

The Gospel of Mark, Teacher's Guide

Week 9: The Compassion of the Shepherd King

Mark 6:30–56

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Mark 6:30–56 brings together three closely related scenes (the feeding of the five thousand, the walking on the sea, and the healings at Gennesaret) and weaves them around a single theme: the deep, steady compassion of Jesus as the long-promised Shepherd of God's people.

Doctrinally, this lesson will need to address several large themes. Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Shepherd promises (Ezekiel 34; Psalm 23; John 10). Christ's sufficiency to do much with the little His people offer Him. The Eucharistic shape of the feeding, which foreshadows the Lord's Supper as the church's weekly meal with the risen Christ (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26). The deity of Christ revealed in His walking on the sea and in His self-identification, "It is I." And, with sobering weight, the reality that even genuine disciples can have hearts that quietly harden when they do not pay attention to what the Lord has done.

At the same time, the lesson is one of the warmest in the entire Gospel. Most students sitting in front of you are running tired. They are juggling responsibilities, carrying burdens, holding people they love through hard times, and giving more than they think they have. The scene in Mark 6 of Jesus looking at a needy crowd with compassion rather than impatience is exactly the picture they need to remember. He is the same today. They are not interrupting Him. They are exactly the people He came to feed. Lift their eyes to a Christ who has not changed.

Finally, do not let the chapter end without naming the hardness-of-heart warning. It is striking that Mark places the warning not on the rejecting crowds but on the chosen Twelve. They had just watched the loaves multiply, and a few hours later they could not see who was walking toward them across the water. This is a warning aimed straight at long-term, faithful, active disciples. We are exactly the ones whose hearts are most at risk of quietly forgetting. Help your students leave the lesson with a deepened resolve to remember, to give thanks, to come to the Lord's Supper attentively each first day of the week, and to refuse the slow drift into a heart that has stopped marveling.

Question 1

Student Question:

When Jesus sees the crowd that has run around the lake ahead of Him, Mark says, "He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (6:34). Connecting this scene with Ezekiel 34, Psalm 23, and John 10:11–18, what is Mark teaching us about the identity of Jesus as the long-promised Shepherd of God's people, and what does it mean for the daily life of believers to belong to this Shepherd?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The phrase “sheep without a shepherd” carries enormous Old Testament weight. Moses prayed that God would not leave Israel “as sheep that have no shepherd” (Numbers 27:17). In 1 Kings 22:17, Micaiah saw Israel “scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd” in the days of unfaithful kings. Most importantly, Ezekiel 34 records the Lord’s great indictment of unfaithful shepherds and His promise that He Himself would come and shepherd His sheep: “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down” (Ezekiel 34:15). When Jesus looks at the Galilean crowd and sees sheep without a shepherd, He is looking at people whose religious leaders have failed them and into whose lives the long-promised Shepherd of God Himself has now come.

This is one of the great unspoken claims of the chapter. Jesus does not merely have compassion. He acts as the very Shepherd Ezekiel had promised. He gathers the scattered. He teaches them many things. He feeds them with His own hand. He gives them rest. In John 10 He will say it explicitly: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Hebrews 13:20 calls Him “the great shepherd of the sheep,” and 1 Peter 2:25 calls Him “the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” Psalm 23 finds its fulfillment in Him.

To belong to this Shepherd is to belong to the One who knows His sheep by name (John 10:3), goes after the lost one until He finds it (Luke 15:4–7), feeds them in green pastures, leads them beside still waters, restores their souls, and walks with them through the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23). It is to be enrolled in His care for the rest of life and into eternity.

For students this is meant to be a deep comfort. The Lord is not absent. The shepherd is not asleep. The compassion of Jesus toward needy, weary, distracted, even demanding people is unchanged. He sees the crowd and is not annoyed. He sees them and is moved.

It also has implications for the church. Christ shepherds His sheep through the means He has appointed: His Word, His Spirit, the Lord’s Supper, prayer, the assembly of the saints, and the under-shepherds He has placed in His church (1 Peter 5:1–4; Acts 20:28). Every faithful elder in a local congregation is a small extension of the Shepherd’s own care.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament shepherd promises (Ezekiel 34; Psalm 23; John 10:11–18)
- Christ as the great Shepherd of the sheep (Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25)
- The personal knowledge and care of Christ for each of His people (John 10:3, 27–28)
- Elders in the local congregation as under-shepherds extending Christ’s care (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1–4)
- Christ’s compassion as a defining attribute of His relationship with His people (Matthew 9:35–38; Hebrews 4:14–16)

- The means of grace by which Christ shepherds His people today: the Word, prayer, the Lord's Supper, the assembly

Discussion Prompts

- How does Ezekiel 34 prepare us to recognize what is happening in Mark 6?
- What changes about your day-to-day life when you remember Christ is your Shepherd?
- How do elders, brothers, and sisters in the church extend the Shepherd's care to one another?

Question 2

Student Question:

Sheep without a shepherd are restless, wandering, vulnerable, and exhausted. Where in your own life or in the lives of people you love do you see the marks of shepherdless living, and where do you most need to allow Christ to actually shepherd you (in your decisions, your fears, your rhythms, your hopes) rather than running on your own?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Sheep without a shepherd are easy to recognize. They are restless. They wander into danger they do not see. They are exhausted because they keep moving without ever quite arriving. They are vulnerable. They are anxious. They will follow the loudest voice that promises green pasture, even when the voice belongs to a wolf.

Help students name the places in their own lives or in the lives of people they love where shepherdless living is showing up. The grown child who is bouncing between identities and ideologies because no settled voice is leading. The friend who cannot find rest in any season. The marriage that feels like two anxious sheep rather than two flock members. The own life that is full and busy and exhausting and yet somehow has not produced the deep peace they thought their faith was supposed to bring.

The corrective is not more activity. It is more shepherding. To allow Christ to actually be the Shepherd. To open the Word to listen, not just to study. To pray for guidance and then wait. To bring decisions, especially the small ones we usually keep to ourselves, into His presence. To accept the under-shepherding of the elders and the brothers and sisters He has placed around us. To slow down enough to be led.

For most students, this will mean adjusting some specific area. The morning routine that has no time for the Lord. The decision being made by spreadsheet rather than by prayer. The fear that has not been spoken aloud to Him. The relationship that has been driven by anxiety rather than carried in His care. Encourage one concrete change this week. Small steady steps into the Shepherd's rhythm are how a wandering soul gets gathered back into the flock.

There is also a relational dimension. Sheep are flock animals. They do not flourish alone. Christians who try to follow the Shepherd in isolation, away from the local congregation and away from the faithful relationships He has placed in their lives, end up wandering even when they want to follow. Lean back into the community.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The flock nature of the Christian life; Christ shepherds His people in community (1 Corinthians 12; Acts 2:42–47)
- The means of grace as ordinary instruments of being shepherded (Word, prayer, the Lord's Supper, the assembly, faithful elders)
- Rest in Christ as a defining gift of the Shepherd (Matthew 11:28–30; Psalm 23:2)
- The danger of self-leading rather than being led (Proverbs 3:5–6; Jeremiah 10:23)
- The need for deliberate, daily yielding to Christ's guidance in concrete areas of life

Discussion Prompts

- What does shepherdless living look like in our culture right now?
- Where in your life are you most tempted to lead yourself instead of being led?
- What concrete change this week would allow Christ to shepherd one specific part of your life more directly?

Question 3

Student Question:

When the disciples want to send the crowd away to find food, Jesus tells them, "You give them something to eat" (6:37), and then asks what they have. They report five loaves and two fish. What is Jesus teaching the disciples (and the church) about what He does with the small offering of His people when it is placed into His hands, and what does this scene illustrate about His sufficiency and our role as servants of His abundance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The disciples want a sensible solution. "Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat" (6:36). It is the answer of tired, practical people who have rightly assessed their resources and concluded that the problem is bigger than they can solve. Jesus does not accept their answer. He simply says, "You give them something to eat."

That sentence is a wrench in their plans. There are five thousand men, not counting women and children. The amount of food required is far beyond anything they could produce. Two hundred denarii would not be enough. Two hundred denarii was about eight months of a working man's wages. The disciples are not being unreasonable when they object. They are being mathematical. Jesus is not interested in their mathematics. He is interested in what they have.

He asks the question that defines this whole scene: “How many loaves do you have? Go and see” (6:38). They check. They find five loaves and two fish, perhaps one boy’s lunch (John 6:9). Jesus tells the disciples to seat the crowd in groups, takes what they have, looks to heaven, blesses, breaks, and hands the food back to them. The disciples carry the food. The crowd eats. Everyone has enough. Twelve baskets of leftovers are gathered up, one for each disciple, as if to make sure they will not forget what He has done.

This scene teaches at least two enormous truths. First, Christ’s sufficiency is not bounded by our shortage. He does not need our abundance. He works with what we have. When five loaves are placed in His hands, the question of how much is no longer the operative question. The question is whether He has it. Second, the disciples are part of His provision. He does not feed the crowd around the disciples. He hands them the bread. They distribute it. The miracle goes through their hands.

For students, this means rethinking the way we evaluate kingdom resources. The right question is rarely whether we have enough. The right question is whether what we have has been offered to Christ and is being distributed in obedience to His command. Five loaves in Christ’s hands are more than a warehouse not yet surrendered.

It also means rethinking the role of the disciple. We are not the source. We are the carriers. The Bread of Life still works through our hands. Every quiet ministry of teaching, hospitality, prayer, generosity, and witness is part of the way Christ continues to feed His people. We are not the source of the bread. We are the ones who set it before the people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ’s sufficiency apart from human abundance (2 Corinthians 9:8; Philippians 4:19)
- The faithful offering of what we have as the way God multiplies our service (1 Corinthians 4:1–2)
- Disciples as carriers of Christ’s provision to others, not its source (1 Corinthians 3:6–9)
- Christ as the Bread of Life who feeds His people (John 6:35, 51)
- The principle of much from little when offered to Christ (1 Kings 17:8–16; 2 Kings 4:1–7)
- Faithful obedience as the proper response when commands seem larger than resources

Discussion Prompts

- How does this scene reshape the way you measure kingdom resources?
- What is your role as a “carrier” of Christ’s provision in someone else’s life right now?
- What problem in your life feels like too many people and not enough loaves? What might it look like to put what you have in Christ’s hands?

Question 4

Student Question:

Most of us measure our lives by what we do not have rather than by what Jesus has put in our hands. What are the “five loaves and two fish” of your own life right now, the small but real resources, gifts, relationships, and time that Christ could multiply if you would actually offer them to Him, and which one of those is He asking you to hand Him this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Most of us spend most of our lives focused on the loaves we do not have. The career we wish we had taken. The relationship we wish had not ended. The income we wish were higher. The talent we wish were more visible. The energy we wish were not declining. The illness we wish were not real. We are convinced that if we just had a little more of what we are missing, we could finally serve the Lord the way we have been meaning to.

This question turns the lens around. What has Christ actually put in your hand? Not the abundance you wish you had. The five loaves and two fish you actually have. The gifts the Lord has already given you. The relationships in your network. The hours in your week that you actually control. The years of experience you have already accumulated. The opportunities already in front of you. These are the resources He intends to multiply, if you will hand them to Him.

Help students get specific. Maybe the five loaves are an empty seat at your dinner table that could host a hurting neighbor. Maybe they are a half hour each week you could spend mentoring a younger believer. Maybe they are the wisdom of your years that a struggling young couple needs. Maybe they are a small, faithful prayer life that could grow into something Christ uses to carry someone through a crisis. Maybe they are a handful of dollars that, when given gladly, opens doors you could not have imagined.

There is a particular kind of joy that comes from offering the small thing. It defeats the lie that we will start serving Christ when our resources are bigger. It puts us in the company of the boy with the lunch, the widow with the two coins (Mark 12:41–44), the woman with the alabaster jar (Mark 14:3–9). All of these are people who gave what they actually had, and Christ did more with their gifts than any of them could have done themselves.

Encourage students to identify one specific “loaf” they can hand to Christ this week. Be concrete. The lesson is not finished until something is actually offered.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Stewardship of the gifts, time, and resources Christ has actually given (Matthew 25:14–30; 1 Peter 4:10)
- The biblical pattern of God using small and despised things to do great kingdom work (1 Corinthians 1:26–31)
- Joy in giving as a fruit of grace (2 Corinthians 9:7; Acts 20:35)
- The danger of waiting for ideal conditions before obedience (Ecclesiastes 11:4)

- The faithful use of what we have as the way the Lord entrusts more (Luke 16:10)

Discussion Prompts

- What are the “five loaves and two fish” in your life right now?
- Which one is Christ asking you to put in His hands this week?
- What story would you tell of a time when offering something small produced a kingdom-sized result?

Question 5

Student Question:

Mark’s description of the feeding is striking: Jesus “took the five loaves and the two fish and looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people” (6:41). The verbs (took, blessed, broke, gave) reappear at the Last Supper (Mark 14:22) and in the church’s ongoing Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23–26). What is Mark hinting at by using this language here, and what does the connection teach us about the meaning of the Lord’s Supper as the church’s weekly meal with the risen Shepherd?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Mark’s description of the feeding is deliberately layered with Eucharistic language. “Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people” (6:41). The same fourfold pattern (took, blessed, broke, gave) appears in Mark 14:22 at the Last Supper: “He took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them.” It appears again in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, in the church’s ongoing observance of the Lord’s Supper.

Mark is hinting at something. The feeding of the five thousand is more than a generous miracle. It is a foretaste of what Christ will do for His people in every Lord’s Supper. He takes ordinary bread. He blesses it. He breaks it. He gives it to His disciples, who in turn set it before His people. And in that meal, the risen Christ feeds His church.

The Lord’s Supper is not a mere memorial in the sense of empty remembering. It is a meeting with the Shepherd who continues to feed His sheep. “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16). In the bread and the cup, the church proclaims the Lord’s death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:26), receives strength to keep walking, and is bound together in one body (1 Corinthians 10:17).

The New Testament pattern is clear. The first-century church observed the Lord’s Supper on the first day of every week. “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them” (Acts 20:7). 1 Corinthians 16:2 connects the first day of the week with the gathered church. Revelation 1:10 calls it “the Lord’s Day.” This is the day on which

Christ rose from the dead (Mark 16:9; Matthew 28:1), and it is the day on which His church gathers to remember and to feast at His table.

It is also important to be clear what the Lord's Day is not. It is not a "Christian Sabbath" under the Old Covenant Sabbath laws. The Sabbath was a sign of the Old Covenant given to Israel (Exodus 31:13–17; Colossians 2:16–17), and that covenant has been fulfilled in Christ (Hebrews 8:6–13). The first day of the week is the New Covenant day of assembly, established by the resurrection of Christ and the apostolic pattern of worship, including the Lord's Supper.

For students, the Lord's Supper is the weekly anchor of their walk with Christ. Help them see this feeding scene as a foretaste of what they receive every Sunday. The same Shepherd who fed the five thousand still feeds His people in the bread and the cup. Not a different Christ. Not a smaller act. The same compassion in concentrated, regular form, given for the strengthening of the saints.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Lord's Supper as the church's weekly meal with the risen Christ (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26)
- The first day of the week as the New Testament day of Christian assembly (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10)
- The Lord's Day distinguished from the Old Covenant Sabbath, which has been fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:16–17; Hebrews 8:6–13)
- The Supper as both proclamation of Christ's death and participation in His body and blood (1 Corinthians 10:16–17; 11:26)
- The Supper as a means by which the Shepherd continues to feed His sheep
- The unity of the one body expressed in the one loaf and the one cup (1 Corinthians 10:17)

Discussion Prompts

- How does seeing the "took, blessed, broke, gave" pattern in Mark 6 deepen your understanding of the Lord's Supper?
- Why is it important that the first-century church observed the Lord's Supper weekly on the first day of the week?
- What is the difference between the Old Covenant Sabbath and the New Covenant Lord's Day, and why does that distinction matter for our worship today?

Question 6

Student Question:

Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 establish the New Testament pattern of the Lord's Supper being shared on the first day of every week. How does (or could) faithful weekly participation at the Lord's table shape your awareness of Christ's compassion, your dependence on His

sufficiency, and your unity with the whole congregation, and what would it look like for you to come to that table this Sunday with a more attentive heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Many Christians attend the Lord's Supper every Sunday and yet do not actually meet Christ at His table. The bread is passed. The cup is passed. The mind is somewhere else. The mechanics of the rite are observed, but the encounter with the Shepherd is missed. The challenge of this question is to recover what is actually happening at the table and to come to it differently this Sunday.

There are several practical disciplines that help. Arriving with time enough to settle the heart before worship begins, not breathless and distracted. Praying through 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 or Mark 14:22–25 during the week, so the words are alive when they are heard again in the assembly. Examining ourselves before the Supper (1 Corinthians 11:28), confessing known sin, and renewing our union with Christ. Receiving the bread and the cup deliberately, with thanksgiving, not as a hurried obligation. Letting our minds rest, even for a moment, on the body broken for us, the blood shed for us, the resurrection that vindicated Him, and the fellowship of saints around us who share the one loaf.

The Supper also shapes the rest of the week. We come back to the table each Sunday because the week has worn on us. We come tired, stained, sometimes ashamed, sometimes confused, often weary. Christ meets us there. He feeds us. He renews our identity. He binds us back to His body. And we leave equipped for another week of living in the world as those who belong to Him.

For students, encourage one concrete change this week. Read 1 Corinthians 11 carefully on Saturday night. Pray about a particular sin or struggle as you take the bread. Look around at your brothers and sisters during the Supper and remember that you are one body. Linger in thanksgiving as the cup passes. Whatever the change, let the Supper this Sunday be a real meeting with the risen Christ.

Help students also see the Lord's Supper as a unifying act of the whole congregation. The one loaf reminds us that we are one body. The shared cup binds us together. The Supper is not a private meal between me and Jesus. It is the church meeting her Lord together. To skip it lightly, or to come carelessly, is to miss what He has given the church for her sustenance.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Weekly observance of the Lord's Supper as the New Testament pattern (Acts 20:7)
- Self-examination as the proper preparation for the Supper (1 Corinthians 11:27–32)
- The Supper as a means of communion with Christ and with the whole body (1 Corinthians 10:16–17)
- The Lord's Day as a deliberate, recurring rhythm in Christian life (Hebrews 10:24–25)

- The Supper as nourishment for the church's ongoing pilgrimage (John 6:53–58)

Discussion Prompts

- What change in your Sunday preparation would help you come to the Lord's table more attentively?
- How does the weekly Supper shape your awareness of being part of one body?
- What truth about Christ have you most needed to receive at His table in the last month?

Question 7

Student Question:

In verses 47–50, Jesus walks across the sea toward the disciples in the middle of the night and tells them, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” Mark also notes that Jesus “meant to pass by them” (6:48), echoing Old Testament moments when God passes by His servants (Exodus 33:18–23; 1 Kings 19:11–13). What is Mark teaching about the identity of Jesus, and how does this scene reinforce the deity of Christ even as the disciples are slow to recognize Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Mark's description of Jesus walking on the sea is one of the most theologically loaded scenes in the Gospel. The disciples are straining at the oars against a contrary wind in the middle of the night. Jesus sees them. He comes to them, walking on the sea, and Mark says, “He meant to pass by them” (6:48). They cry out in fear. He immediately says, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid” (6:50). He climbs into the boat and the wind ceases.

The Old Testament background here is unmistakable. In Job 9:8, God is described as the one who “alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea.” In Psalm 77:19, the LORD's “way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen.” Walking on the sea is a divine prerogative. Then there is the deliberate phrase “he meant to pass by them.” When the LORD passed by Moses in Exodus 33:18–23 and 34:6, it was a deliberate, self-revealing moment. When He passed by Elijah at Mount Horeb in 1 Kings 19:11–13, it was the same kind of moment. Mark is telling us that Jesus is doing what the LORD does in the Old Testament.

The phrase “It is I” carries the same weight. In Greek it is ‘ego eimi,’ the same phrase used in the Septuagint translation of Exodus 3:14, where God reveals Himself to Moses as “I AM.” In John's Gospel, Jesus repeatedly uses ‘ego eimi’ as a self-identification with the divine name (John 8:24, 28, 58; 18:6). Mark gives us the same claim in compressed form here. Walking on the sea. Passing by. Self-identification with the divine name. The disciples are looking at God in the flesh.

And yet they do not see it. Mark says they were utterly astounded, but he immediately adds the painful sentence: “For they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were

hardened” (6:51–52). The miracle of the feeding had not yet sunk in. The identity of Jesus was right in front of them, and they were slow to read it.

For students, this scene is meant to settle their confidence in Christ. The One who walks across the sea toward them in the dark is the One who spoke creation into being, parted the Red Sea, walked with Israel through the wilderness, and revealed Himself to Moses as I AM. That same Christ is in their boat now.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The deity of Christ revealed in His walking on the sea (Job 9:8; Psalm 77:19)
- Christ’s self-identification as “I AM” (Mark 6:50; John 8:24, 28, 58; Exodus 3:14)
- The “passing by” of Christ as deliberate divine self-disclosure (Exodus 33:18–23; 1 Kings 19:11–13)
- The full deity and full humanity of Christ united in one person (Philippians 2:5–11; John 1:14)
- Christ’s authority over wind and sea, demonstrating His identity as Creator (Colossians 1:16–17)
- The progressive nature of the disciples’ recognition of Christ’s identity through the Gospel of Mark

Discussion Prompts

- What Old Testament background helps us read Mark 6:45–52 with full force?
- What does ‘ego eimi’ (“I am”) reveal about who Jesus is?
- Why do you think the disciples were so slow to recognize who was in their boat?

Question 8

Student Question:

The disciples were straining at the oars in the middle of the night, making almost no progress against the wind, when Jesus came to them across the water. Where in your life right now are you straining at the oars, exhausted and unable to make headway, and what would change in that situation if you genuinely received the truth that Christ is already on His way to you across the storm?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The picture in Mark 6:48 is haunting. The disciples are straining at the oars. The wind is against them. They are making no headway. It is the middle of the night. Jesus sees them. He does not call from shore. He does not wait for them to figure it out. He walks out to them across the very water that is fighting them.

Most students can name a season like this in their own life. The relationship they have been rowing toward and getting nowhere. The habit they have been trying to break for years. The

illness that will not lift. The grief that will not finish. The financial stress that does not let up. The wayward child whose direction will not turn. The ministry that feels heavier than it should. The simple weariness of life pressed against you for a long time.

This question is meant to land in that specific place. Where are you straining at the oars right now? Where have you been pulling and pulling and the shore is no closer? Jesus is not far away. The same Christ who walked toward His disciples across the storm is walking toward you. He is not surprised by the wind. He is not delayed by it. He is, in fact, using it as the very path on which He is coming to you.

That is not a metaphor for soft comfort. It is a steady, sober promise. “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid” (6:50). Christ does not promise that the wind will be silenced immediately. He promises that He is with us in it. Often He climbs into the boat and the wind dies in the next sentence. Sometimes the storm continues for a long season, and what changes is that we know He is with us in it. Either way, the disciple is not alone, and the boat will not sink.

Encourage students to do two things this week. First, name the specific situation where they are straining at the oars. Second, look for Jesus walking toward them in it, sometimes in obvious answers, often in quiet steadying through Scripture, through a brother or sister’s prayer, through the Supper, through a sustained sense of His presence. Christ has not abandoned His sheep. He never abandons them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ’s constant presence with His people through every storm (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5–6)
- The disciple’s confidence grounded in the character of Christ, not the cessation of difficulty
- Prayer as the believer’s direct access to Christ in storms (Philippians 4:6–7; 1 Peter 5:7)
- The local congregation as a community of mutual support through hard seasons (Galatians 6:2; James 5:13–16)
- Means of grace (the Word, the Lord’s Supper, the assembly, the company of saints) as the steady channels of Christ’s presence
- The certainty that the believer’s “boat” will not sink, even when it feels like it might (John 10:27–29)

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you straining at the oars in your life right now?
- Where do you see, or could you look for, Christ walking toward you in that situation?
- What is one specific way you can lean into Christ’s presence this week, even if the storm continues?

Question 9

Student Question:

Mark closes the storm scene with one of the most sobering sentences in his Gospel: “They were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened” (6:51–52). What is Mark teaching about the danger of a slowly hardening heart even among genuine disciples, why is forgetting what God has already done such a serious spiritual problem, and what does Scripture call us to do to keep our hearts soft and remembering (compare Hebrews 3:7–15; Deuteronomy 8:11–18; Psalm 103:1–5)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Mark 6:51–52 deserves to be read slowly. “And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.” It is one of the most sobering sentences in the Gospel. The disciples have just watched Christ feed five thousand. They have just rowed all night through a contrary wind. They have just seen Him walk toward them on the water and step into their boat. The wind has stopped. And Mark says their hearts were hardened.

What does this mean? Not that they were apostates. Not that they had lost their salvation in some final, catastrophic way. They are still the Twelve. They are still with Jesus. But there is a slowness of heart, a dullness, a quiet resistance to letting what they have already seen actually become real in their understanding. They have not connected the loaves to who Jesus is. They have witnessed the work and not received the lesson.

This kind of hardening is one of the most serious warnings in Scripture for long-term disciples. Hebrews 3:7–15 picks up this same warning and applies it directly to the church: “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Hardness is not loud. It is the slow drift of a heart that has stopped remembering, stopped marveling, and stopped responding.

Forgetting what God has done is one of the chief causes of this drift. Deuteronomy 8:11–18 warns Israel as they enter the promised land: “Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments... lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them... your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God.” The repeated psalm-call is “forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:2). The whole Old Testament is built around remembering: the Passover, the firstfruits, the sabbath cycles, the festivals, the Shema. Forgetfulness is dangerous.

The New Testament gives us the corresponding remedies. The Word of God preached and taught, soaking the soul in the works of Christ. The Lord’s Supper observed weekly, deliberately remembering His death until He comes. The assembly of the saints, where brothers and sisters help one another remember. Prayer that thanks God specifically for what He has done. Songs that put the truth deep into our memory. Personal disciplines of meditation and journaling.

Repentance, when we notice the drift starting. The deliberate practice of looking back over our lives and naming the times the Lord has fed us, walked toward us across the storm, and shepherded us through the dark.

For students, this question may be the most personally important in the chapter. We are not the rejecting crowd at Nazareth. We are the Twelve. We have seen Christ work. The danger is not that we will deny Him. The danger is that we will slowly forget, that the bread will be in our hands and we will not understand about the loaves, that the One in our boat will be the same One who walks toward us across the sea, and we will not see Him.

There is also a hopeful word here. Hard hearts can soften. The same Twelve who are hardened in chapter 6 will eventually be the apostles of the resurrection. The Lord did not give up on them, and He will not give up on us. The work of remembering, of repenting, of returning to the Word, of regathering at His table, of receiving His patient instruction is the way He keeps softening hearts that are at risk of hardening.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hardness of heart as a slow, dangerous drift even among genuine disciples (Hebrews 3:7–15)
- Forgetfulness of God’s works as a chief cause of hardening (Deuteronomy 8:11–18; Psalm 78; Psalm 106)
- The Word, the Lord’s Supper, the assembly, and prayer as God-ordained means of softening hearts and keeping memory alive
- The role of brothers and sisters in the daily exhortation that protects against hardening (Hebrews 3:13)
- The reality of falling away as a continuing warning in the New Testament, requiring vigilance and ongoing faithfulness (Hebrews 6:4–6; 10:26–31)
- The patience of Christ with His slow-learning disciples, who softens hearts over time through faithful means
- The practice of deliberate remembrance as a discipline of New Covenant life

Discussion Prompts

- What does Mark teach us by placing the warning about hard hearts on the Twelve rather than on the crowds?
- What practices help you actually remember what God has done in your life rather than forget?
- How does our class or congregation help one another keep tender hearts?

Question 10

Student Question:

When Jesus reaches Gennesaret, the people recognize Him immediately, carry the sick to Him in their beds, and “as many as touched it were made well” (6:53–56). As you close this chapter, who in your life is in need of being carried to Jesus, what specific way could you “bring” that person into His presence this week (by prayer, by invitation, by speaking of Him to them), and what is one practical step you can commit to taking?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter ends with a striking scene at Gennesaret. The moment Jesus and the disciples step out of the boat, the people recognize Him. They run through the whole region. They begin to bring the sick on their beds wherever they hear He is. They beg Him to let them touch even the fringe of His garment. And “as many as touched it were made well” (6:53–56). The chapter that began with five thousand fed ends with a region carrying its sick to the One who heals.

Notice the active role of those who recognize Jesus. They do not stand still. They run. They go through the whole region. They carry sick relatives and neighbors. They take initiative. They bring people to Jesus. The faith of those who carry is part of how Jesus heals.

This is the closing call of the lesson. Every disciple has people in their life who are weary, ill in body or soul, despairing, far from God, struggling under burdens too heavy to carry alone. Some of them know it. Some of them do not. Some are family members. Some are coworkers. Some are old friends with whom contact has thinned. Some are children, parents, neighbors, classmates. They are reachable. They are at the edge of the same Galilean shoreline Christ still walks.

What does it look like to bring someone to Christ this week? Sometimes it is invitation. “Would you come with me to worship on Sunday?” “Would you come to our Bible study?” “Would you have coffee with me; I want to tell you something the Lord has done?” Sometimes it is sustained intercession. “I am praying for you this week.” Sometimes it is presence and witness over a long time. Sometimes it is a hard, honest conversation, finally offered in love. The forms vary; the heart is the same.

Encourage students to name one specific person and one specific step. Not in general. Not as a vague intention. A name. A step. A timeframe. The chapter ends with whole villages carrying their sick to Jesus. The lesson should end with each student in the room willing to carry one person.

Tie the whole lesson together. The Shepherd is the same. The compassion is the same. The bread is the same. The walking-toward-us across the storm is the same. The healing power that flowed from the edge of His garment in Gennesaret is the same. And the calling to bring others to Him is the same. Mark 6 is not just history. It is the present invitation of the Shepherd King.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The continuing compassion and power of Christ for all who come to Him (Hebrews 13:8; Matthew 11:28–30)
- The role of disciples in bringing others to Christ (John 1:40–45; James 5:19–20)
- Intercessory prayer as a way of carrying others into Christ’s presence (1 Timothy 2:1–4)
- The hospitality and openness of the church as part of bringing the lost to Christ (Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2)
- The faithful witness of believers in their own networks as a central engine of gospel advance (Acts 8:4; 1 Peter 3:15)
- The promise that those who reach for Christ in faith and obedience will not be turned away (John 6:37; Hebrews 7:25)

Discussion Prompts

- Who in your life is most in need of being carried to Jesus right now?
- What specific step could you take this week to bring that person closer to Him?
- How can our class help carry one another’s burdens, and the burdens of those we love, into the presence of the Shepherd?