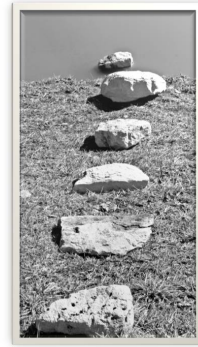


Take The Next Step

Mark 7-8

"Do you still not understand?" Mark 8:21 NIV

"Do you still not get it?" Mark 8:21 The Message



Truth to Stand On

Jesus' true identity comes into focus for us when we deny ourselves and our preconceptions of who He is.

Opening Prayer

Dear God, Show us clearly who you are. Lead us to lose our lives and find true life in you. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Getting in Step With Your Group

Introduce yourselves if there are any new group members. If you had to choose to be blind, deaf, or mute, which would you choose and why?

Step by Step Through Mark 7-8

In Mark 7-8, Jesus' identity and mission are coming into focus. Many still do not recognize Him as the Christ, and those who do are finding that His mission is not what they expected. Read through Mark 7-8 together, noting these steps along the way:

- Step 1: The Pharisees focus on the outside while Jesus focuses on the heart – Mark 7:1-23
- Step 2: Jesus rewards the Gentile woman's focused faith – Mark 7:24-30
- Step 3: Jesus opens deaf ears – Mark 7:31-37
- Step 4: The Pharisees still do not see, even after another miraculous meal – Mark 8:1-13
- Step 5: The disciples do not yet see and understand – Mark 8:14-21
- Step 6: Jesus brings the blind man's world into focus – Mark 8:22-26
- Step 7: Jesus true identity comes into focus with Peter's confession – Mark 8:27-30
- Step 8: Jesus' mission is not what His followers expected – Mark 8:31-38

What outward practice were the Pharisees concerned about in chapter 7? What example does Jesus give of the Pharisees honoring God "with their lips" while their hearts were far from Him? According to Jesus, does sin come from the outside in or the inside out?

Jesus told the Gentile woman it was not right to give the children's bread to the dogs. (7:27) Who are the children He is referring to and who are the dogs? What does the woman's response to Jesus say about her?

What method does Jesus use to heal the deaf and mute man? (7:33-35) Why do you think He did this rather than just using words to heal him?

Compare Mark 6:30-44 with Mark 8:1-13. How are these events similar? How are they different? Why do you think Jesus repeated this miracle?

What was Jesus' reaction when the Pharisees asked for a sign? (8:11-12)

What was Jesus talking about when he warned the disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees? (8:15)
What did they think He was talking about?

Who did the people think Jesus was? (8:27-28) Who did Peter say Jesus was? Why did Jesus warn the disciples not to tell this truth? Why did Peter object when Jesus shared His mission? How did Jesus respond to Peter? (8:33)

What does it mean to deny yourself? (8:34) What is the law in this command and what is the gospel?

Stepping into Our World

Bring the words of these chapters into focus in today's world by answering the questions below in your group as time permits:

- o Mark 7:8 in The Message describes the Pharisees in this way: "They use me as a cover for teaching whatever suits their fancy." What are some current examples of false teaching that use Jesus as a cover? How can we guard ourselves against such teachings?
- o Do you ever put your faith in tradition/religion/your denomination rather than God? How comfortable are you around other believers who may have different traditions and practices?
- o The Gentile woman kept after Jesus because she knew there was enough of Him to go around. How persistent are you in bringing your needs to Jesus?
- o Jesus chose to physically touch the deaf man. Where does Jesus choose to physically touch us? How has Jesus opened your ears and mouth?
- o The Pharisees wanted "signs" or "miraculous guarantees" (The Message). What "signs" has Jesus given you? Do you still ask for more? What is the relationship between faith and a guarantee?
- o How has Jesus' true identity gradually come into focus in your lifetime? How do you see him differently now than you did as a child? 10 years ago?

More of Him, Less of Me

Our culture is all about self-help and self-fulfillment. Yet Jesus calls us to deny ourselves and be filled with Him. Read Mark 8:34-37 from The Message: "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am....Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for?" This message is in stark contrast to our self-centered society. But what grace and freedom to know that we don't have to be in the driver's seat. We are being steered by a gracious and loving God who sacrificed Himself for us!

Taking the Next Step

Take today's study of Mark 7-8 into the week ahead by choosing one of the following challenges:

- Pray at the beginning of each day: "More of you, Lord, less of me."
- If you regularly worship at one of Ascension's campuses, try worshiping at the other campus for one Sunday. The outward appearance is different, but the heart of worship is the same.
- Count how many commercial messages promote self-fulfillment during one 30 minute TV show.
- If you have given up on a particular prayer, renew your persistence in coming to Jesus.

Closing Prayer

Give group members an opportunity to share prayer requests for the coming week.