

The Bread of Life

January 30, 2022

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

John 6:1-15

Session Outline

1. The Need for Bread (John 6:1-9)
2. The Bread Provided (John 6:10-15)
3. The True Bread (John 6:30-40; 47-58)

Theological Theme

People naturally seek fulfillment and meaning outside of Jesus, but only He fulfills our desire for meaning and purpose.



Leader Guide

The Bread of Life

Introduction

- ❓ What are some things the world believes can give satisfaction?
- ❓ How have you experienced the reality of being failed by worldly things?

Like us, the people mentioned in John 6 were distracted by things that satisfy for a short time at best. In fact, they were generally quite poor, and every day was spent struggling for survival. It is no small wonder that they were drawn to Jesus after He miraculously fed them and provided leftovers. In their eyes, being with Jesus would eliminate their need to work for survival. Yet Jesus was not primarily concerned about their poverty. He was concerned about something much deeper.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus made a series of “I am” statements. He said, “I am the light of the world”(8:12); “I am the gate for the sheep”(10:7); “I am the good shepherd”(10:11); “I am the way, the truth, and the life”(14:6); and “I am the true vine”(15:1). Today’s passage, where Jesus said twice, “I am the bread of life” (vv. 35, 48), is the first in this series. Of course, this is a metaphor, and Jesus’s hearers never seemed to understand His metaphors. They could only think in terms of physical bread, like Moses gave their ancestors.

Session Summary

Jesus feeding the five thousand is the fourth sign in the Gospel of John. Jesus explained the sign as a living parable that He is the Bread of Life. The people did not understand the sign because they were only looking for earthly provision. They wanted a recreation of the manna God provided during Moses’s leadership. Jesus revealed He is the true and better manna and would provide true nourishment for people’s souls. To have the Bread of Life we must feed on Jesus and fully put our hope in Him.

1. The Need for Bread (John 6:1-9)



Why were the crowds following Jesus at this point? How did the crowds following Jesus set the stage for the miracle that was about to take place?

John wrote that this great crowd of people were following Jesus because of the signs He was performing. They were amazed at all Jesus had done and seemed to believe in Him—or at least they believed in His power.

Jesus looked up and saw the crowd pressing in on His disciples on the mountain and decided to do something about it. Philip was from this region, so Jesus likely asked him because he was a local, but Jesus had a greater purpose and lesson in His question. The disciples had no way of feeding the crowd and understanding that was important.

The crowd was large; with women and children, it was probably as many as 15,000 people. It would have cost nearly eight months' wages to buy enough food to feed all of those people. Philip was only thinking in terms of finances, and Andrew was only thinking about what was in front of him—a tiny bunch of barley loaves and two fish. It was hardly a banquet. But the issue wasn't money or a matter of supply. For Jesus, this was an opportunity to display His power as the provider of all things. Those witnessing this miracle would have a choice to make too.



What was Jesus trying to teach Philip with his question in verse 5?

Philip's response revealed that Jesus's question was overwhelming to him. Andrew—Philip's brother—was stumped too, but he found a boy with five loaves of bread and two fish. They might have wondered, "What good will this do?" but they had something; it was more than nothing.

Jesus had all of the resources needed to provide for the people. Philip did not see the situation from Jesus's point of view. He missed what Jesus was able to see clearly, and we often do the same. Many people stop short of moving from stranger to acquaintance in relationships because they are afraid they are not enough or won't make a difference. Yet, Jesus understood all that was going on. What we give to people does not matter as much as the practice and desire of willingly giving to the work of the Lord. When you give what you have, Jesus multiplies it.

It isn't our job to multiply. It isn't our job to provide for the crowds. Our responsibility is to act as the little boy in this story: We bring what we have to Jesus. We don't do nothing; we do something, and we don't give up.

The Cost of Bread for the Crowd

Two hundred denarii was roughly eight months' wages, since one denarius was about one day's pay for a common laborer (12:5; Mt 20:2).

We may only possess the equivalent of a few loaves of bread and some fish. Maybe you feel like you don't have the skills or talents other people have. Maybe you feel the church doesn't need what you have to offer. And the truth is, God doesn't need any of it. He doesn't need our abilities, but He calls us to offer them and chooses to use us as His people. In offering what we have, however small, we act in faith knowing He will use it tenfold. He uses it. He multiplies it—by His power, not ours.

- ❓ Application: Where might Jesus be calling you to view a hard situation through His perspective? How do you need to respond?

2. The Bread Provided (John 6:10-15)

Jesus's response to the disciples should be noted. They saw so little in front of them and had no idea how everyone would be fed. They had seen the miracles. They had seen Jesus do the unfathomable. He could have rebuked them for their lack of faith or understanding. He could have reminded them of His great power to do anything the Father instructed Him to do. But He didn't. He simply fed the people. They were hungry, and He fed them—abundantly. This wasn't a show or a spectacle. The bread and fish miraculously multiplied.

- ❓ Why is it often hard for us to believe Jesus can use what little we can offer?
- ❓ Why is it important that there was bread and fish left over? What does this remind us about God's character and the nature of His gospel?


When Jesus provides, He does so in abundance. This isn't a promise of fortune or wealth but it is a promise that He will always be enough. His provision may rarely come in the form we expect, but it will be more than we could ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

Jesus didn't just provide for the people; He provided extravagantly. Every person ate until full. This is just another reminder of the lavish generosity of God. He doesn't skimp and provide the bare minimum. Jesus took a poor boy's lunch and multiplied it exponentially. There were twelve baskets left over that day, one for each disciple. And God was not only generous in the past; He is generous today as well. God has blessed us so richly, giving all things to us—including giving His Son to die for us.

The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is quite frequently used as a story to talk about world hunger and the Christian response to it. This account does show Christ's concern for the hungry and reveals how


God can take what little we offer and multiply it. However, this story is more than a hunger story. It is a story for any person who feels that their resources are inadequate to meet the challenges they face. And who has not faced such a situation? Sometimes it feels like we are looking through opposite ends of binoculars at the challenges ahead of us and the resources within us. We look at our challenges and they seem magnified, much larger than they often turn out to be. We look at our resources with those binoculars turned around, and they seem oh so tiny!

With this act, Jesus showed that even if all we have is five loaves and two fish, it is enough when it is dedicated to God. God will multiply whatever we offer to Him, and He will make it more than adequate to meet our challenges. But we must do two things: we must offer what we have (what would have happened had the boy withheld his five loaves and two fish?), and we must have faith in what God can do with what we offer Him.

 Application: Compare the reaction of the multitudes to your own experience of Jesus. How are they similar? What needs to change?

3. The True Bread (John 6:30-40; 47-58)

As if Jesus's healing the sick and feeding the thousands weren't miraculous enough, the crowd demanded more signs like the manna in Exodus 16. In Exodus 16, the people grumbled and complained against God about their hunger, forgetting God's power in the exodus from Egypt. In the same way that the Jews of Moses's day disregarded God's signs, the Galileans disregarded Jesus's signs.

 In verses 31-32, the people revealed their doubt that Jesus was any better than Moses, and Jesus sought to correct them. In what ways is Jesus better than Moses?

Moses stood between God and the Israelites and mediated an old covenant that could not save. Jesus is better than Moses: He stands in the gap between the people and the Lord once and for all, establishing the new covenant that alone saves (see Hebrews 3). The biblical way to study the great people of God in the Old Testament is not merely to draw broad moralizations from their lives but to see how they point us to Jesus and our need for Him.

The crowd in verse 34 clearly struggled to understand what Jesus was really talking about. Their treasure was their desire to no longer live in poverty, and Jesus was the means to that end. It's unlikely that people will seek to fill their spiritual hunger when their idols are being fed. "Junk food" may never satisfy, but it certainly keeps us occupied.



What assurances of eternal life did Jesus give in verses 37-40?

Jesus addressed the crowd's unbelief by telling them forthrightly that they did not believe in Him despite seeing Him firsthand (v. 36). Unless the Father has given people to the Son and drawn them to Him, they will not come to Jesus and believe in Him. We need more than miracles of manna; we need the miracle of saving faith, which is a gift from God in itself (see Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29).

When Jesus said He came from heaven, many were cynical because they knew Jesus's earthly parents and they thought He was born to them in a normal way. They seemed to think that coming from heaven precludes any sort of birth process. But Jesus said that those who are sensitive to God and God's guidance would understand and follow Him (vv. 44-51). It was no use for Him to argue with those who did not have this sensitivity. The reward for those who do listen to God and believe is eternal life.

Verses 53-58 likely seem strange. Jesus's words obviously seemed strange to His hearers. It is hard to fathom someone wanting to be eaten by others, let alone promote it as the path to life. But Jesus was speaking metaphorically to a group that should have understood Him, as He had just recently miraculously fed them from a few fish and a few loaves of bread. This group was pursuing Jesus so He could continue to supply bread for them but what they needed was Jesus Himself. Eating Jesus's flesh means that we are to fully trust in Him and let Him be the source of sustenance and the source of life in us. This would be a terribly difficult saying for the Jews because they could not see Jesus for who He really was, only for who they wanted Him to be.

Many of Jesus's followers had a difficult time with the words of Jesus on that particular day. But Jesus clarified what He meant: It meant trusting Him, not His provision. It meant desiring Him, not His miracles.



Application: The people in today's passage worshiped comfortable lives and tried to follow Jesus, thinking He would fulfill those desires. Are there idols in your life that you may be trying to obtain through Jesus? What steps can you take this week toward removing those idols from your life?

Conclusion

“You are what you eat” is a phrase we often hear. Yet in the case of spiritual nourishment, it takes on new meaning. The Gospel of John is not just about what Jesus did, but more importantly, it’s about who He was. Today’s passage shows us who Jesus was as the Bread of Life, the One who came from heaven to give life to all who would believe.

- ❓ Where do you currently feel you are lacking what you need in your life? How will you submit this situation to the Father and ask Him to provide for your needs according to His will?
- ❓ Where do you see hungry or needy people in your community, and how can you pray that God will multiply the resources needed to feed them?
- ❓ How might exhibiting honesty about your needs while also seeking to meet the needs of those around you point others to the Father?

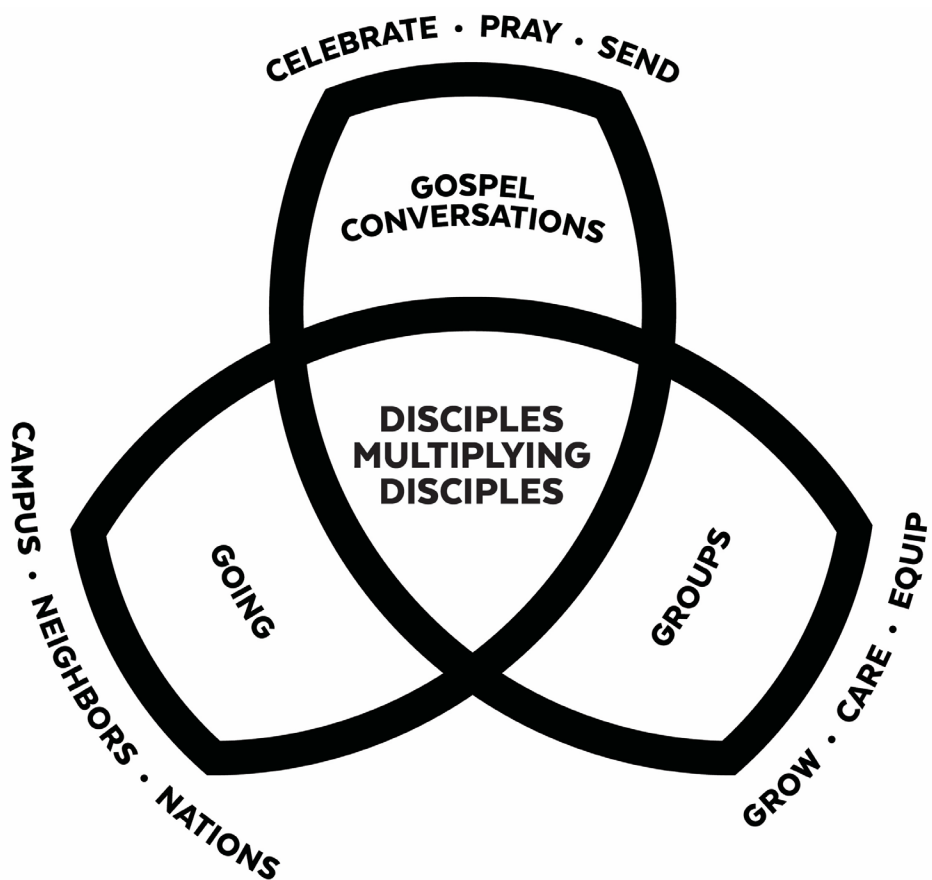
Prayer of Response

Pray and thank God that He is faithful to provide for our needs. Thank Him for His provision, even in the midst of a perceived lack of resources or options. Ask God to grow your awareness of the needs of those around you and use you to meet those needs for His glory.

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in John* by Matt Carter
- *Be Alive* by Warren Wiersbe
- *John Chapters 1-10* by J. Vernon McGee

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Group Emphasis

Challenge your Group to read the Bible daily this week. Assign verses for each day. Next week ask a person per day to share what they discovered.

For Next Week

Session Title

- The Lord of the Storm

Main Passages

- John 6:16-21

Session Outline

1. The Outward Reality (John 6:16-18)
2. The Love of Christ (John 6:19)
3. The Appropriate Response (John 6:20-21)

Memorize

Then Jesus took the loaves, and after giving thanks he distributed them to those who were seated—so also with the fish, as much as they wanted.

—John 6:11

Historical Context of John

Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30–31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God’s people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve (“the disciple Jesus loved,” 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24–25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of “the disciple Jesus loved” with Peter in 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3–4; 8:14–25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John’s Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1–4).

Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John’s lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter’s martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1, 14, 18; 10:30; 20:28).

Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John’s Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

Extended Commentary

John 6:1-15

6:1. “After this” again indicates the passing of an indefinite period of time (5:1). Half a year may have passed since the previous event. Sea of Tiberias was an alternate name for the Sea of Galilee. Herod Antipas founded Tiberias, the largest city on the Sea of Galilee, in honor of his patron, the Roman emperor Tiberius (a.d. 14-37). The name gained currency toward the end of the first century.

6:3. Mountain may not refer to a specific mountain. It could designate the hill country east of the lake, known today as the Golan Heights (Mt 14:23; Mk 6:46). Like other rabbis, Jesus sat down to teach (Mt 5:1; Mk 4:1; 9:35; Lk 4:20), although teaching is not mentioned here.

6:4. This is the second of three Passovers mentioned by John, and the only one Jesus spent in Galilee.

6:5. The huge crowd apparently walked several miles around the north side of the lake and caught up with Jesus and the disciples. Remember that Jesus had been doing more miracles than the three John has recorded for us so far. Many people followed him because of their interest in his power and his teaching. This crowd would have been greatly enlarged because of the number of visitors to Palestine for the Passover. Jesus had led his disciples out to this solitary place to have some private teaching time with them, but the crowds followed. Mark tells us in his account that Jesus had compassion on them and taught them late into the day—and he also saw their need for food.

6:6-8. From a picture of people in need we move to a picture of the disciples in confusion. Philip’s reply is so typical of what we might say. He looked strictly at the human dilemma, considering only his own resources, and pronounced that the situation was hopeless. Two hundred denarii was roughly eight months’ wages, since one denarius was about one day’s pay for a common laborer (12:5; Mt 20:2). This whole inquiry was instigated by Jesus’ question: Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? It is typical of John to remind his readers that Jesus already knew what would happen next (v. 6). At first we wonder why Philip was singled out, but then we remember he was a native of Bethsaida, possibly the closest town. If a local convenience store had been open at that hour, Philip would have known about it. Nevertheless, Philip did a quick assessment of what it would cost for each one to have a bite! Philip would be the natural choice for Jesus’ question since he, like Andrew (v. 8) and Peter, was a native of nearby Bethsaida. Jesus’ question echoes Moses’ query in the wilderness: “Where can I get meat to give all these people?” (Num 11:13). Other parallels between Jn 6 and Num 11 are the people’s grumbling (Num 11:1; Jn 6:41,43); the description of the manna (Num 11:7-9; Jn 6:31); the reference to the eating of meat/Jesus’ “flesh” (Num 11:13; Jn 6:51); and the overabundance of the provision (Num 11:22; Jn 6:7-9).

6:9. Boy may refer to a kid, a teenager, or even someone in his early twenties. The same word is used to refer to young Joseph in Gen 37:30 and Daniel and his friends in Dan 1. Barley was common food for the poor (the well-to-do preferred wheat bread); the fish were probably dried or preserved, perhaps pickled. In a similar account, Elisha fed 100 men with 20 barley loaves (2Ki 4:42-44).

6:10. The men numbered about 5,000, plus women and children (Mt 14:21), totaling perhaps as many as 15,000 people. Plenty of grass may allude to the messianic age (10:9-10; Ps 23:2). Mark (Mk 6:39-40) mentioned that the grass was green, which points to springtime. Like Moses' ancient rod, Samson's donkey jawbone, and David's sling, this simple lunch shows again that seemingly useless things can become important in Jesus' hands. He alone is all-sufficient. Everyone was satisfied, and each disciple had his own personal basket of leftovers as a reminder of the Master's power. The identification of the number of men appears in all four Gospels. We can only guess what the total number of people might have been. Some estimates reach as high as twenty thousand people. What a wonderful picture John paints of Jesus holding those five small barley loaves in his hands as he gave thanks.

6:11. A common Jewish thanksgiving prayer was, "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth."

6:12. Jesus' words echo Ruth 2:14: "She ate and was satisfied and had some left over." Jesus took the same care in providing for those whom the Father gave Him (Jn 10:28-29; 17:11-12,15).

6:13. The number of baskets may allude to Jesus' symbolic restoration of the 12 tribes of Israel.

6:14-15. The reference to the Prophet who was to come into the world alludes to Dt 18:15,18. No one could deny the miracle, especially those who had enjoyed lunch. Many people were drawn back again to questions posed to John the Baptist in 1:21, particularly the reference to "that prophet" promised by Moses. But Jesus would have none of their political pressure brought on by full stomachs. He slipped again into the hills for rest and worship. Mark told us that he "dismissed the crowd" (Mark 6:45), and John told us that he withdrew again to a mountain by himself. He would be no political messiah hustled into battle with the Romans to regain Palestine for Israel.¹

References

1. *HCSB Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010).

Author Bio

Matt Carter (Exalting Jesus in John)

Matt Carter serves as the Pastor of Preaching and Vision at the Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, Texas, which has grown from a core team of 15 to over 8,000 attending each Sunday since he planted it in 2002. Matt has co-authored multiple books including a commentary on the Gospel of John in The Christ Centered Exposition Commentary series. Matt also co-authored a novel of historical fiction, *Steal Away Home* which tells the real life story of famed pastor Charles Spurgeon's unlikely friendship with former slave-turned-missionary, Thomas Johnson. Matt holds an M.Div. from Southwestern Seminary and a Doctorate in Expository Preaching from Southeastern Seminary. He and his wife Jennifer have been married for over 20 years, and they have three children, John Daniel, Annie, and Samuel.

Warren Wiersbe (Be Alive)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of *Back to the Bible*, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

J. Vernon McGee (John Chapters 1-10)

Dr. J. Vernon McGee (1904-1988) spent more than 50 years teaching the Bible on his “Thru the Bible” radio broadcast. He pastored for more than 40 years and has authored many best-selling books, including *Doctrine for Difficult Days*.