Mark 6 Leader's Guide

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Overview for the leader

Big idea: Mark 6 is a chapter of unbelief seen from three angles — neighbors, enemies, and even Jesus' own disciples — and it invites each of us to face our own unbelief and ask God to soften our hearts.

This guide is planned for **two sessions**:

Session	Passage	Focus
1	vv. 1–29	Unbelief of acquaintances and enemies
2	vv. 30–56	Unbelief of the disciples

Before you lead

- Read all of Mark 6 several times, plus the parallels: Luke 4:16–30, Luke 7:1–9, Matthew 14:22–33, and John 6.
- Pick two or three questions per section; there are more than you will need.
- The original leader opened by sharing a personal struggle with faith. Prepare an honest example of your own — a season when belief was hard — to model openness.
- At the end of Session 1, ask men to reflect on their unbelief during the week; you'll invite them to share at the start of Session 2.

Session 1 — Opening

Welcome the group and open in prayer.

Chapter summary: Mark 6 is full of unbelief from different angles.

Verses	Whose unbelief	Who they are
1–6	Acquaintances	Neighbors — people who think they know us
6–29	Enemies	Unbelievers — not everyone will believe

Verses	Whose unbelief	Who they are
30–56	Disciples	Those close to Jesus, who have seen everything

- Charles Darwin is often cited as calling belief in God one of the most complete distinctions between humans and animals. Belief matters.
- Tell the group you are praying that each of them will think about his own unbelief, past or present, and that the Holy Spirit will guide them deeper than today's discussion.
- *Leader:* share a brief, honest example of a season when your own faith was tested.

Read aloud: Mark 6:1–29.

Session 1, Part A — Jesus' hometown (vv. 1–6)

v. 1 — Ask: *Where do we find Jesus at the start of the chapter?* In His hometown, Nazareth, with His disciples.

v. 2 — Jesus teaches in the synagogue, and many are amazed.

- This is not His first visit. About a year earlier (Luke 4:16–30) He read from the Isaiah scroll, declared He fulfilled the prophecy, and was driven to the brow of a hill. He walked away.
- On this second visit, they are still amazed — at His wisdom and His miracles.
- No miracles are recorded in Nazareth; they only heard the reports that spread (Mark 1:28). Ask: *Is there any significance to that?*

v. 3 — Ask: *Notice anything odd about how they describe Him?*

- "The carpenter" — read as *just* a carpenter.
- "Mary's son," not Joseph's. A man was normally named by his father, so this was likely a slight.

vv. 3–4 — Ask: *What was their reaction, and why?*

- They took offense. They thought they really knew Him after 30 years.
- Familiarity breeds contempt. Their contempt said nothing about Jesus and a great deal about them.
- *Illustration:* A tourist rushes through an art gallery and tells the guard on the way out, "I didn't see anything special." The guard replies, "The pictures aren't on trial. The visitors are."

v. 5 — Ask: *Why couldn't He do miracles there? Is lack of faith a factor in healing and miracles?*

v. 6 — Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith.

- Scripture records Jesus being amazed only twice: here at unbelief, and at the faith of the Gentile centurion who asked Him to just say the word (Luke 7:1–9).

Wrap-up question: What did Jesus do in response to the unbelief in His hometown? *(Leader: He had compassion on them and didn't give up. He went on teaching in the surrounding villages.)*

Session 1, Part B — Sending the Twelve and the death of John (vv. 7–29)

v. 7 — Jesus sends the Twelve out two by two with authority over impure spirits.

- "Send" is *apostellō*, the root of *apostle*. They weren't sent on their own; they went to represent Jesus and accomplish His work in everything they said and did.
- A message for us: we represent Christ in our interactions with people.
- Jesus multiplies His ministry by sending others. Ask: *Notice the authority He gave them?* They had spiritual authority to heal and cast out demons — imagine the rush they felt.

vv. 8–11 — Take nothing: no bread, no bag, no money.

- The "bag" was a beggar's bag; they were not to beg.
- They also received instructions for responding to unbelief (shaking off the dust).
- Their plain dress resembled Jesus' own — again, they went as His representatives.
- Ask: *Why do you think Jesus gave these instructions?*

vv. 12–13 — Ask: *What did the disciples do?* They carried out Jesus' plan.

v. 14 — Ask: *What was one consequence?* Herod heard about it.

- Ask: *What do you think Herod was feeling?* He was ultimately responsible for John the Baptist's death.
- *Side note:* Mark calls him "King," but Herod Antipas was a tetrarch, ruling a quarter of the nation. "King" was the title he wanted.

vv. 17–29 — A flashback to John's death.

- v. 24 — Ask: *Why do you think Herodias wanted John's head?*

Wrap-up: We see unbelief in the towns and villages, and enemies working against Jesus.

Discussion question: Have you made enemies because of your faith? If so, how did you respond?

Session 1 — Closing

- We've seen unbelief in Jesus' acquaintances and His enemies.
- Most of us don't fit those categories. Next time we will see ourselves in the disciples and their up-and-down faith journey.
- **Challenge for the week:** reflect on the areas of your walk where unbelief shows up, pray about it, and tell someone.

Close in prayer.

Session 2 — Opening

Welcome the group and open in prayer.

Recap

- Acquaintances refused to believe (too close); enemies rejected Jesus outright (too threatened).
- Mark often takes side trips in his storytelling. Here: the Twelve sent out, John's beheading, then the apostles returning to report.
- Being sent two by two marked the disciples' shift from followers to apostles — representatives of Jesus (*apostellō*).
- This comes at a cultural turning point: John's execution and the rising pressure on Jesus' followers.

Share: Does anyone want to share a reflection from last week's challenge?

Trivia: What is the only miracle, apart from the resurrection, recorded in all four Gospels? *(Answer: the feeding of the 5,000.)*

Read aloud: Mark 6:30–56.

Session 2, Part A — Feeding the 5,000 (vv. 30–44)

vv. 30–31 — The apostles report everything they did and taught. With crowds everywhere and no time even to eat, Jesus invites them to a quiet place to rest.

- They were likely coming off a mountaintop experience with much to share.
- Pastor Vance Havner put it this way: if you don't come apart and rest, you will just come apart.
- Key point: we can do all the good works we want, but if they wear us down and hurt our health, we need pauses for healing and reflection — reorienting on the Father and the mission.

v. 34 — Jesus lands, sees a large crowd, and has compassion on them.

- The crowds wouldn't leave Him alone. Jesus had a plan, but His compassion welcomed the interruption.
- What stands out is His patience and willingness to change the script. The big picture stays the same, but the path isn't always the most direct one.
- *Leader:* share honestly how hard it is for you when your own plans get interrupted.
- Ask: *Is it possible to have too much compassion?* Discuss compassion that creates dependence rather than real help. *(The original leader used a story about a tribe in Alaska to illustrate this; substitute any example you know.)*

vv. 36–37 — The disciples see two options: send the people away for food, or buy it for them. Jesus has a third.

- Ask: *Isn't that always the way with Jesus — there's always a third option?*
- Notice that after a season of healing and miracles, a miracle never crossed their minds.

vv. 39–40 — Contrast this simple meal on the grass with Herod's lavish, deadly banquet just before it.

vv. 40–41 — Echoes of other moments in Scripture: the Lord's Supper (taking, blessing, breaking, giving bread), and the crowd seated on a hillside as at the Sermon on the Mount.

v. 41 — Jesus gives the bread to the disciples to distribute. We are distributors, not manufacturers.

- In John 6:22ff, Jesus turns this miracle into a sermon on "the bread of life." It wasn't only meeting a need; it was a revelation of Himself — a living sermon.
- Focus more on the Giver than the gift.
- Ask: *What happens when we focus on the gift too much?*

Wrap-up: Even after performing miracles as Jesus' representatives, the disciples still struggled to believe for something physical.

Session 2, Part B — Jesus walks on the water (vv. 45–56)

A night of wonders. We remember this as one miracle, but several happen together:

1. Jesus walks on the water.
2. Peter walks on the water (Matthew 14:28–31; Mark leaves it out).
3. Jesus stills the storm.
4. The boat reaches shore the instant Jesus gets in (John 6:21).
5. People are healed by touching His cloak (vv. 53–56).

vv. 47–54 — Compare the two boat stories in Mark:

	Mark 4:35–41	Mark 6:45–52
Where is Jesus?	In the boat, asleep	On the mountain, praying for them

- Ask: *Was there a notable difference between the two stories? Is it a coincidence?*

v. 48 — He was about to pass by them.

- Ask: *Why do you think Jesus acted as if He would pass them by?*
- Possibly a test: He wanted them to recognize Him, trust Him, and invite Him into the boat — but they were terrified.
- "Passing by" echoes God revealing His glory: to Moses (Exodus 33:19, 22) and to Elijah (1 Kings 19:11). In both, passing by isn't avoidance — it's revelation. Jesus was showing the disciples who He truly is.
- Ask: *Why do you think Mark left out Peter stepping out of the boat? (Leader: Mark's Gospel is traditionally tied to Peter's own preaching. Peter may have chosen not to highlight himself.)*

vv. 51–52 — He climbs in, the wind dies down, and they are completely amazed, because they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

- The disciples failed the test. Even after all they had seen, they didn't grasp who Jesus was.
- A warning: if we fail a spiritual lesson, our hearts can harden too.
- A good prayer prompt: ask God to soften your heart.

vv. 53–56 — Mark closes on a hopeful note: Jesus' ministry to others continues, and all who touch Him are healed.

Wrap-up

- Jesus keeps growing and testing His disciples.
- Even they struggled with unbelief despite seeing everything with their own eyes.

Session 2 — Closing

- Pray that each man's faith will keep growing — the faith of those who believe without seeing (John 20:29).
- Remember that Jesus is the victory that overcomes the world, and our faith rests in Him (1 John 5:4).
- Put all your trust — heart, soul, and mind — in Jesus, because He never fails.

Close in prayer, asking God to soften any hardened hearts.