



Jesus Is the Bread of Life

5

Key Theme

- Jesus is God.

Key Passages

- John 6:1–14, 6:22–66

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe how Jesus fed the 5,000.
- Explain what it means that Jesus is the bread of life.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Students will review the memory verse by completing the Memory Verse Review Sheet.

- Write on the board, “Do we always read the Bible literally?”
- Print one Memory Verse Review Sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



Studying God's Word

Jesus took a small lunch and miraculously multiplied it to feed a crowd of 5,000 men and an untold number of women and children. He used the miracle to point out the spiritual hunger that physical bread cannot satisfy. Only Jesus, the bread of life, can provide the spiritual food necessary for eternal life.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: The Bread of Life

The students will work in groups to answer four key questions about the Bread of Life Discourse in John 6.

- Print one Bread of Life Answer Key from the Resource DVD-ROM for your use.
- Student Guides
- Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above along with this background.

The miracles Jesus performed confirmed that He was God. He had power over all creation (Mark 4:39). He had the wisdom and knowledge to teach with authority (Luke 4:32). He had the authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:5). He had power over disease (John 9:6–7). And He had power over life and death (John 11). As we read these accounts and come to know Jesus better, we can understand the centurion's response as he watched Jesus die on the Cross: "Truly this Man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39).

Jesus's life was characterized by miracles, service, compassion, teaching, and truth. One event that demonstrated all of these characteristics was when Jesus fed the 5,000. Bear in mind that the crowd was far larger than 5,000, as this number would not have included women and children. Jesus had been teaching, and this multitude—estimated at 20,000—followed Him. Upon seeing the crowd, Jesus had compassion on them. Knowing what He was about to do, Jesus tested Philip: "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" (John 6:5). Philip responded that there were not enough funds available to even begin to feed all of them. But Jesus had a plan. They found a young boy with five barley loaves and two small fish. Jesus took this meager lunch, gave thanks to God, and passed out enough food to feed the entire crowd! Not only that but they filled 12 baskets with the leftovers. Here again, Jesus revealed who He was to those who had eyes to see (Matthew 13:16).

It was an amazing miracle indeed—one that met the physical needs of a great number of people. But Jesus would soon make a claim that would prove to be more amazing than even this miracle. He would claim that He Himself is the bread of life (John 6:35).

You see, the crowds continued to follow Jesus (John 6:24). But Jesus knew that they were captivated, not by Him but by His miracles. They sought Him because they had recently eaten the food He had miraculously

multiplied (John 6:26). They were more concerned with filling their stomachs temporarily than satisfying their spiritual hunger eternally. So Christ's address must have puzzled them when He said, "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him" (John 6:27). What food would be available that would provide eternal life?

They continued to ask for more signs and miracles and even recalled that Moses had supplied manna in the desert (John 6:31). But what God had offered through the manna was merely a hint of what was to come—the true bread, Jesus Christ. And again, Jesus surely surprised them with His answer: "Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:32–33).

They asked the Lord to give them that bread. And again, Jesus startled them when He said, "I am the bread of life, He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

What did Jesus mean? Again, He was not referring to physical life that perishes or to bread that temporarily satisfies; He was referring to eternal life and spiritual bread that forever satisfies. Jesus is the living bread of life who has come down from heaven. He gives spiritual life; that is why He came. He is the only source of life. The "bread" Jesus gives is His own flesh, sacrificed on the Cross for the life of the world (John 6:47–51). He gave His precious, sinless life for the life of sinners everywhere—sinners who would one day come to Him in humility, repentance, and faith for the forgiveness of their sins.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Have you ever had someone ask you, "You don't take the Bible literally, do you?" Usually, they ask this because they think it is ridiculous to accept some of the

things the Bible says. They may follow up with, “Jesus said, ‘I am the door.’ You don’t think he’s really a door, do you?” Or, “Jesus said to cut off your hand if it causes you to sin. So why do you still have two hands?”

The problem lies with our use of the term literal. It would be best if we avoid using this term with regard to Bible interpretation. It would be incorrect to state that we take the Bible literally, in the way that the person above means it. The Bible itself gives us some principles of interpretation in 2 Corinthians 4:2 and Proverbs 8:8–9:

But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.

All the words of my mouth are with righteousness; nothing crooked or perverse is in them. They are all plain to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge.

In other words, we are to read and understand the Bible in a plain or natural manner. This is usually what believers mean when they say “literal interpretation of the Bible.” It means we don’t go looking for spiritual allegories everywhere or profound truths hidden under the surface of every passage. It would be better to say that we take the Bible “plainly” or in a “straightforward manner.” Reading the Bible “plainly” means that we seek to discover the meaning of a passage as the original author would have intended and as the original hearers would have understood it.

As a matchless literary work, the Bible contains many literary styles, called genres. These genres include historical narrative, poetry, prophecy, parable, and proverb. We understand that historical narrative is to be interpreted differently from poetry, which may use allegory. It’s also different from prophecy, which often uses fantastic imagery. And we know that proverbs are general truths that help us to live godly lives, not foolproof promises.

In addition to literary genres, the Bible employs a variety of figures of speech. These include simile, meta-

phor, allegory, hyperbole, sarcasm, metonymy, personification, anthropomorphism, imagery, and symbolism. For instance, we understand that when Jesus says, “I am the bread of life,” He’s using a metaphor—He’s not an actual loaf of bread. Similarly, when someone says, “My uncle Bob is the black sheep of the family,” we know they aren’t talking about an animal with black wool, but they mean that Uncle Bob is an odd or disreputable member of the family.

Reading the Bible plainly/straightforwardly (taking into account literary genre, figures of speech, context, authorship, historical setting and culture, etc.) is the basis for what is called the historical-grammatical method of interpretation, which has been used by theologians since the church fathers. This method helps to eliminate improper interpretations of the Bible and allows us to plumb the depths of God’s Word.

As we study the Bible and seek to rightly interpret God’s Word (2 Timothy 2:15), may we follow the example of the Bereans (Acts 17:11) and carefully examine the Bible to ensure that any teaching we hear is in line with Scripture.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Dear Jesus, Bread of Life, Creator, Almighty God, I give you praise! You have such love and compassion for this sin-sick world. You are patient and kind. You, the great I Am, compassionately provided food for a hungry crowd who just clamored for more miracles. You, the Creator of life, spoke words of life into the ears of your disciples, yet many left you because they did not believe. You, the Bread of Life, offered yourself as spiritual food to a world of people who only wanted physical food. But some believed. I believe. I pray my students will believe. May they desire this food that only comes from you, that they, too, will hunger no more!

► **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.



Review

We have been looking at the power and authority that Jesus exercises over creation in our recent lessons. Our discussions have shown us how Jesus has power over nature, power over disease, and even power over death.

? What have all of these passages confirmed about the nature of Jesus? *Jesus is God in the flesh, exercising power over all of these areas as only God can.*

While His mission was to come to earth to seek and save the lost, along the way He performed many miracles. All these miracles were performed to authenticate the message that Jesus preached and the fact that He was the promised Messiah, the Son of God.

Today we are going to look at another miracle and how that miracle provided an example of the role of Jesus as the bread of life.



► Write on the board, “Do we always read the Bible literally?”



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

We are going to read all of John 6 today, all 71 verses. To get the full context of what happens as Jesus interacts with the various groups of people, we will read through the entire chapter and then turn our immediate focus to verses 1–14. Let's read John 6 together. *Have several people read the passage aloud. This should take about 9 minutes. Consider breaking the chapter into the following sections for different readers: verses 1–14, 15–21, 22–40, 41–59, 60–71.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

Now that we have read through the whole chapter, let's focus on the miracle in verses 1–14 and ask some questions of the text.

? **When did this event take place?** *We know it was near the Passover. This is likely the third Passover, so about one year before the Crucifixion. Point this out on the New Testament History Poster.*

? **Why was the crowd following Jesus?** *He was healing people and doing signs that impressed them.*

? **Who was with Jesus on the mountain?** *The disciples were with Him.*

? **How large was the “great multitude” of people?** *We see the number was 5,000 men. Looking at the parallel passages in Mark 6:44 and Matthew 14:21, it says there were also women and children. Reasonably, there could have been up to 20,000 people in the crowd.*

John 6:1–71

Mark 6:44;
Matthew 14:21–23

- ? **Why did Jesus ask Philip where they could buy bread for the crowd?** *Jesus desired to test Philip, but He knew what He was going to do.*
- ? **How much money did Philip think they would need to feed the crowd?** *Philip suggests that 200 denarii would only give each person a little food.*
- ? **How much is a denarius?** *This was equivalent to a day's wages for a laborer—so about 8 months of salary.*
- ? **Upon searching, how much food was available for the crowd to share?** *A boy had five barley loaves and two small fish. These would have been small loaves, more like buns than the large loaves we are used to.*
- ? **What did Andrew say about the loaves and fish?** *What are they among so many?*
- ? **What does this indicate about his attitude toward feeding the crowd?** *He doubted that this little amount could feed so many.*
- ? **After the people had taken seats in the grass, how did Jesus distribute the food?** *He gave thanks, giving them to the disciples to distribute to the crowd.*
- ? **How much food was given out?** *There was enough food so that everyone had their fill, and there was some left.*
- ? **What command did Jesus give the disciples after the meal?** *He told them to gather up all the fragments so that nothing was lost.*
- ? **How does this event qualify as a miracle?** *The multiplying of the food to the point of excess can only be explained by supernatural means. Jesus had performed a sign of His deity.*
- ? **Why did Jesus want the disciples to gather what was left?** *While the text is not explicit at this point, God is not a God of waste. This could also have served as a very clear indication that there was abundant food for the large crowd.*
- ? **How much was left?** *There were 12 baskets remaining, enough to provide the next meal for the twelve disciples.*
- ? **Whom did the men in the crowd understand Jesus to be after this sign?** *They knew He was the Prophet who was promised.*
- ? **Where is this idea of the Prophet from?** *Moses had spoken of this Prophet in Deuteronomy 18:15, and the Jews were anticipating His coming, thinking He was the Messiah. The Jews had asked John the Baptist if he was the Prophet in John 1:21.*
- ? **What did the men wish to do upon realizing the Prophet was standing before them?** *They wanted to make Him king. The idea that the Messiah would come as a political ruler, to overthrow Rome at this point, was a common view and is repeated in many places in the New Testament.*
- ? **Where does Jesus go to avoid the crowd taking Him to be their king?** *He avoids the crowds, sending them away and going up the mountain to pray alone (Matthew 14:22–23).*
- ? **What word does John use to describe the miracle?** *John uses the word “sign” to refer to the miracle. This is his common way of referring to the miracles of Jesus.*

Deuteronomy 18:15;
John 1:21

Discover the Truth

Standing next to the one who had healed the blind and paralyzed, Andrew wonders how in the world they are going to feed all of these people. He forgot who Jesus was and what He could do in the name of the Father. Jesus knew. He even tested their faith and understanding with His question. In the midst of all of the people, Jesus demonstrated His ability to care for those who would follow Him. He even provided the next meal for the disciples from what was left over from the miraculous meal.

The feeding of the 5,000, as we call it, is probably one of the most well-known miracles performed by Jesus. In the minds of many, this miracle is a way to promote the compassion that Jesus shows to people. But this promotion of the compassion of Jesus is often done at the exclusion of the harder side of Jesus—a side we will see as we move through the rest of this passage.

MERCIFUL

FAITHFUL

- ? How does Jesus demonstrate His mercy in this account? *He provides for the physical needs of the people who had been following Him and listening to His teaching in a desolate place. Refer to the Attributes of God Poster.*

As the crowd acknowledged, God was with them, and the one the Prophet Moses had spoken of had come to them. Even as they could see God's faithfulness to them in keeping this promise, they had some misunderstandings about what Jesus came to do. He was not the political Messiah who would become their king and toss Rome out of Israel. He offered a different type of kingship—one the people didn't really want to submit to.





The Bread of Life

MATERIALS

- Bread of Life Answer Key
- Bread of Life Worksheet for each group
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

The students will be examining the remainder of the passage to understand the overall message. To accomplish this, divide the class into groups (placing an appropriate "leader" in each group) and have them answer one or more of the questions on the Bread of Life worksheet. Then have each group present the answer to the question with an explanation that uses the verses from the passage (and others if necessary) for support. As they present their conclusions from the text, use a few more questions to draw out any key points they may have missed. This activity will take the bulk of the time in class.

Rather than me teaching through the remainder of the passage, I am going to have you put your skills to work and analyze the rest of the passage. To do this, I am going to divide you into groups and have each group answer a question (or questions) on this worksheet. Pass out one Bread of Life worksheet to each group. **After**

you have come up with an answer that is supported by the text, you are going to share that answer with the class.

Think about repeated words or ideas, identifying the audience, using cross-references, looking for various figures of speech, and the other parts of analyzing a text that we have used in the past. Develop a fully supported answer and then try to summarize your full response in one sentence. Divide the students into groups and assign each group one of the four questions on the Bread of Life worksheet.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Now that you have had a chance to look at the questions, let's have each group give us an answer to the question. As you listen, you can jot down a few notes and then take some time to look more closely at the answers later. Allow each group a few minutes to present their answer. Use the Bread of Life answer key to guide and re-direct discussion.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

As we think about the feeding of the 5,000 and the subsequent discourse on the bread of life, there are a multitude of truths we could draw from this passage. We have only touched on a few key points today, but I hope you can see the richness of this passage. It points us to our God, who was pleased to send His Son to be the bread of life that would be broken for us and to draw us to Himself by His Spirit.

In this discourse, Jesus said some very hard things and was very direct with the crowd, and even with those who were following Him. Imagine

being a Jewish person hearing His words—it sounded like He was asking them to become cannibals. But eating His flesh and drinking His blood was a metaphor. His flesh is to be eaten, but not as the manna in the wilderness. That manna only sustained their ancestors physically. The bread Jesus offered was His flesh upon the Cross and the blood that was shed for the forgiveness of sins. Those who were unable to accept the spiritual truth behind this metaphor had not received the words of Jesus by the work of the Spirit and the drawing of the Father. They turned from following Jesus because this was too hard for them to believe in their own flesh. They really weren't looking for Jesus to satisfy them, they were looking for the benefits to the flesh that He offered through His miracles.

But every spiritual truth is too hard for the natural man to believe and submit to. As Jesus told Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, he needed to be born again by the work of the Holy Spirit so that he could understand the truths Jesus spoke to him (John 3:1–8). It is easy to follow after someone who is providing food for you and healing your sicknesses, but what if that person said hard things or asked you to do hard things?

If you are simply trying to follow Jesus by your own strength and on your own terms, it can't last. There will come a point where you will be asked to eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to survive, and you will turn away from following Him. But if you recognize that Jesus alone has the words of life and that He is the bread of life, then you have acknowledged these things as spiritual truths by the power of the Holy Spirit working in you. Then when you hear the call to find your nourishment from partaking of Christ's body and blood, you will gladly accept having recognized the spiritual truth that offers you eternal life.

That is what the crowd of Jews and disciples missed but what the twelve recognized. They looked to Jesus as the only source of truth and eternal life. Let us all have that same attitude and look to Christ for our nourishment, because partaking of His flesh and blood is necessary for our eternal life just as eating bread and drinking water is necessary for our physical life.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? Some people try to change the meaning of the feeding of the 5,000 into a story about how the people shared their lunches with one another, removing any hint of an amazing miracle performed by Jesus. What is the likely intent of those who desire to change miracles into everyday occurrences? *They are likely trying to minimize the supernatural acts of Jesus to focus on His humanity. Many liberal theologians try to turn Jesus into a good teacher to follow rather than a Savior to submit to. We must be careful to affirm the miracles of Jesus as a sure sign of His deity.*

? As Andrew surveyed the scene, he couldn't see how such a small amount could feed so many. Do you recognize Andrew's doubt in your own life as you follow Jesus? What is the antidote to a doubting attitude? *Discuss various answers with students, encouraging them to look to Christ in faith and study the Word to find answers to their questions.*

? Many people attempt to minimize the Bible by insisting that you can't take the things written in it literally. How could you use the passage we studied today to address that claim? *When we read Scripture, we are to take it in its plain meaning. It uses metaphor and simile in many places, as when Jesus called Himself the bread of life. But we do not read that thinking that Jesus is a loaf of bread any more than we hear the weatherman say it is raining cats and dogs and rush to our windows to see the spectacle. We take the metaphors in Scripture in the sense they are meant by the author and would be understood by the original audience. When we do this, guided by the Holy Spirit, we can understand the text for its true meaning and then apply that knowledge to our lives.*

? We often think of Jesus as a meek man who only ruffled the feathers of a few religious legalists. But in this passage we see Jesus practically driving away a large group of His followers by showing them their selfish desires and calling them to submit to Him alone. How does this passage change your view of Jesus? *Discuss various answers, especially approaching the false belief that Jesus was always "nice" to everybody except the Pharisees.*

? As you think about your own conversion, where do you see evidence of the Father drawing you to the Son by the power of the Spirit? *Discuss various answers, focusing on the supernatural role of God in the conversion of each person (John 6:44, 6:63, 6:65).*

? As you consider your walk with Christ, what "hard sayings" do you still struggle with, and how can you overcome these failures? *Ultimately, these struggles will only be removed as we recognize that Jesus alone has the words that bring life. It is by humbly submitting to Him and obeying His Word that we are free.*



MEMORY VERSE

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for offering us eternal life in Christ Jesus.
- Praise God for His provision of the bread of life—Jesus.
- Ask God for a sure faith to follow Him to the end.

