

## John 6:1-15 - Group Discussion Guide

**TEXT - John 6:1–15 (ESV)** After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. 2 And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. 3 Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. 5 Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” 6 He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. 7 Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.” 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, 9 “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” 10 Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. 11 Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” 13 So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. 14 When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!” 15 Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

*What is going on in this text (retell the story or summarize main points)?*

### **THEOLOGY - What do we learn about God from this text?**

- a) God is both our creator and our sustainer. He created us body and soul and by his providence he sustains our body and soul. In this text we see God’s providence displayed as Jesus feeds the crowd. With God there is always abundance. He has the power to provide for our needs unhindered by human limitations.
- b) Human beings are hungering creatures who long to be filled. All our hungering is ultimately for communion with God himself. In God alone can our hearts find their true home. Food itself is a gift from God given so that it in eating we would receive with thankfulness and remembrance of God who nourishes us body and soul.

*Anything else we might learn about God from the text?*

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**Consulting the Scholars**<sup>1</sup> - 1–4 This miracle is the only one that is mentioned in all the Gospels. This fact alone should alert us to its significance. The phrase “some time after this” shows that John does not specify the exact lapse of time between this event and the one previously recorded. The fact that Jesus was in Galilee may indicate that a segment of the Galilean ministry is presupposed as having already occurred. The feeding of the multitude took place in the spring shortly before the Passover (v. 4). Perhaps some of the people belonged to a crowd of pilgrims who had come together from different parts of northern Galilee, in preparation for the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Jesus was well known because of the miracles he had performed on sick people. John uses the word “signs” (sēmeia), though he gives no details of their character. His usage confirms his statement that Jesus performed “many other miraculous signs” during his ministry (John 20:30). The very fact that this one was selected enhances its importance. The Synoptics indicate that Jesus had several motives in retreating to the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. The time had come to prepare the disciples for his death and to sort out those who would be loyal from those who would not. The determination of Jesus’ enemies to remove him became known to him and to his disciples, and they had to confront this rapidly growing hostility. Furthermore, as the account shows, Jesus refused to take the part of a political Messiah or king. He was willing to meet basic needs but he would not assume the responsibility of leading a revolt or of creating a new nation. Knowing these things, he called the disciples together so that they could report on their recent ministries (Mark 6:30; Luke 9:10). Matthew adds that Jesus had just learned of the execution of John the Baptist (Matt 14:12–13) and that he withdrew to the wilderness with his disciples for consultation.

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<sup>1</sup> Tenney, M. C. (1981). John. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts* (Vol. 9, pp. 71–72). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

5–6 John’s interest concentrates mainly on the relation of this occasion to the disciples. The crowd had come unbidden, prompted by curiosity and eagerness to share in Jesus’ teaching and healing power. As the day declined, Jesus recognized that they were hungry. Desirous of involving the disciples in the responsibility for ministry, Jesus turned to Philip, asking, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” Jesus was not at a loss for a solution to the problem; he wished to educate the disciples by calling their attention to their responsibilities and by leading them to propose some plan of action.

7 Philip’s reply shows that while he had a practical turn of mind, he was rather unimaginative. His calculations, however accurate, were futile, for he could only produce statistics to show what could not be done. The text translates “eight months’ wages” rather than the literal “two hundred denarii” (diakosiōn dēnariōn). A denarius, which was worth approximately seventeen cents, was a day’s wage for an unskilled laborer or soldier. If a man worked for six days a week, two hundred denarii would represent the pay for thirty-three weeks, which would be just about eight months. It would take a long time to save the equivalent of such a sum. No doubt none of the disciples would have enough money to subsidize the purchase of food for a crowd of approximately ten thousand persons, including women and children (Matt 14:21).

12–13 In spite of the miraculous power that effectively produced the ample supply, Jesus permitted no waste of the surplus. Twelve baskets full of remnants were salvaged—possibly one for each of the disciples—and carried back to Capernaum. The term for “basket” (kophinos) usually denotes a large basket, such as might be used for fish or bulky objects. The detail of collecting the remaining fragments of bread and fish may have been introduced to emphasize the ample sufficiency that Jesus provided, or it may indicate that he combined generosity with economy.

15 The desire of the multitude to make Jesus king marks both the height of his popularity and the moment of decision for him. They wanted someone to rule them who would feed them and guarantee their security; they had no comprehension of his spiritual mission or purpose. He, on the other hand, refused to become a political opportunist or demagogue. His kingdom could not be promoted by organizing a revolt against the existing political powers or by promising a dole to all who would join his banner.

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## **LIFE**

*What are you hungering/ (longing) for? How might God be inviting you to look to him for true satisfaction?*

*How does food lead us to worship and communion with God? In what ways do we forget God in our eating?*

*How does this text lead you to love God and others more?*

*How do you sense the Spirit leading you to respond in obedience? How does what you learned call you to change?*

## **PRAYER**

*Confess your sin to God in prayer and ask Him for strength to respond in obedience to his word.*

*What is one personal need you have that we can pray for you as a group?*

*Pray for one friend, family member, or coworker who you want to share the love of Jesus with.*