



If you think the Lord is unaware or too busy to be concerned about your need, take to heart His words in Matthew 6:31-33: “*Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ . . . Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*”

4. Matthew 6:33 contains both a *condition* to fulfill and a *promise* to claim—what are they?
  - What adjustments, if any, can you make to ensure you will seek Him first, above all else?

There is no problem too great for Him to handle; no need too small or insignificant to warrant His attention. He is the same *yesterday, today, and forever!* He is the Bread of Life now, in this moment.

*Heartbeat . . .* (Memory verse) “*Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*” Mark 8:34b

## *Day Two:*                    The Failure to Understand

### *What to look for . . .*

Jesus and the disciples sailed to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee where they were once again met by an angry group of Pharisees, determined to demand a sign from heaven to authenticate Jesus’ authority. But they were not the only ones who failed to perceive His true mission.

#### **Read Mark 8:11-21**

1. What was the real motive behind the Pharisees desire for a sign from heaven?  
v. 11

These men came and began to dispute, or debate Him, asking for a sign in the hope of unmasking a false prophet. Once again they were laying a trap for Him.

2. What was the Lord’s response to them? v. 12

In Matthew’s account of this confrontation (see Matthew 16:4), Jesus allows the only exception—the sign of Jonah—referring to His resurrection.

The appeal to Jesus for a miracle can originate from the expression of one's faith as in the case of the Syrophenician woman (7:25-26) and the deaf mute brought for healing (7:32). But if the request arises from a heart of unbelief as in the case of the Pharisees, it is disingenuous and Jesus will not honor it.

*Selah* . . . Do you expect God to prove Himself to you? Have you asked for a sign before you will believe? Write out the words to John 20:29 in the space below.

After this encounter with the religious leaders, Jesus abruptly got into the boat accompanied by the disciples and headed back toward the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This marked the end of His ministry in the region.

3. What had the disciples forgotten to take along? v. 14
  - a. While they were worrying about provisions, how did Jesus use their concern to warn them? v. 15

Yeast is a key element in making bread, causing the dough to rise. Most often in Scripture it is symbolic of the pervasive influence of evil. In this context, it refers to a gradual increase of *unbelief*. The Pharisees had asked for a sign, even though their minds were already made up. Jesus warned against this kind of attitude.

4. Did the disciples understand what Jesus was saying to them? vv. 16-21
  - a. Of what did He remind them?
  - b. After they correctly answered all His questions, what did He ask them?

It was a rhetorical question—the answer should have been obvious! His last question: “*Do you still not understand?*” was meant as an appeal to consider all they had personally witnessed and heard. If they carefully weighed all the evidence, they would correctly conclude who Jesus was—their Messiah! If Jesus presented you with the same question, how would you respond?

*Review this week's memory verse.*

## *Day Three:* Who Do You Say that I Am?

### *What to look for...*

Here Mark records a miracle not found in the other Gospels. It is perhaps fitting that it follows the example of the disciples' continued spiritual blindness (8:14-21). The way in which Jesus healed this particular man demonstrates that He uses a variety of ways to accomplish His purposes. We will also see that this miracle connects with Peter's declaration that follows.

#### **Read Mark 8:22-30.**

Jesus and the disciples again crossed the sea to Bethsaida, Peter's hometown (John 1:44). When they arrived some people brought a blind man to Jesus.

1. What was the tone of their request? v. 22
  - a. What was the first unusual thing Jesus did? v. 23
  - b. What did Jesus then proceed to do to open the man's eyes?

Whether it was the unbelief of the people in Bethsaida or the spiritual condition of the man, Jesus chose to go outside the city. The fact that this individual could recognize images indicates he may not have been born blind, but that it may have resulted from an accident or some form of disease.

2. What happened when Jesus touched him the second time? v. 25

Do you see a parallel between the disciples' spiritual blindness and the man in the story being healed in stages? The incomplete healing of this man did not reflect an inability on the part of Jesus to heal; rather, He healed him gradually to build his faith to believe he would be restored. It also served as a teaching lesson for the disciples whose spiritual eyes were beginning to open, but not completely. Jesus earlier rebuked them for their lack of understanding, but soon they would all know.

3. *Personal:* Is there something God has begun to open to your spiritual understanding that you could not see before? (Acknowledge it by noting it here.)

The disciples were learning lessons that would benefit them later on: trust Jesus to supply every need; don't ask for a sign, believe in faith; avoid the *leaven* of unbelief; expect Jesus to work in a variety of ways. From here on, Jesus would begin to disclose in a greater way what awaited Him at Jerusalem.

4. As Jesus and the disciples took a long walk together (25 miles from Bethsaida to Caesarea Phillipi), what question did He pose regarding His identity? vv. 27-28
  - What does their reply tell you about the understanding of the people?
  
5. Jesus then asked them a more direct question to point out their understanding apart from what others thought. What did He ask?
  - What did Peter's declaration reveal about his belief in Jesus?

### *Come closer...*

Jesus' initial question addressed what others thought about Him. His second question was very direct—intended to stop the disciples in their tracks. It was intended to be personal. Today He asks *you* the same pointed question: “*Who do **you** say that I am?*” Take a moment to ponder your answer and then record it here.

*Review this week's memory verse.*

## *Day Four:*                    The Cost of True Discipleship

### *What to look for...*

The consensus of opinion among the people was in favor of a Messiah coming to crush the Roman occupation and raise the nation of Israel to prominence. Jesus, however, *began* to teach those closest to Him that the Son of Man must die. Peter's objection clearly reveals how hard it was for the disciples to receive the idea of a savior who would suffer and give his life.

#### **Read Mark 8:31-38**

1. What did Jesus explain would ultimately happen to Him? vv. 31-33
  - a. Jesus spoke openly to them, but then what did Peter do?
  
  - b. What was the Lord's response to all the disciples?

Without realizing it, Peter was attempting to prevent Jesus from going to the cross and fulfilling God's purpose for Him on earth.

Contrary to what the disciples previously thought, Jesus told them that He did not come to establish an earthly kingdom. This was the turning point in His preparation of the disciples. From this point on He spoke clearly and often about what they could expect—that He would have to suffer, be rejected, be killed, and then rise again from the dead.

2. When He had called the people and the disciples together, what did He tell them about the cost of discipleship? v. 34

The term *take up his cross* brought to mind the sight of a condemned man forced to carry his own cross through the streets of Palestine to the place of his execution. It was intended to demonstrate submission to the authority against which a person had previously rebelled.

- a. What does it mean to *deny self*?
  - b. What does it mean to *follow Jesus*?
3. For whose sake must one be willing to lose one's life? What happens to those willing to make the sacrifice? v. 35

The Greek word for life is *psuche*, referring to the *soul*—the part of a person having to do with personality (including their ideals, hopes, and goals, etc.). The person who seeks to save their own life by satisfying these things apart from God ultimately *loses* that life. The person willing to lose their life for the sake of Jesus Christ and the Gospel actually saves it. Jesus wants us to stop taking the control of our lives and follow Him into His plan for us, which is ultimately better than anything we could ever conceive in ourselves!

4. In yet another attempt to illustrate the same point, what does Jesus ask? vv. 36-37
  - a. What fate awaits those who are ashamed of Jesus and His words? v. 38  
Where do *you* stand on this issue?

There is absolutely nothing of value that is worth exchanging for a person's soul. Even if a person gained the whole world, it is meaningless because only the soul lasts for eternity! The pursuit of God must be more important to us than the pursuit of worldly pleasures. To wholeheartedly follow Jesus *now* means abundant life not only in this world, but also in the eternal world to come!

*Review this week's memory verse.*

*Day Five:*

Praying God's Purpose

It's time to do some *prayer walking*—not in the literal, but the *spiritual* sense. The Holy Spirit will lead you today as you consider three points from your lesson, write them in the form of a prayer, and lift them to the Lord. If practicing the presence of God is new to you—be patient—it will come, and you will be blessed!

*"... We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."* Romans 8:26-27 NLT

*A prayer for forgiveness . . .*

Do you struggle with unbelief creeping in and taking control of your thought life—even spilling over into your actions? Ask God to forgive you and help you believe what He says to you in His Word.

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*A prayer for enlightenment . . .*

Do you feel you need to ask God to open your spiritual eyes for greater understanding? Lift that desire to Him in prayer today.

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*A prayer for denying self . . .*

Have you determined in your heart to deny self and take up your cross to follow Jesus? Ask Him to help you daily commit to His purpose.

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*Write out this week's verse from memory:*

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## Notes