

Small Group Guide: The Bread of Life

Based on John 6:1-21 -- Signs Series, Week 5

Overview

In John 6, Jesus feeds more than five thousand people with five barley loaves and two fish. But John is not simply recording a remarkable event. He is making a declaration about who Jesus is. This sign, set against the backdrop of Passover, connects Jesus to Israel's story of the Exodus and reveals him as the one who satisfies the deepest hunger of the human soul. This guide is designed to help your group move beyond the surface of the miracle and wrestle with the deeper question John is asking: Who is Jesus, and are we truly seeking him?

Key Takeaways

1. The king's compassion precedes the crowd's need. Jesus saw the hunger of the crowd before anyone asked. In the same way, God sees and knows our needs before we bring them to him.
2. Human resources are never enough. Philip's calculations and Andrew's small offering both point to the same reality: what we have in our hands is insufficient on its own. God does not require our abundance. He requires our availability.
3. The kingdom of God is characterized by abundance, not scarcity. Jesus did not merely provide enough. He provided more than enough, with twelve baskets of leftovers. God's provision exceeds the need.
4. The crowd misunderstood the king. The people wanted a political liberator who would give them bread and overthrow their oppressors. Jesus refused to be shaped by their expectations and withdrew. He came not to conform to our vision but to transform our hearts.
5. Jesus is the bread of life. The sign points beyond the physical meal to a deeper truth. Jesus himself is the satisfaction for the deepest longings of the human soul.

Discussion Questions

Opening

1. Think about a time when you were genuinely hungry -- physically or otherwise. What did that hunger drive you to do? How did it feel when that hunger was finally satisfied?
2. The sermon mentioned that we use the word "hunger" as a metaphor for deeper desires -- for purpose, security, love, forgiveness, and significance. Which of those resonates most with you right now, and why?

Digging Into the Text

3. John notes that it was nearly time for the Passover when this miracle took place. Why is that detail significant? What connections does it draw between Jesus and Israel's story in the Old Testament?
4. In verse 6, John tells us that Jesus already knew what he was going to do when he asked Philip where they could buy bread. What does it mean for your prayer life to know that God already sees your need and already has a plan?
5. Andrew finds a boy with five barley loaves and two fish -- the bread of the poor. He then asks, "What good is that with this huge crowd?" Have you ever felt that what you had to offer God was too small to matter? What does Jesus do with that small offering in this story?
6. After feeding the crowd, Jesus gathers twelve baskets of leftovers. The sermon connected those twelve baskets to the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve disciples. What does this abundance communicate about the nature of God's provision?
7. When the crowd tried to make Jesus king by force, he withdrew. What does his withdrawal reveal about the difference between the kingdom the crowd wanted and the kingdom Jesus actually came to establish?

Going Deeper

8. The sermon described the danger of coming to Jesus for what he gives rather than for who he is. In what ways do you see that tendency in your own life? How does it affect your relationship with him?
9. C.S. Lewis is quoted as saying that our problem is not that our desires are too strong but that they are not strong enough -- that we settle for mud pies when a holiday at the sea is on offer. What are some of the "mud pies" that people -- or that you personally -- tend to reach for instead of the bread that Jesus offers?
10. Jesus declares in John 6:35 that whoever comes to him will never be hungry again and whoever believes in him will never be thirsty. What would it look like practically for you to live as though that is true this week?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to practice individually or as a group before your next meeting.

Bring what you have. Identify one area of your life where you have been holding back from God because you feel like what you have to offer is not enough. This week, intentionally offer that thing -- your time, your resources, your ability, your willingness -- to God and ask him to multiply it.

Examine your hunger. Set aside fifteen minutes this week to sit quietly and honestly ask yourself: What am I most hungry for right now? Am I seeking that from Jesus, or am I looking for it somewhere else? Write down what comes to mind and bring it to God in prayer.

Pray before you worry. The sermon reminded us that Jesus sees our need before we ask. This week, make a conscious effort to bring your needs to God in prayer before you begin calculating, worrying, or problem-solving on your own. Practice trusting that he already knows and already has a plan.

Examine your image of Jesus. The crowd tried to force Jesus into the role of a political king. Reflect honestly on whether you have shaped Jesus to fit your own preferences, agenda, or comfort. Ask God to reveal where your picture of him needs to be corrected by Scripture.

Feed someone else. The twelve baskets of leftovers suggest that God's provision is not only for us but also for us to share with others. This week, look for one practical way to meet a need in someone else's life -- whether physical, emotional, or spiritual.

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by praying as a group. You may use the following as a guide.

Lord Jesus, you are the bread of life. You see our hunger before we name it, and you have already provided more than enough to satisfy every longing of our souls. Forgive us for the times we have settled for less -- for temporary things that cannot fill us. Forgive us for the times we have tried to shape you into the king we wanted rather than following the king you are. Teach us to come to you not only for what you give but for who you are. Satisfy the deepest hunger in us. And let what overflows from your abundance in our lives spill out into the lives of those around us. In your name, amen.

For Further Reflection

- Read the rest of John 6, particularly verses 22 through 59, where Jesus explains the meaning of this sign in his own words.
- Read Exodus 16, the account of God providing manna in the wilderness, and consider the parallels to John 6.
- Read Isaiah 25:6-9, the vision of the messianic feast, and reflect on how Jesus fulfills that promise.
- Read Psalm 23 and meditate on the image of a shepherd who feeds, leads, and satisfies his flock.