself, there was the unjudged spirit of the world.

Note that Jesus first **looked at His disciples**, then **rebuked Peter**, as if to say, "If I do not go to the cross, how can these, My disciples, be saved?"[1]

[1] William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1339–1341.