



LEADER GUIDE

JOHN

SIGNPOSTS OF
THE SAVIOR

THE SIGN OF HIS PROVISION

BIG IDEA: Jesus meets the needs in our lives.

DATE: Sunday, February 1 and Wednesday, February 4, 2026

SCRIPTURE: John 6:1-15

OPENING QUESTION

Have you ever encountered a celebrity? Who was it and what was the circumstance? Did you leave them alone or did you approach them?

Jesus was becoming somewhat of a local celebrity after word had spread about the miracles He had performed. Huge crowds were following him, wanting to experience these signs or perhaps receive healing themselves. Instead of rebuffing the crowds, Jesus saw there were many tired and hungry people so he sought to meet a need.

SETTING THE STAGE

In this lesson, we will see yet another miracle recorded in the gospel accounts. The significance of this miracle became a formative moment for those who followed Jesus, especially those closest to Him. It is a significant lesson for understanding how Jesus meets our needs. Let's sit down on the hillside with Jesus to see what we can learn.

SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 6:1-15 (CSB)

After this, Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). ² A huge crowd was following him because they saw the signs that he was performing by healing the sick. ³ Jesus went up a mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, a Jewish festival, was near. ⁵ So when Jesus looked up and noticed a huge crowd coming toward him, he asked Philip, "Where will we buy bread so that these people can eat?"

⁶ He asked this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread wouldn't be enough for each of them to have a little."

⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There's 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." There was plenty of grass in that place; so they sat down. The men numbered about five thousand. ¹¹ 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.

¹² When they were full, he told his disciples, "Collect the leftovers so that nothing is wasted." ¹³ So they collected them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces from the five barley loaves that were left over by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, "This truly is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ Therefore, when Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

DISCUSSION

JESUS SEES THE NEED

READ: John 6:1-5

SHARE: The setting for this sign demonstrates a few notable things about Jesus's actions.

- **Jesus sat down (v. 3).** By this simple action, Jesus demonstrated His authority as a teacher. In the synagogues, a seat was reserved for a rabbi to sit down and discuss the teachings with the people.
- **Jesus sat on a mountainside to teach (v.3).** Mountains were significant in the history of Israel. (Think Abraham and Isaac, God and Moses, and Elijah and the prophets of Baal.)
- **Jesus chose the Passover festival time for this sign (v. 4).** Soon a lamb would be slain to commemorate the saving of God's people from the angel of death in Egypt.
- **Jesus planned to feed the people who came to listen to Him (v. 5).** Jesus also wanted to involve His disciples in what He was about to do.

Note that a denarii was a days' wage, so this would cost 200x a daily wage!

Why is it significant that Jesus noticed and cared about the physical needs of the crowd?

When have you felt noticed by Jesus?

JESUS MEETS THE NEED

READ: John 6:6-11

Who was this boy and what might we know about him and his provision?

- Some scholars believe he might have been a young boy who helped carry the disciples' provisions, since Andrew knew where to find him.
- The type of bread and the original language used to describe the fish suggest that he was probably poor; barley loaves were the least desirable bread, as they were often coarse and used to feed animals.

How have you personally observed that "little is much when God is in it"?

RECAP: Then Jesus did an amazing miracle, as He took the bread and fish, gave thanks, and the food was distributed among the people. Not just a tiny morsel or crumb; they could eat what they wanted until they were full. What started as something small - pieces of bread and a couple of fish - was trusted to the Lord, and He quickly turned a fast into a feast! The focus of this part of the

narrative shows how the greatest hope wasn't found in the disciples who had been with Jesus for so long, nor the unlikely circumstances affecting them; instead, the answer to a great need came from a young boy who simply surrendered to Jesus.

What's our part and what's God's part in seeing our physical needs met?

What is the relationship between faith and God's provision?

Share this story: George Muller was an evangelist who operated several orphanages in England in the 19th century. Early one morning, Muller led the children into the dining room set for breakfast but there was no food. He prayed, "Dear Father, we thank Thee for what Thou are going to give us to eat." There was a knock at the door, and it was the baker, unable to sleep because he was sure God wanted him to bake bread for Muller. Muller said to the children, "Children, we not only have bread, but *fresh* bread." Almost immediately they heard a second knock. This time it was the milkman. As it turned out, the milk cart had broken down outside the orphanage and he offered the milk to the children, completing their meal. This wasn't the first nor the last time Muller knew that God saw his need and was able to meet it. The God who would feed five thousand and who took care of Muller's children, will provide for us as well!

EXPECTATIONS GROW

READ: John 6:12-15

What do you notice about this miracle in verse 12? (The people were full and there were leftovers!) What does this teach us about God?

RECAP: After Jesus performed this incredible miracle, people began to see Him as fulfilling a sign designated for the promised Messiah. Yet, something about the way they responded led Jesus to withdraw. We might think at this point, *Jesus, isn't this what you want to happen?* Jesus didn't need an earthly Kingdom to prove His authority, and He certainly didn't come to lead a revolt. The refusal by Jesus to be designated as their earthly king shows how the path as Messiah was more about the cross than the crowd, more about the resurrection than the miraculous meal.

When has Jesus stepped in to meet your needs in a powerful way? Share with your group to encourage them!

RECAP: You see, the feeding of the 5,000 is a tremendous miracle that calls people more to *spiritual growth* than it does to any *physical blessing*. It leads to a faith that teaches us that Jesus meets our needs as they arise, but we shouldn't presume on His goodness and provision. It's also a faith that teaches us to depend upon the power of God for what ails us most. The same extraordinary power that transformed the offering of bread and fish into a meal for over five thousand people is the same power that raised Jesus from the grave. And it's the power that comes from God's endless source of grace and mercy: it's the power to set you free. Praise God that He knows what we really need!

What are some lessons we can learn from this fourth sign from Jesus?

Circle back to the main point of this lesson, "Jesus meets the needs of His people." Note the *Who* and the *what*. It is JESUS and He meets our needs vs. wants.

RESPONSE

In what areas are you needing God's provision right now? Perhaps you have financial needs, physical problems, family issues, friendship struggles, emotional stress, or something else. Identify the "loaves and fishes" God has placed in your life that *seem* inadequate for the need. God sees us as we really are, and through each circumstance, He is working to meet our needs. We can trust His work, and we can trust Him. Thank Him for how He has met your needs in the past and trust Him to meet them in the future.

READING PLAN

WEEK 5: 2/1-Exodus 40; 2/2-Leviticus 9; 2/3-Leviticus 10; 2/4-Isaiah 56; 2/5-Hebrews 8; 2/6-Psalm 51; 2/7-Psalm 103

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COMMENTARY

JOHN 6:1-5

Jesus saw the need of the people.

After this (v. 1). After what? In the preceding chapter John recorded how Jesus healed a disabled man at the pool called Bethesda. The religious leaders overlooked the miracle of healing and instead focused on the violation of Sabbath law.

The Sea of Galilee (v. 1). The sea, also known as the Sea of Tiberias, a Roman name honoring the second emperor who was on the Roman throne at the time. The sea is located near the city of Capernaum, the center of Jesus's ministry for a time. Capernaum was the hometown of Simon Peter and Andrew. Luke called the body of water the Lake of Gennesaret.

The Sea of Galilee is approximately thirteen miles from north to south and eight miles wide at its widest point. The Jordan River flows into it, and out of it to the Dead Sea. The fishing industry flourished in the Sea of Galilee. Peter, Andrew, James and John are identified as fisherman in the area.

The signs (v. 2). John didn't use the word *miracle* as the other Gospel writers did, preferring to use *signs*. John understood the mighty acts of Jesus to be signs pointing to a greater reality. Jesus followed the healing at Bethesda with other healings. John didn't specifically record the greater reality revealed by these physical acts of healing, other than they, no doubt, displayed the power of God at work in the ministry of Jesus, the Messiah.

Went up a mountain (v. 3). The Sea of Galilee nestles between three mountain ranges. It's unclear which mountain this was. Perhaps John wished to communicate that Jesus sought solace from the press of the crowds who followed Him because of the healings. Matthew seems to suggest the same idea when Jesus went to the mountain to teach His disciples in what we call the Sermon on the Mount. But this private time was interrupted. As Jesus taught, the crowds discovered where He

was and began to filter in and to listen. Even the Son of God needed rest and release at times from the demands of ministry, though it was hard to get away from the crowds.

The Passover...was near (v. 4). The Passover commemorates the deliverance of the Hebrew slaves from the terrors of the tenth plague – the death of the firstborn in Egypt. John seems to have referred to three Passover events roughly corresponding the three years of Jesus's earthly ministry. John didn't record any reason for mentioning this approaching feast other than for chronology, but he may have wished to highlight the significance of the season and the eagerness of the people to seek and to worship God. This may indicate why the crowds were so intent on finding Jesus. With the approaching holy season, they were more eager than usual to see His miracles and to hear His teaching.

Philip (v. 5). Philip was from Bethsaida, another coastal town bordering the Sea of Galilee. Jesus invited Philip to follow Him. Philip did, and found his friend, Nathaneal, and told him to "come and see" the prophet Moses foretold. Though Judas is identified later as keeping the apostles' money, Philip might have held that role at some point. If so, it would have been natural for Jesus to approach him when money was needed.

Bread (v. 5). This word in Scripture often includes food items other than bread, though bread seemed to be the basic meal item for most people. In this case bread also included fish a young boy had brought. The term here underscores the meagerness of what was available.

What the disciples wanted to do with the crowd. Matthew 14 records that the disciples asked Jesus to send the people away so they could find food for themselves. Their logic was that the area was deserted, and the hour was late. Luke also recorded the disciples wished to send the crowd away. Mark had already added a unique caveat: Jesus "had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34).

JOHN 6:6-11

Jesus met the need of the people in a miraculous way.

Test him (v. 6). Jesus knew already what He would do but wanted to test Philip. This is not to be understood in the sense of temptation, as Satan would do, but a testing intended to lead Philip to further and deeper commitment as a follower of Jesus. Philip would grow in his understanding of the power of God demonstrated in the miracles of Jesus. He and his friends would see the power of God many times as they followed Jesus.

"Two hundred denarii" (v. 7). A denarius was a typical day's wage. Philip's objection was that it would take more than six months of labor to earn enough to feed this multitude. The disciples may have had some money for their needs, but hardly this amount. And there were no resources for food nearby even if they had sufficient funds.

Andrew (v. 8). Andrew is often identified as the "soul-winning disciple" since he brought people to Christ at least three times. He was a disciple of John the Baptist and began to follow Jesus, introducing his brother Simon (Peter) to Jesus. Here he brought the lad and his lunch to Christ and later he brought some inquiring Greeks to meet Jesus. Andrew is named along with Peter, James, and John when they pressed Jesus further about the destruction of the temple. Tradition claims Andrew was crucified on a cross in the form of an X, now known as a St. Andrew's cross, and that he may have been tied to the cross rather than nailed, at his request, believing he was unworthy to die in the same way Jesus had.

"A boy" (v. 9). Andrew may have been seeking to discover what food was available. He surely met with disappointment, for there was only a small portion of food. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all wrote about the meager food supply, but don't mention the boy. Only John identified who had the food. It's often implied that the lad brought his lunch to Jesus, but John records that Andrew was the one to offer it to Jesus, but seemingly did so with a shrug: "But what are they for so many?"

"Five barley loaves and two fish" (v. 9). Barley was commonly grown in Palestine and identified in the Old Testament as a food for the poor. It was also used to feed livestock. Some believe the fish mentioned here was pickled fish, or perhaps more like a relish or topping. The point is the utter hopelessness of feeding anyone more than this young boy with such a meager lunch.

The men numbered about five thousand. (v. 10). Jesus asked the disciples to arrange the people in an orderly fashion for serving, and perhaps for numbering. Mark and Luke mentioned specifically companies of 50 (and 100 for Mark). John just gave a total count of men. Matthew mentioned men "besides women and children." Thus, the awesome display of God's provision is multiplied when realizing the crowd was larger than initially not. It's been speculated that the actual crowd may have been in excess of ten thousand.

Giving thanks (v. 11). This story is remarkably similar to the account of the Last Supper during Holy Week. Before going to the Gethsemane garden where He prayed and where He was betrayed, Jesus took bread, gave thanks to God for it and distributed to those around Him. Giving thanks acknowledged God as the giver of all things. He gives in response to our request for "daily bread", as expressed in the Lord's Prayer. Martin Luther identified the meaning of "daily bread" with scores of things, including a good marriage, obedient children, a good home, and other matters. Christians are commanded to offer thanks to God for all the blessings of life, and to acknowledge that all blessings come from His hand.

Breaking bread. The other three gospels specifically mentioned Jesus breaking the bread after giving thanks. This may either mean that the bread on the mountain that day was baked in loaves that needed breaking before sharing, or that the breaking was part of a common ritual after giving thanks. The apostle Paul on his final journey to Rome urged the passengers in the storm-tossed vessel to eat and gain strength in their time of peril. Luke recorded, "After he said these things and had taken some bread, he gave thanks to God in the presence of all of them, and after he broke it, he began to eat." It is not uncommon yet today that we invite others to "break bread" with us - that is, to share a meal with us

JOHN 6:12-15

The satisfaction Jesus brought to the people led them to expect more from Him.

"Collect the leftovers" (v. 12). All the Gospels record the disciples collecting the remaining food – twelve baskets full – no doubt underscoring the awesome power of God on display in caring for the multitude and providing for them in abundance. The people received more than they needed. Jesus commanded the disciples to gather the remaining fragments, though the Gospel writers did not tell us the specific reason for gathering what was left. Would the food be used by the disciples over the next few days? Twelve baskets might be taken by the Twelve apostles on their journey the next day. Or was the remaining food to be given to others who came to hear Jesus and who might have hungry family members at home? It's not uncommon today when congregations have fellowship meals for church members to think of others who might enjoy some of the food that remains. The gift of food is usually a welcomed gift, and a way to express love for others. "Waste

not" is a common refrain. But regardless of the reason, Scripture is clear regarding Jesus's instruction to retrieve what remained.

The Prophet who is to come into the world (v. 14). Some Bible scholars believe this reference to *the Prophet* points back to the promise of Deuteronomy 18:15: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him." This was Philip's explanation to Nathanael (John 1:45). Moses is remembered as the instrument God used to send bread (manna) to the wandering Hebrews in their long journey to the promised land. The next verse in John 6 shows that the people wanted to make Jesus their king immediately after this miracle, prompting His departure from them. The time for such a position had not yet come.

Subsequent verses show the disciples spent the night crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat. Jesus encountered the multitudes the following day and chided them for their willingness to follow because He fed them. Some in the crowd accentuated the promise of Moses when they spoke about Moses providing manna in the same way Jesus provided bread. Jesus exhorted the multitude that their spiritual ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, but they died. Physical bread can't ensure life for more than a short time.

In the midst of His dialogue with the crowd, Jesus spoke another of the great "I am" statements recorded in John's Gospel: "I am the bread of life" (v. 48). Jesus's teaching that day reminded all that life is more than the physical and temporal. Those who believe and trust in Him will have eternal life. The one who eats this spiritual bread "will live forever" (v. 58).

Take him by force to make him the king (v. 15). Perhaps the approaching Passover fanned the fervor of the people for the Messiah to appear. Orthodox Jews yet today leave a door open when they celebrate the Passover, in the event Elijah appears to announce the Messiah. The multitudes, no doubt, believed Jesus's miracles proved He came from God, and were eager to join His army. In the final Passover Jesus spent in Jerusalem – during what we now call Holy Week or Passion Week – He was welcomed by crowds as Messiah with great adulation on Sunday, but then crowds, perhaps including some of the same people shouted "crucify him" on Friday. In the end, Jesus had not fulfilled the common expectation of a military messiah. Independence from Rome might have been a worthy political goal, but Jesus had not come for political purposes. He came at this moment to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Servant (Isa. 53). The kind of king the Jews wanted wasn't Jesus's mission. He came, as John the Baptist announced, to be the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29).