

[Sources] Scenic background generated with OpenAI image generation for this presentation on 2026-08-31. Prompt: Ancient path descending toward the Sea of Galilee at sunrise; no text or modern objects.

Open with a moment of quiet. Let them read the title, then go to the flannelgraph question.

OPENING

Mark 6:31–54

- Jesus Feeds the 5,000
- Jesus Walks on the Water



How would you tell these as stories on a flannelgraph?

How many of you went to Bible class and they taught you with a flannelgraph?

I want you to remember that as we come to today's lesson. In it, we find two stories we know well.

Jesus feeds the 5000 and Jesus walks on water.

If you were telling this on a flannelgraph, what would you say?

What might you leave out? And if you leave it out, what do you miss?

"Mark thinks the flannelgraph leaves out the most important sentence."

OPENING

Basic Misunderstanding



What we see, we understand… or do we?

This is a lesson that goes to the heart of a basic understanding.

We believe that what we see, we understand. Yet sometimes we are perplexed.

It is similar to watching a good magician work. You watch everything but don't get how it is done.

When Jesus came, he did many things, miracles, and yet the people who saw them did not seem to get the point.

Like the hometown crowd at Nazareth, they failed to get the point. Like Herod, who was fascinated, he never got the point.

Seeing a miracle does not guarantee you understand anything about Jesus.

OPENING



Expectations tell us…

1. how life works
   what is normal, and what isn't
2. how Jesus fits
   the framework in our minds

Jesus smashes the expectations of life.

Jesus has a basic question: What do you expect? Jesus is trying to change expectations. We see the world in a particular way and we color our world through our expectations.

Expectations inform us about how life works, what is normal and what isn't. (My story about seeing the woman from the post office at a wedding and not recognizing her because I was used to seeing her at the post office.)

They are also about how Jesus fits the framework we have been taught or developed in our minds. When we look at a situation in life, how do we expect it to unfold?

The stories are about how Jesus smashes the expectations of life.

MARK 6:31–32 · NIV

LESSON | TEST | VERDICT

A Retreat

“Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.”



So the lesson starts with a retreat.

The disciples had come back from their limited commission with so much to say, but the crowds kept pressing in. They did not even have time to eat. Such is the nature of ministry, and Jesus shows what has to happen. You have to be intentional.

He removes himself and the disciples from the scene to a quiet place. (The disciples were peopled-out.) So they set out by boat to get to a different place.

MARK 6:33 · NIV

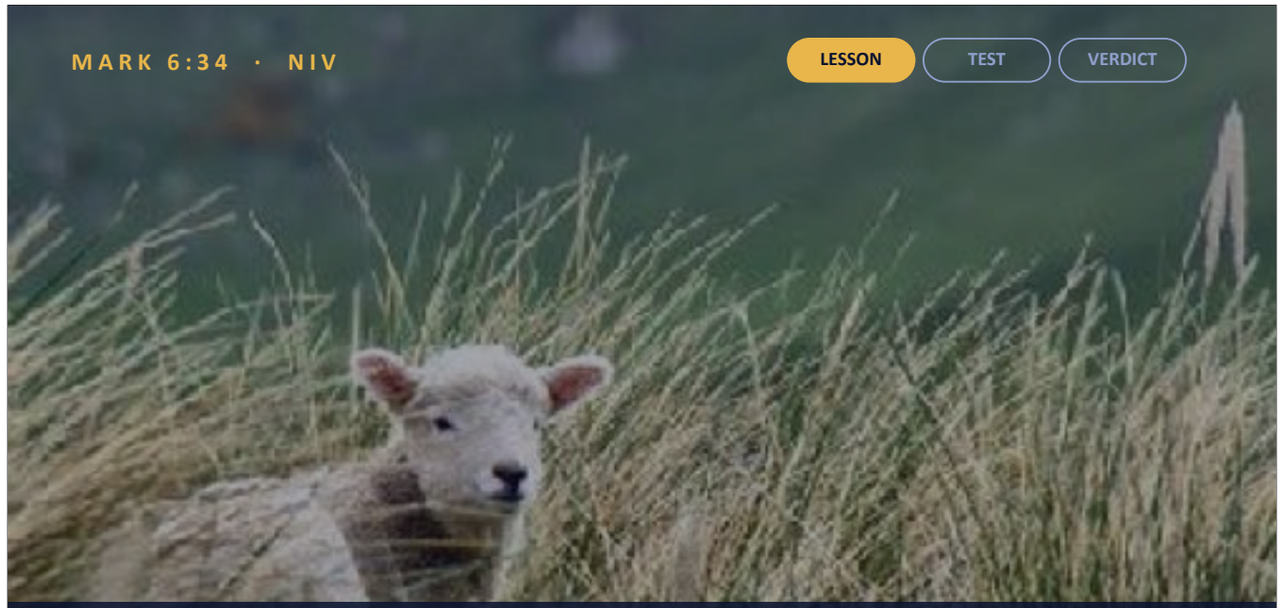
LESSON | TEST | VERDICT

Moves to an Interruption

“But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.”



But that gets interrupted. Someone saw the boat leave and, seeing the direction they were going, the crowd began to run to that new place to meet him.



“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.”

When he got there, Jesus was met by a large crowd, all who needed something. It would have been irritating, but Mark tells us how he saw the people in that crowd.

It says that they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Lost sheep need direction. They cannot survive long. They are prey for wolves and can eat themselves out of a pasture.

What Jesus saw were people who were aimless and not knowing how to live their lives, full of physical and spiritual issues, with no apparent answers.

MOTIVATION OF JESUS

LESSON | TEST | VERDICT

he had compassion on them

Mark 6:34, NIV

"to feel in the inward parts"



Butterflies in your stomach

Jesus had a certain motivation. It says he had compassion on them.

That's a strange word but it tells us how we feel in various moments. It means to "feel in the inward parts." We call it butterflies in your stomach.

When you are engaged with someone who is in pain, you feel it.

I have been to homes where someone has just died and the pall of grief falls over. As the people try to talk, you start to feel uncomfortable inside, like you want to run away. But that feeling is a good feeling. It says you are responding to them in the same way they are feeling… you are feeling with them.

Jesus looked at this crowd and his insides churned with their need.

MARK 6:34 · NIV

LESSON | TEST | VERDICT

“So he began teaching them many things.”



He began to teach, and the teaching continues in what happens next.

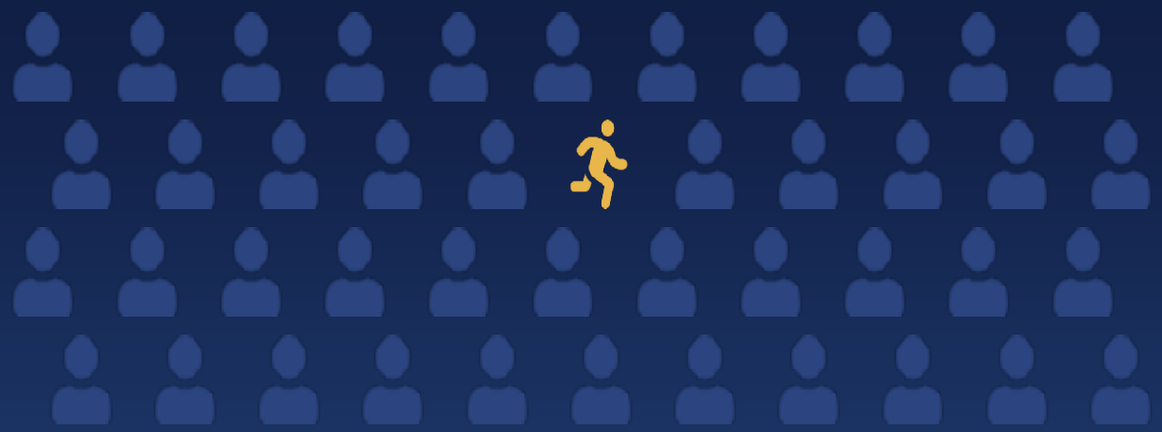
His response was simple. He began to teach them. He taught many things. We don't know the content of the "many things," but it is the things that these wayward people needed to get their lives back on the right track.

When lost, you need someone to say, "I know the way."

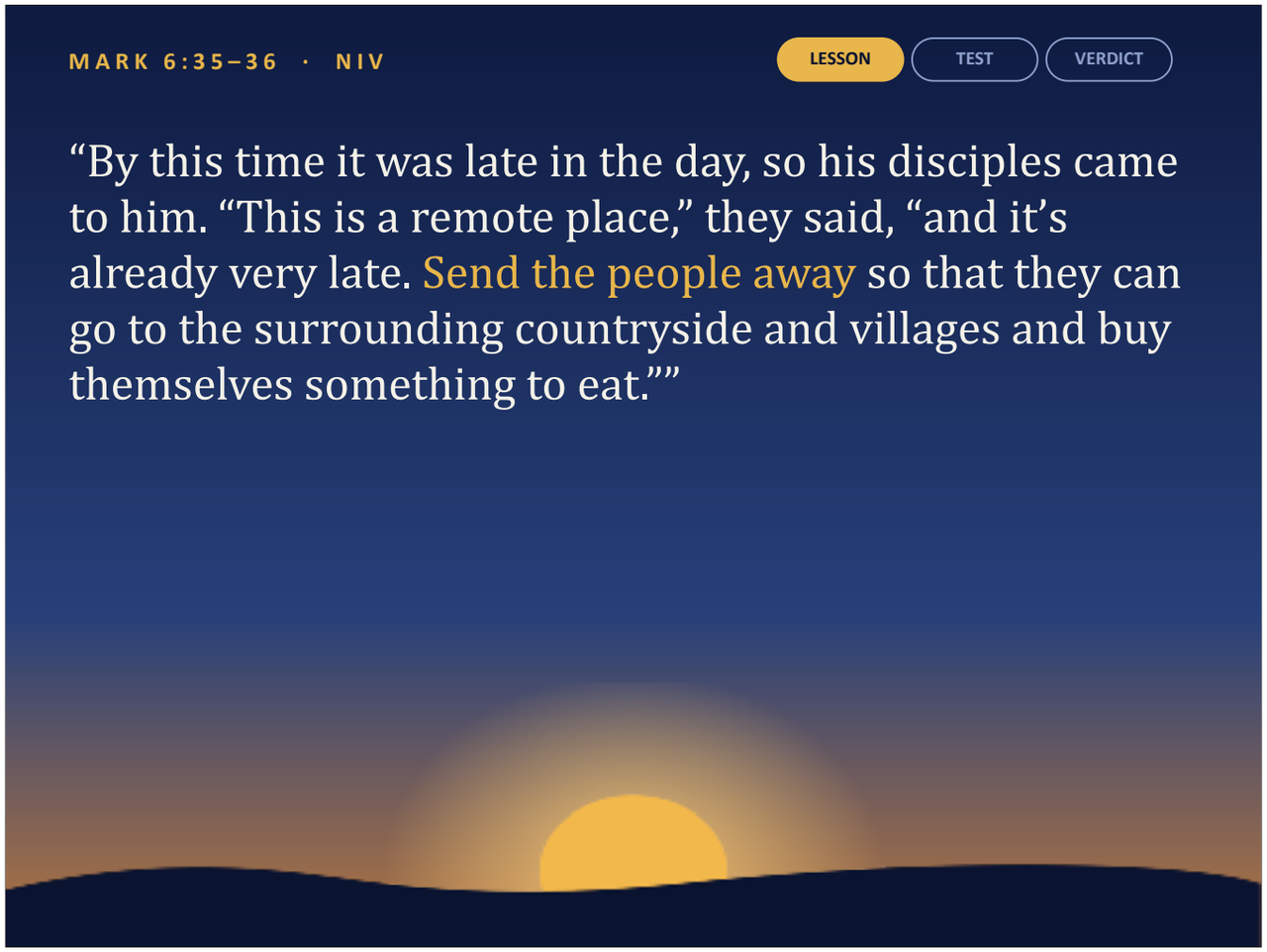
THE LESSON?

LESSON TEST VERDICT

How do you handle a hungry crowd?



So he starts with a lesson. Let's see if you can handle a hungry crowd.



Jesus has taught all day and the sun is starting to set. The disciples note this and are also aware of a coming problem.

It is late and these people are hungry. So let them go so they can get something to eat.

This is a very practical suggestion.

But their solution is a very logical and earthly solution. It makes sense… to everyone but Jesus.

THE BIG ASSIGNMENT · MARK 6:37

LESSON | TEST | VERDICT

"But he answered,"

"You give them something to eat."

They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

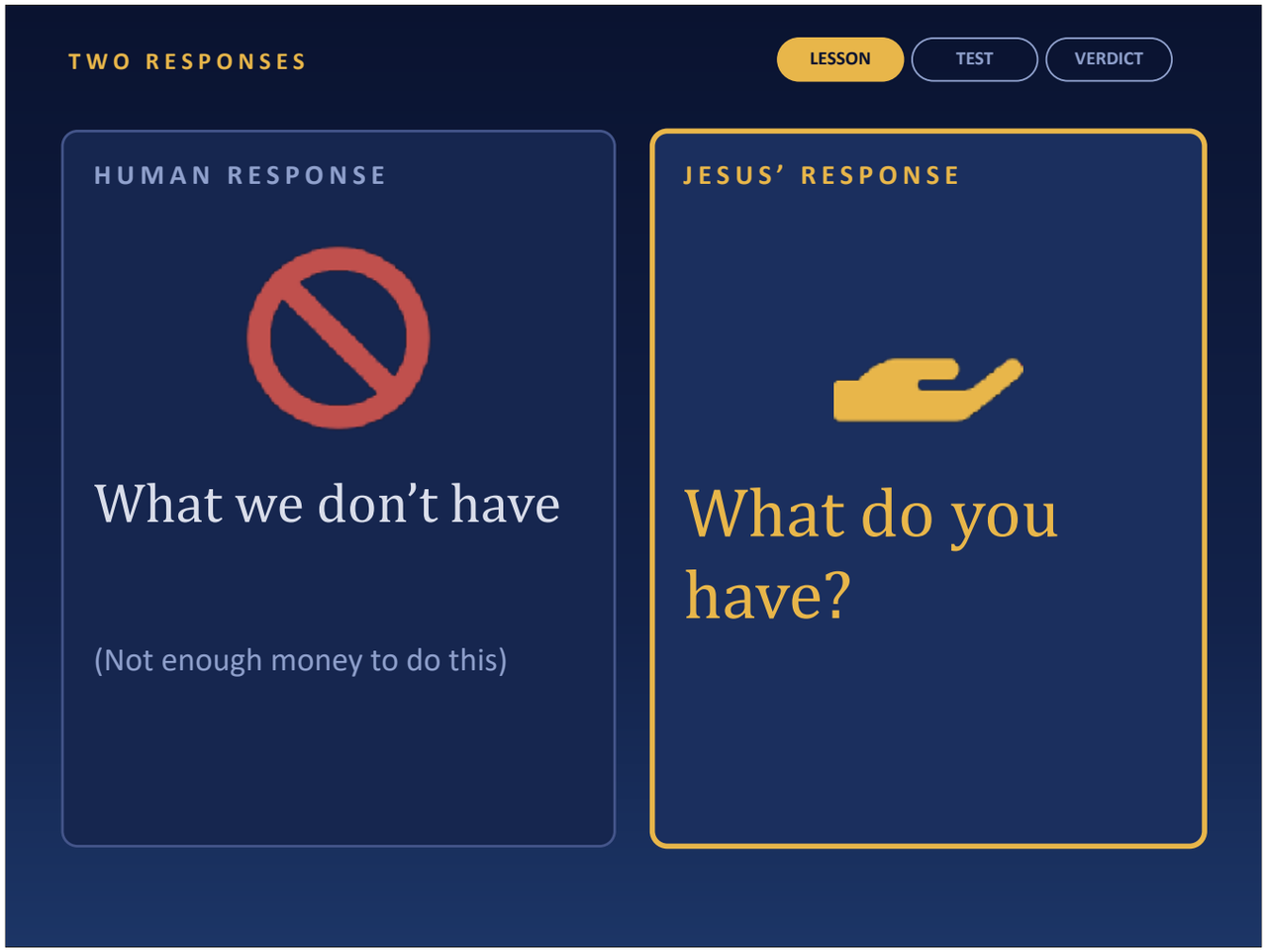


So instead of dismissing the crowd, he gives his disciples a big assignment.

You give them something to eat.

That must have hit them as impossible. In fact, they have already done the math. The accountant of the group had a spreadsheet showing how much the costs would be… It would take six months' worth of wages to even make a dent.

Give them something to eat? Preposterous and impossible.



In this tension are two responses.

The first is the human response. Measure the need and if it is too large, we sidestep it. The disciples said, great idea, but we don't have the money. The easiest thing to do is to find out why we cannot do something. (And the truth is they, themselves, could not do anything.)

So Jesus turns this scarcity upside down. Fine, you don't have money. What do you have? Now they have to expand their thinking. Are there any resources, no matter how meager they may be, at your disposal?

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE BIG ASSIGNMENT

LESSON | TEST | VERDICT

People do not learn most from what you tell them. They learn from what you put them through.



The principle of the big assignment is that people do not learn most from what you tell them. They learn from what you put them through.

Why is it that for me, the best lessons came in the worst possible ways? When I have had to struggle for something?

Who learns most? The one who has it easy or the one who has it hard?

In high school I took a math class I hated. I did not get it and I worked hard. Next to me sat a kid whose dad worked at TI, and they were coming out with a new product, a handheld calculator that handled higher-level math like trig. He got him one, and this kid hit a bunch of buttons and got the right answer. But I learned more because it was hard and I had to overcome something.

MARK 6:38 · NIV

LESSON | TEST | VERDICT

“How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.” When they found out, they said, “Five—and two fish.”



5 loaves + 2 fish

So they survey the landscape and come up with five loaves and two fish. Now those loaves are probably about the size of a fist and the fish are a little bigger than sardines. Still not much. (Not even enough to feed the disciples.)

MARK 6:40–41 · NIV

LESSON | TEST | VERDICT

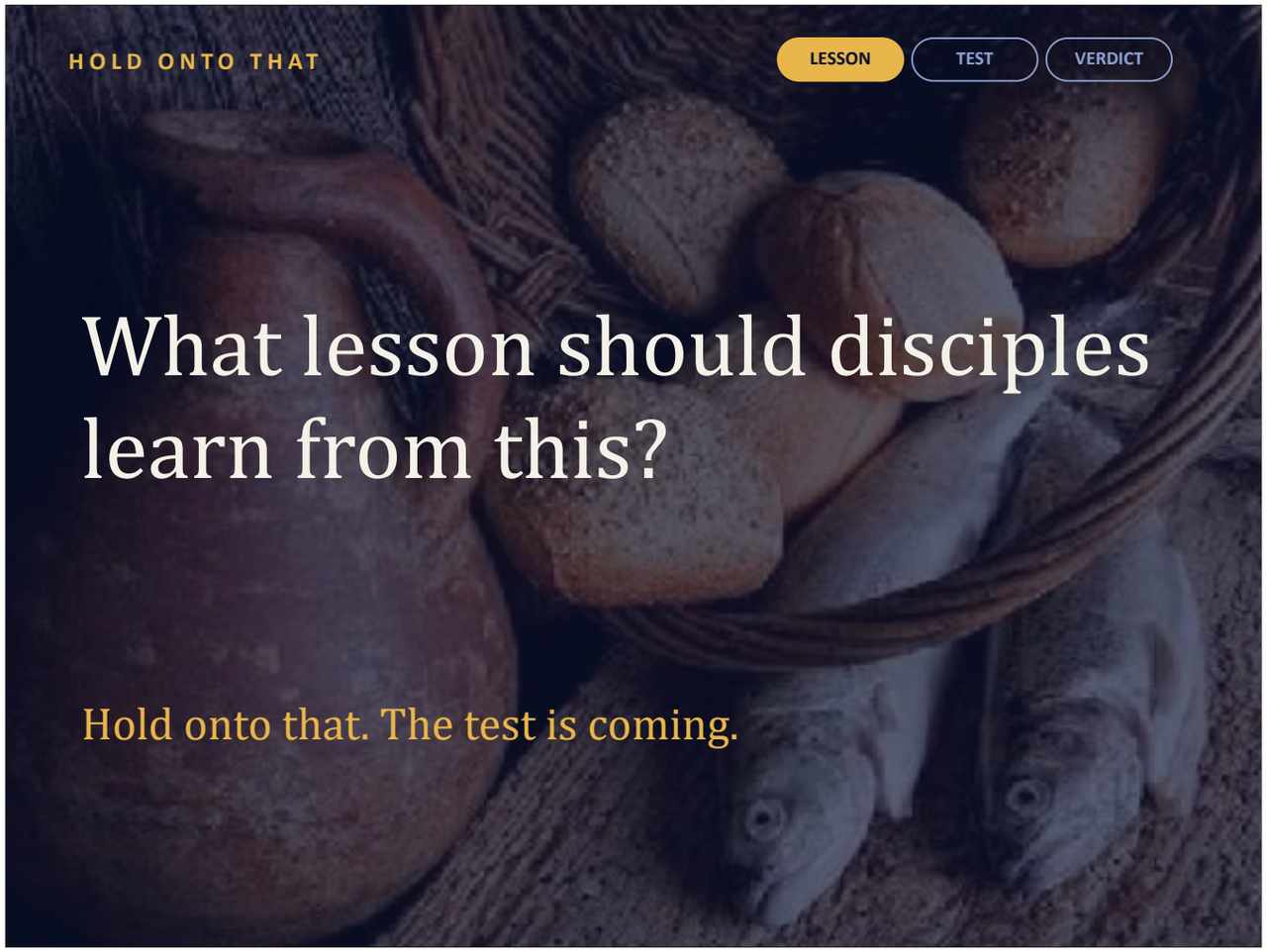
“So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.”

The language of the Last Supper

TOOK › GAVE THANKS › BROKE › GAVE

But Jesus has everyone sit down. Notice the language… it is the language of the Last Supper: took, gave thanks, broke it, and distributed it.

And all ate and there were leftovers. At least 5000 were fed. (Tells you the size of the crowd and the consternation of the disciples.)



I want you to think about that experience. What lesson should disciples learn from this? (Get the audience to respond.)

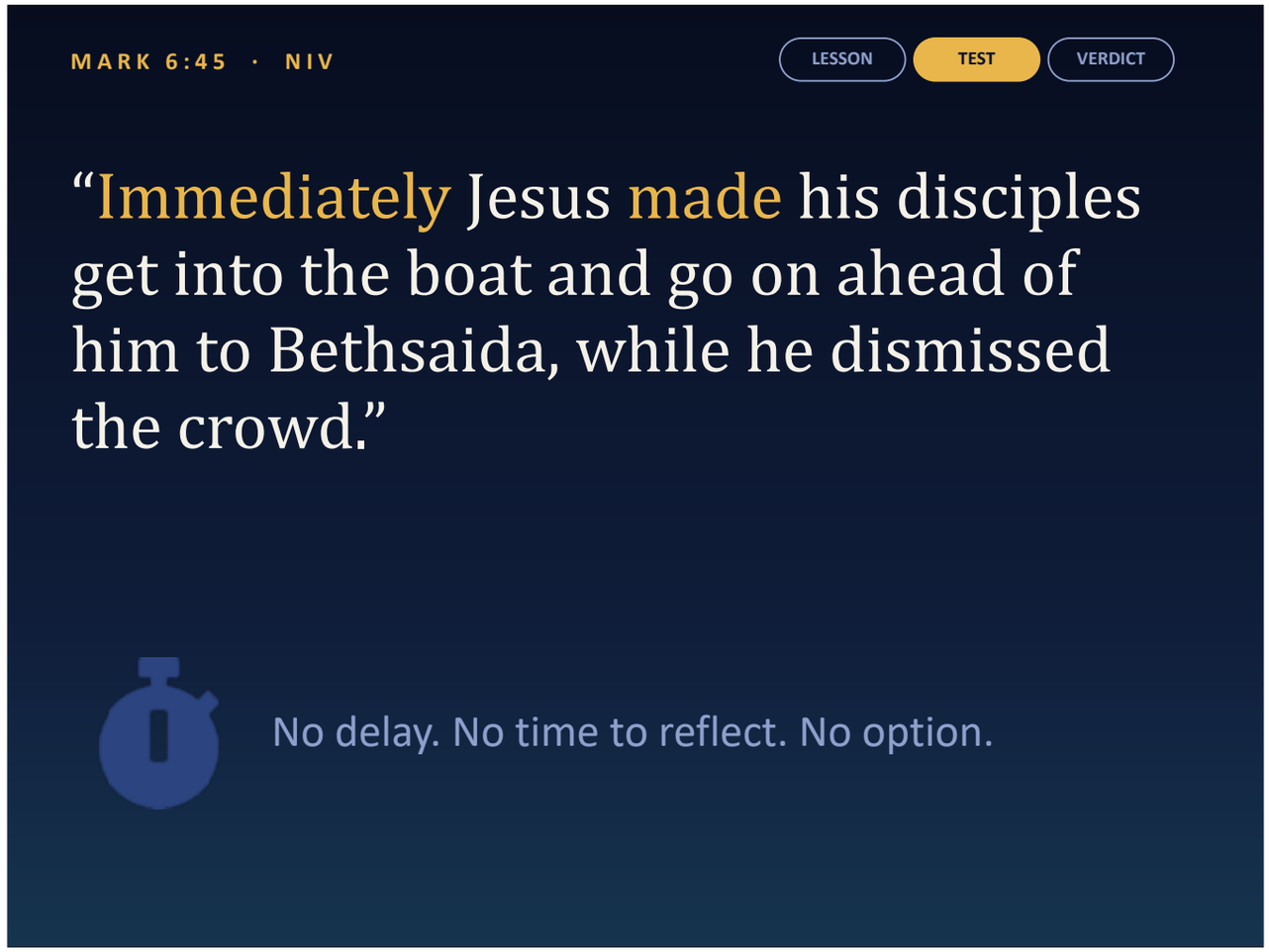
Hold onto that. The test is coming.

The Test

After the lesson comes a test.



After the lesson comes a test.



It says, "Immediately." There was no delay, no time to ask Jesus, no time to even reflect. Immediately, right now. There is something Jesus wants to test. Did these men learn anything today?

And it says that Jesus "made them" get into the boat. This was not an option. He forced them. Something is going to happen and they have no control of it. They are responding to the instruction of Jesus.

They are going to cross the Sea of Galilee toward Bethsaida on the opposite shore. If the wind is at their back, it will be a quiet journey. But it isn't.

THE CROSSING

LESSON | TEST | VERDICT



Destination:

Bethsaida

Across the Sea of Galilee, to the opposite shore.

They are going to cross the Sea of Galilee toward Bethsaida on the opposite shore. If the wind is at their back, it will be a quiet journey. But it isn't.

MARK 6:48 · NIV

LESSON | TEST | VERDICT

“He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them,”



Jesus is praying and he sees them

The wind was against them. They were "straining" at the oars, not making progress, and if you piece together the timeline, this goes on all night long.

Suddenly an object appears on the horizon, something moving in the midst of the sea, and it was moving swiftly, about to pass them.



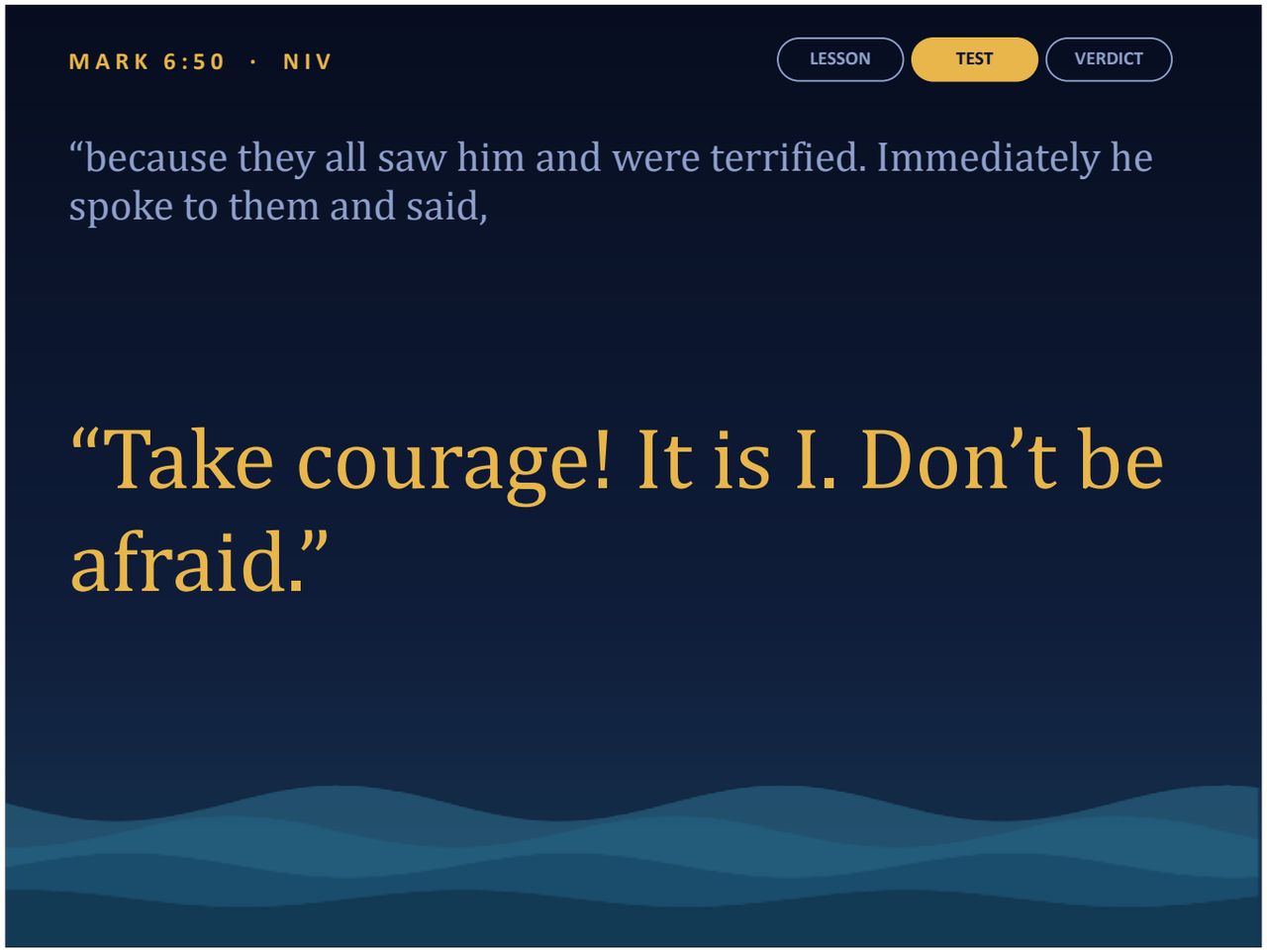
Notice that this is a paradigm of the Christian life.

Many times we find ourselves in situations not of our choosing, and we are encountering trouble and difficulty and pain. It is something that will mark the lives of these men for the rest of their lives. And the question is, how do you respond?



They saw the figure and they shrieked in terror. It was a phantom.

They expected Jesus to either be on shore where they left him or in the boat… but not here. (My story about seeing the woman from the post office at a wedding and not recognizing her because I was used to seeing her at the post office.)



Instead, Jesus speaks. Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid.

The term "It is I," rendered literally, is "I am" — the same words as God's name from the burning bush. God is there. (Check before using: the Greek is ego eimi, "I am.")

In the times when you don't know what to do, take courage because Jesus is with you. No reason to be afraid.

But that is a hard lesson to learn.

MARK 6:51 · NIV

LESSON | TEST | VERDICT

"Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed,"



Jesus climbs into the boat, and the wind dies down. Notice something: he didn't have to be in the boat to see the boat. For hours he was up on the mountain, praying, watching them strain at the oars. Now he steps in, and the storm quits.

And the disciples are completely amazed. The word means they were beside themselves, out of their minds with astonishment. They had just handed out bread to five thousand people, and now this.

Hold on to that word, because Mark is about to tell us what they were missing.

MARK 6:52 · NIV

LESSON | TEST | VERDICT

The Verdict



“for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.”

But what was wrong? They had not grasped the meaning of the loaves. With Jesus, nothing is beyond his control. He can feed 5000. But they didn't get it.

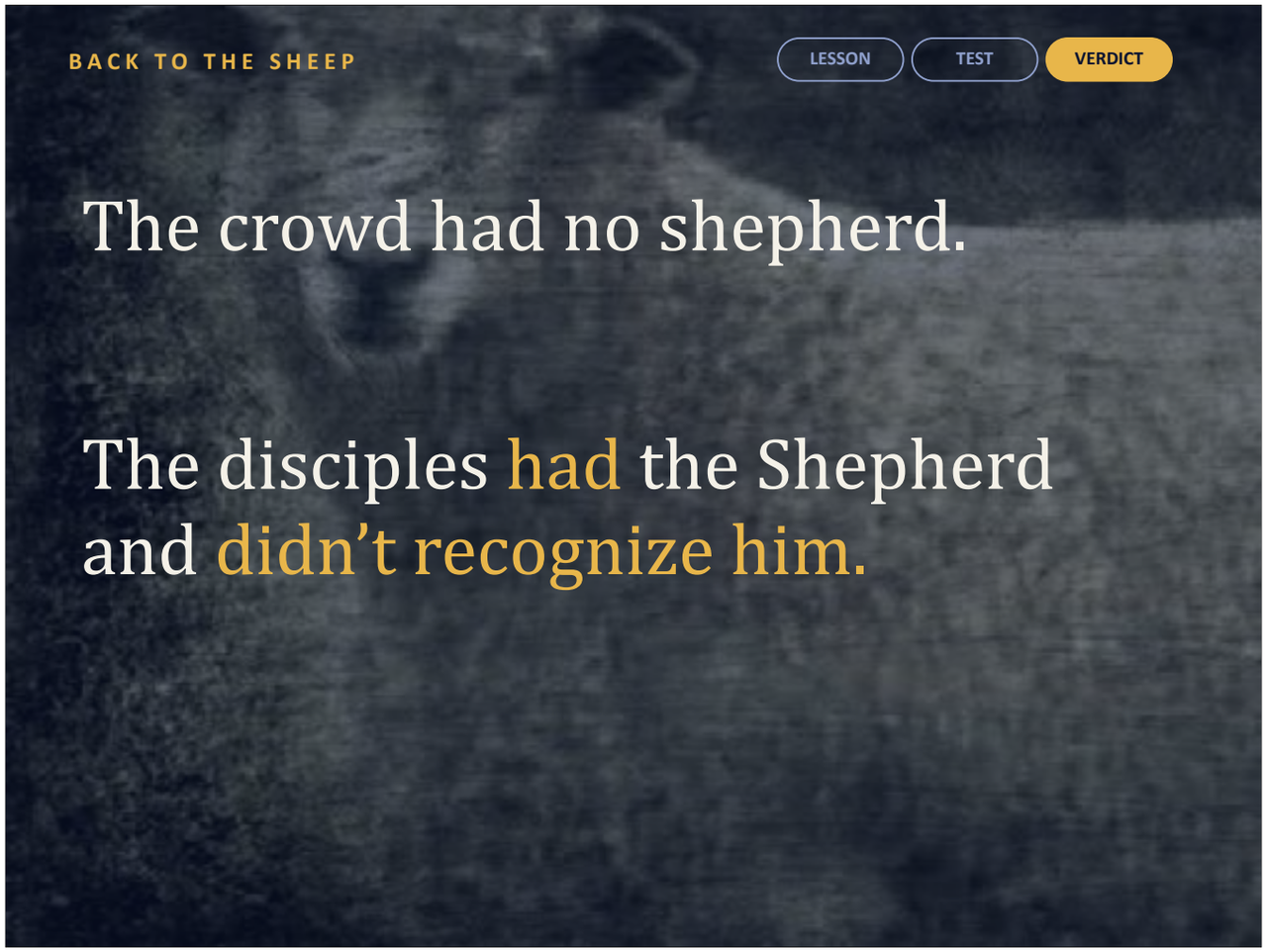
It says that their hearts were hardened.

Their hearts were closed to the idea that there is nothing that is beyond the grasp of Jesus the Christ. It just did not penetrate. They just did not get it.



The problem with the disciples is not the lack of information. It never is. Jesus has shown them miracle after miracle and it still hasn't stopped the fear they felt in that boat. The problem is not that more miracles are needed but more response of faith.

What Jesus does teaches more than any flannelgraph lesson could.



Go back to the sheep from the start of the lesson. The crowd was sheep without a shepherd, and Jesus met that need. He taught them and he fed them.

But look at the disciples. They weren't missing a shepherd. They were walking with him. Their problem was that they didn't recognize him when he came across the water. The crowd had no shepherd. The disciples had one and didn't know him when he came.

Notice what Mark does next. The boat lands at Gennesaret, and the people there recognize Jesus immediately (v. 54). The ones who knew they needed a shepherd saw him at once.

So when the hard thing comes, the question isn't only "Do I have guidance?" It's "Do I recognize the one who is already guiding me?"

REMEMBER

LESSON | TEST | VERDICT

The next hard thing is not a new problem for God.

What he has already done is meant to teach us who he is when it comes.



And remember. The next hard thing is not a new problem for God. What he has already done is meant to teach us who he is when it comes.

We face life because God doesn't have the challenge. He has the answer to the challenge.

Now put it on the board.