Mark 8:22–38 Leader's Guide

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Overview for the leader

Big idea: Mark 8 is the "continental divide" of the Gospel. Jesus shifts from showing the crowds who He is to preparing His disciples to follow a suffering, sin-bearing Messiah — moving us from believing in Him to following Him.

Session flow

1. Welcome and opening prayer
2. Recap and reading (Mark 8:22–38)
3. Part A — The two-touch healing (vv. 22–26)
4. Part B — "Who do you say I am?" (vv. 27–33)
5. Part C — Bearing the cross (vv. 34–38)
6. Closing and communion

Before you lead

- Have a map handy to show where Caesarea Philippi sits, about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. A photo of the cave at Banias helps too.
- Arrange communion elements ahead of time.
- The Mount Hermon background in the appendix is optional and goes beyond Scripture. Offer it as further reading after the session rather than teaching it in depth.
- Next session: Mark 9.

Opening

Welcome the group and open in prayer.

Recap: Last week's feeding of the 4,000 carried two messages — one for us, and one for the disciples, preparing them for Jesus' death and resurrection.

Today: We reach a turning point in Jesus' ministry, often called the continental divide of Mark's Gospel.

Read aloud: Mark 8:22–38.

Part A — The two-touch healing (vv. 22–26)

v. 22 — Some people bring a blind man to Jesus.

- Ask: *Does this sound familiar?* Recall the paralyzed man lowered through the roof by his friends (Mark 2:1–12).
- We don't know what this man believed. We only see the faith of his friends.
- Ask: *Do you have friends who would do this for you?*

v. 23a — Jesus leads him out of the village. Ask: *Why?*

- They are in Bethsaida, a town Jesus had already pronounced judgment on for refusing to repent despite His miracles (Matthew 11:21–22).

v. 23b — Jesus spits on the man's eyes. Ask: *What did we learn about Jesus and spit in Mark 7:33?*

- Ancient tradition held that a firstborn son's saliva had healing power. Jesus was Mary's firstborn and the only Son of the Father.
- Saliva was a commonly used healing remedy in that culture.

v. 24 — "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

- He knew what trees looked like, so he likely had sight at one time.
- *Optional discussion:* Was he perhaps blaming God for his blindness?

v. 25 — Something that happens only once. Ask: *What is it?*

- Recorded only in Mark, it's the only time Jesus touches someone twice to heal them.
- Ask: *What's the significance? Isn't Jesus perfect and all-powerful?*
- The first touch gave light, color, and shapes, building the man's faith so the second could draw it out fully.

v. 26 — "Don't even go into the village." Jesus' familiar instruction not to spread the news, because the time isn't right yet.

Part B — "Who do you say I am?" (vv. 27–33)

The turning point. After v. 26 we reach the continental divide of Mark.

- Until now, Jesus has performed miracles and taught Jews and Gentiles, showing He is the promised Messiah.

- From here He shifts His focus from the crowds to the disciples, preparing them for His suffering, death, and resurrection.

v. 27 — Caesarea Philippi. Ask: *What do we know about this place?*

Background (use a map):

- About 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, at the northern edge of the promised land.
- At the headwaters of the Jordan River, the water that sustains all of Israel.
- At the base of Mount Hermon, the tallest mountain in the region — today a ski area and UN observation post.
- Mount Hermon carries a lot of history: in extra-biblical Jewish writing (1 Enoch) it is where fallen angels descended; it lies in the territory of Og, the giant king of Bashan defeated by Moses (Numbers 21; Deuteronomy 2–3); and some scholars believe it was the site of the Transfiguration (Mark 9). See the appendix for more.
- Herod the Great built a temple to Caesar Augustus here; his son Philip expanded the city and named it for Caesar. The city proclaimed Caesar as lord — something Christians would later refuse to do, and many were martyred for it.
- The Jordan springs from a cave known as the Grotto of Pan, named for the half-goat Greek god (hence "pan flute").
- Over the centuries, shrines were built there to many false gods, including Baal, Zeus, and Nemesis.
- People believed the cave was the entrance to the underworld — the Gates of Hades.

Back to the text. Jesus brings His disciples to a place known for idolatry, false worship, and demonic activity — and there He asks, *"Who do you say I am?"*

v. 29 — Peter: "You are the Messiah." He got it right — but only half of it.

- In Matthew 16:18, Jesus replies that on this rock He will build His church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Imagine hearing that next to the cave called the Gates of Hades.

vv. 31–32 — For the first time, Jesus speaks plainly about His suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection. No questions, no parables — straight to the point.

v. 33 — From "on this rock" to "Get behind me, Satan!" Ask: *What happened?*

- Peter rebuked Jesus for speaking of death. The disciples expected a political, military Messiah.
- Jesus is preparing them to see that they can't understand the Messiah until they understand a crucified one.

- The difference between what they wanted and what they needed: they needed a sin-bearer Messiah.
- So do we — and we have one, proclaimed to us through the Great Commission Jesus was preparing His disciples to carry out.

Part C — Bearing the cross (vv. 34–38)

Jesus calls the crowd back together and teaches two opposite approaches to life:

The way of the cross	The way of self
Deny yourself	Live for yourself
Take up your cross	Ignore the cross
Lose your life for Jesus and the gospel — and save it	Try to save your life — and lose it

This is discipleship. Once you believe, you need to follow. The first part of Jesus' ministry was about belief; now, as He turns to His disciples, He teaches how to follow.

- **Dethrone** — deny yourself.
- **Die** — take up your cross; let the old life go.
- **Decide** — whom you will follow, and how. Decide now, because in a season of suffering you won't have the clarity to make that choice.

When you decide to follow, you trust the path He leads you on and honor Jesus along the way.

Illustration: Remember the old "Jesus is my co-pilot" bumper stickers? Let Him be the pilot. Get in the back seat and let Him drive.

Mentorship challenge. Discipleship is the heart of the group's mentorship program: honest, open conversation about what following Jesus looks like in your life.

- If you don't have someone you talk with about these things, pray that God will show you that man, then start the conversation.
- Discipleship can begin with one simple question: *How has your walk with Christ been this week, this month, this year?*

Closing and communion

- Jesus now speaks plainly about His death and the way of the cross. Up to this point His teaching introduced Himself to the world, Jews and Gentiles alike.
- Now we see the shift from accepting Christ to the lifelong pursuit of becoming like Him — the definition of discipleship.

Communion. Jesus marked transitions in His ministry with a meal. As we shift our focus from believing to following, close by sharing communion together.

Close in prayer. **Next time:** Mark 9.

Appendix — Mount Hermon background

Optional material for men who want to go deeper after the session. Some of it draws on extra-biblical sources and on interpretations that not all scholars share, so present it as background, not doctrine.

Spiritual warfare in Jesus' ministry

- During Jesus' ministry, demonic activity and spiritual warfare were intense — the conflict between the two seeds foretold in Genesis 3:15.
- Mark 5: among the Gerasenes on the Sea of Galilee, the demons call themselves "Legion," a possible echo of the Roman legion stationed in the area.
- Then Jesus goes to Caesarea Philippi, at the foot of Mount Hermon by the Grotto of Pan, and says the gates of Hades will not prevail against His church (Matthew 16:18).

Mount Hermon in Scripture and tradition

- **1 Enoch** (not Scripture) names Mount Hermon as where the Watchers descended and the transgression of Genesis 6 began. Daniel 4:17 mentions "watchers."
- Jude refers to angels who did not keep their proper place (Jude 6) and quotes 1 Enoch (Jude 14–15).
- Some interpreters connect the giants of Scripture to Genesis 6. Og, king of Bashan, ruled the Golan region around Hermon (Numbers 21; Deuteronomy 2–3).
- Hermon was a geographic "high place." Nearby in the Golan stands the ancient stone monument Gilgal Refaim ("wheel of the Rephaim").
- Many scholars believe the Transfiguration happened on Mount Hermon rather than Mount Tabor.
- Hermon sits where the borders of Israel, Lebanon, and Syria meet.

- One pastor observed that everything in the physical realm is preceded by what takes place in the unseen, spiritual realm.

Further reading

Author	Work
Michael Heiser	*The Unseen Realm*
Michael Heiser	*Reversing Hermon*
Derek Gilbert	*The Great Inception* (chapter on Mount Hermon)
Judd Burton	Research on Banias and the altar to Pan at Caesarea Philippi