

Small Group Discussion Guide

Mark 8:14-21

“Preoccupied”

Based on Sunday's
Sermon 5/10/2026

Background

Jesus and His men sailed the Sea of Galilee to another destination. We learn from 8:22 that they eventually reached Bethsaida, although they may have ministered somewhere else first.

During His object lesson, someone evidently thought, *Leaven. That makes bread rise. Speaking of bread, I'm getting hungry, and there's only one loaf of bread on board.* While Jesus was driving home a crucial spiritual lesson, the disciples began to discuss lunch plans.¹

Jesus now explained it to his disciples by banging their dense noggins against a hail of questions in verses 17 to 20. “Why are you talking about having no bread?” Bang! “Do you still not see or understand?” Bang! “Are your hearts hardened?” Bang! “Do you have eyes, but fail to see, and ears, but fail to hear?” Bang! “And don't you remember?” Bang! “When I broke the five loaves for the 5,000, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” “Twelve,” they replied. “And when I broke the seven loaves for the 4,000, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” They answered, “Seven.” Bang! Bang! Bang!

In those questions Jesus told them that their lack of understanding was due to a hardness of heart. Of course, they were not hardened to him. They were his followers. Their problem here came from familiarity. The repeated exposure to his teaching, when not reflected upon and acted upon, worked a progressive insensitivity and dullness in their lives. We experience this as well when we fail to think and act upon what God has revealed to us. It was a case of “use it or lose it.” They were not appropriating what they were seeing and hearing.²

Discussion Questions

Getting Started

1. What is something you forget all the time, no matter how many times you try to remember it? (passwords, keys, etc.) What about something really important? (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.)

Observation

2. Read Mark 8:14-21. What repeated questions does Jesus ask the disciples?

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Mark*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Tyndale House Publishers, 2018), 216.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 1, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 190.

3. What details does Jesus bring up from the feeding of the 5,000 and of the 4,000?
4. What was the “leaven of the Pharisees and Herod” and why should they beware?

Interpretation

5. Why does Jesus use the metaphor of “leaven”? What does leaven symbolize in Scripture?
6. Why does Jesus ask so many questions instead of giving a direct explanation?
7. What does this passage reveal about the disciples’ spiritual condition at this point in Mark’s Gospel?
8. Read Matthew 6:25-34. How does this part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount speak to our passage in Mark?

Application

9. What kinds of worries distract you from remembering God’s past faithfulness?
10. If Jesus asked you, “Do you still not understand?”, what area of your life might He be pointing to?

Prayer List: