

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME TWO

STUDY NINE

Serving Dinner to Four Thousand

Mark 8:1–9

If you don't review events in your life, you forget how God met your need earlier and how He can do it again.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WE shake our heads when we realize we've been down this road before. A health crisis. An empty pantry. A disappointed dream. A lost relationship. It's not the first time!

Challenges in life seem to cycle like the seasons, with similar effects: anxious thoughts, loss of sleep, and panicked prayers. They're the same giant-sized problems we've faced before, and when we stand in front of them, our legs of faith freeze with fear and our minds begin to doubt. We wonder, "Will God come through this time?"

In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, the disciples faced the twin brother of the giant-sized problem they had encountered in Galilee, where five thousand hungry people needed to be fed, and they had little food to give them (Mark 6:30–44). Now, in the Decapolis, four thousand people were looking at them with hungry eyes. This time, would they be able *to trust the God who always provides*? Let's join the disciples as they go down a familiar road and, once again, encounter a "big need" with "not enough resources"—a road that, no doubt, you've been down before too.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

*The LORD is my shepherd;
I have all that I need. (Psalm 23:1)*

Echo David's trust in God for total protection, sure guidance, and faithful provision. Think of the way He has fed you spiritually with His nutritious Word in the previous Bible studies. Then, boldly declare your faith in His ability to satisfy your soul again as you turn to Mark's gospel.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus enrolled His disciples in a life-transforming training program (Mark 3:14). Throughout this time, He continually tested them to strengthen their faith, knowing they would soon need to continue the work and carry out the mission He had begun (Matthew 28:16–20).

Mark 8:1–9 feels like a repeat of Mark 6! Is it the same miracle told twice? No. Jesus Himself mentioned that what happened earlier in Galilee was a separate event (Mark 8:19). Observe the contrasts between the two incidents in the table below.

Detail	Feeding of Five Thousand	Feeding of Four Thousand
Scripture	Mark 6:30–44	Mark 8:1–9
Location	Galilee	Decapolis
Distance	All came from nearby	All came from a great distance
Resources	Boy with five loaves and two fish (John 6:9)	Disciples with seven loaves and a few fish (Matthew 15:34)
Scenery	Green grass	Barren, no grass
Jesus' Prayer	Once	Twice
Leftovers	Twelve baskets full	Seven baskets full
Greek Term for "Basket"	<i>Kophinos</i> : small basket (Mark 6:43; 8:19)	<i>Spuris</i> : large basket (Mark 8:8, 20)
Next Scene	Disciples got into a boat alone	Disciples got into a boat with Jesus

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Mark 8:1–9

In the earlier account, after Jesus miraculously fed more than five thousand people, the disciples encountered a life-threatening storm on the Sea of Galilee. But, as Mark notes, “they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their hearts were hardened” (Mark 6:52 NASB). So, as the great Teacher, Jesus was repeating the lesson of the loaves with four thousand people to reinforce the disciples’ learning and growth. Let’s see if they passed the test this time.



Observation: Jesus Feeds Four Thousand

Read [Mark 8:1–9](#) thoroughly and observe what it says. Place yourself in the scene. Feel the hunger in your stomach. Watch the action as if you’re part of the crowd of more than four thousand, sitting in the front row.¹

Evidence of a Human Need—Mark 8:1–3

When Jesus saw that the people “ran out of food,” how did He feel toward them, and what did He say to His disciples, according to Mark 8:1–3? What strikes you about the crowd’s willingness to stay, even when their food ran out?

Example of Divine Intervention—Mark 8:4–9

How did the disciples respond to Jesus in Mark 8:4? Observe Jesus’ patience and persistence in His interaction with His disciples. No rebuke! No sermon! No warning! How did Jesus respond in 8:5?

Note that not one time did the disciples refer to the miracle in Galilee! What did Jesus do in 8:6? Observe how He used His slow-to-learn disciples to serve the meal again. What did Jesus do in 8:7? What happened in 8:8–9?

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Mark 8:1–9

Have we been here? It's exactly what Jesus did before. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Jesus Teaches His Disciples Again

Out of compassion, Jesus brought the need to His disciples in Mark 8:1–3. Look up the Greek term *splanchnizomai*, from *splanchna* meaning “the inward parts,” translated as “have compassion” in the Greek dictionary at biblehub.com. How would you explain Jesus’ compassion? Why did He bring the need to His disciples?

Read [8:4–5](#) in the MSG Bible version. Why did the disciples respond to Jesus the way they did?

How much better to say, “Lord, You’re able. You’re the provider. El Shaddai, almighty God, You’re the Bread of Life. You’re the Great I AM. We will trust You and we will serve whatever You wish. You will do it again, just like You did it before.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Read [8:6–9](#) in the MSG. What is the significance of Jesus’ use of the limited resources, His blessings over them, His giving the disciples the meal to distribute, and the abundance of His provision to us as Christ-followers today?

Remember the original plan? It was to teach them and it was to train them, just like He does us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Correlation: The God Who Always Provides

On Mount Moriah, God tested Abraham's faith. As Abraham raised his hand to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering, the Lord told him not to harm the boy! Now, God knew that Abraham truly feared Him. Then, Abraham looked and saw God's provision—a ram—and named the place *Yahweh-Yireh*, meaning "the LORD will provide." What do the testing of Abraham and the testing of the disciples in [Genesis 22](#) and [Mark 8:1–9](#) teach you?

Compare our passage with [1 Samuel 17:32–50](#) and [Psalm 103:1–2](#). How did David use God's past interventions as an assurance that He would help him in his present problem? What similar lessons do both passages teach, compared to the feeding of the four thousand in Mark?

These are your lion and bear stories. They're the things that David relied on when he faced the giant. It wasn't that David was big and Herculean. He's not that kind of guy; his God is a great God. And he didn't forget. If God could whip a bear, believe me, God could handle a giant Philistine over on the other side of the Valley of Elah. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Compare our passage with [Mark 6:30–44](#); [Ephesians 3:20–21](#); [Philippians 4:6–19](#); and [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#). What common message do all these passages convey?

It's a habit we don't want to break. So, what do we pray for? We pray for our kids. We pray for the day. We pray for our needs. We pray for our ministries. We pray for our struggles. We pray for our food, and we give Him our blessing thanking Him for it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: Learn, Grow, Review

Before we give the disciples a hard time, let's look in the mirror at our own tendencies to forget God's past interventions. Have you been through a test that required you to trust the Lord to provide? What has God been teaching you?

Pastor Chuck shares four statements that can remind us of God's faithfulness. First, *there is no need too great for God to hear*. Share your need right now with the Lord.

At no time will He say, "Why, I tell you, you're out of luck on that one. That is beyond Me." He won't ever do that. He waits for us to come. He pleads for us to pray without ceasing. Rehearse your prayer to Him. Tell Him repeatedly, "This is impossible. Lord, I need You to break through—to handle this."
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Second, *there is no reason for us ever to forget*. The disciples were chronic forgetters! What advice might they give you to keep your memories of God's blessings sharp?

Third, *there is no limit to what God can provide*. How can you apply this truth to your present situation?

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God's supply always exceeds our need. How great is that! I'm not saying He will give you exactly what you ask for. I will say He will hear your prayer, and He will provide exactly what you need. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Fourth, *there is no way God will lighten up on us when we're slow to learn.* God wants you to learn vital lessons about faith because He wants you to experience freedom from worry. What past trials have increased your dependence on the Lord? Why not take some time to thank God for His magnificent wisdom, great compassion, and sure presence within these trials?

Our Father, enable us to find in the midst of the trials insight, understanding, a cultivation of compassion, the realization of how stubborn we have been, and a willingness to learn. It's a long journey, and the valley is called at times the "deep," "dark shadows," or even "death." Teach us even there to trust You. And as we trust You, continue, we pray, the teaching and the training that we might grow up and be like Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

In Jesus' powerful name, I echo the prayer above by saying, "Amen."

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*" at insight.org.

For the 2026–2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2010, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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