

Overflowing Abundance

*A Bible Study on
Jesus Feeding the Five Thousand
Matthew 14:13-21*

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A Bible Study of Jesus Feeding the Five Thousand

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children. Matthew 14:13-21

Introduction.....	2
Lesson 1 — When We Need Rest.....	9
Lesson 2 — When Desperation and Compassion Move Us	21
Lesson 3 — When We Forget Our Calling.....	36
Lesson 4 — When We're Entrusted to Serve	48
Lesson 5 — When Provision Overflows.....	61
Lesson 6 — When Leftovers Remind Us	77
Reference Map	89

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Introduction

It's a spring day in Galilee as residents near the Sea of Tiberias go about their daily routines. Fishing. Working. Doing life.

All of a sudden, a buzz of excitement stirs. Some people spot Jesus crossing over the lake in a boat. And word gets out. *It's Him!* This One they've heard so much about. This One they have seen before. The Sea is not that wide, so they are drawn to follow Him along the shoreline.

By the thousands and thousands.

Keeping their eye on the boat, the healthy run along the water's edge, arriving first where Jesus lands. Some in the massive crowd are sick and hurting, so it takes them longer to make the journey. Some just want to see this miracle worker. To stand in His presence. To see if He can really do the things people have been talking about.

The crowd does not realize that the boat carries weariness and grief. Having received sad news from His disciples, Jesus simply wants to retreat from the crowds. To rest. Re-charge. To stay under Herod's radar, and conduct a debriefing with the disciples about their first missionary tour from which they had just returned.

They desperately need some down time.

But as the boat approaches the shoreline, Jesus sees the vast multitude amassing. Waiting. *For Him.* For healing. For restoration. To witness the healing spectacles.

And instead of irritation or anger about thwarted plans, Jesus experiences *compassion*.

Instead of feeling interrupted, Jesus understands His mission. To teach about the kingdom of God. To allow people to glimpse it in Him. To offer them a chance to experience eternal healing.

So the Shepherd lays aside His weariness to minister to the lost sheep. His touch heals them. His presence soothes them. He tells them about a hope beyond the grave.

For hours and hours.

The day gives way to evening. The crowd grows hungry. But no nearby town can possibly sustain dinner for such a multitude.

The disciples brainstorm and give up.

But not Jesus.

He knows God wants to use this moment to feed the people with the Bread of Life. The disciples find one boy amongst the masses with a sack lunch.

Five barley loaves.

Two fish.

It's a poor boy's lunch.

Not nearly enough.

Until they offer it to Jesus.



Background

Aside from the resurrection, Jesus' feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. We find the accounts in Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, and John 6:1-15. Although Matthew's account will serve as the basis for our study, we will reference various aspects from the other three Gospel accounts in order to lend greater insight into this incredible event.

You may be wondering how in the world we can justify spending six lessons talking about one event. I understand! Let me assure you we could spend months and months studying the rich truths, relevant intricacies, and life application this story contains.

In order to wrap our minds around this massive miracle that Jesus performed, we need to lay the proper groundwork and cover some basic definitions and history.

Miracles

In our culture today, we may be confused about the precise definition of a miracle. We tend to use the word rather loosely to describe anything from narrowly missing a car accident to a sudden windfall of money.

Miracles are not simply wonderful things that happen. True miracles are events that break the laws of nature and require God's direct action.

Miracles appear in many books of the Bible, but not every one. Scripture also uses other words to describe miracles, such as "signs," "wonders," "mighty works," or "works."

A *sign* directs and points toward who God is and what He was going to do. The signs bore witness to God's presence where we clearly understand that only He, and not a human, was at work. Let's look at a few *signs*:

Genesis 9:13 _____

Exodus 12:13 _____

Wonders cause those who witness them to be awed by what God has done. *Mighty works* demonstrate God's power and authority in this world.

Although you and I can accomplish many tasks, God alone empowers and performs true miracles. Any person who defends a miracle as his or her own work is not a true servant of God.

Through the centuries and even today, non-believers consistently deny or denigrate miracles. They attempt to bring the Scripture down to their own level, interpreting it only by what can be physically proven or previously known to have happened. Naturally, they believe the biblical writers made up, logically explained, or exaggerated the miracles they claim to have either witnessed or been used by God to carry out.

Non-believers have trouble believing in miracles for one simple reason: *it requires faith*. Since non-believers deny God's existence, power, and sovereignty, they will naturally deny His works. Those without faith do not have the capability to understand the events portrayed in Scripture.

History

Herod Antipas

This feeding of the five thousand miracle takes place during the time that Herod Antipas (one of Herod the Great's sons) reigned over the Galilean area. In order to more fully appreciate these events, we need to understand Herod's genealogy.

Herod Antipas' grandfather, Antipater, became the ruler of Palestine during the Roman civil wars after winning the favor of Julius Caesar. Antipater then appointed his son Herod (later known as Herod the Great) to be governor of Galilee. Following Antipater's murder, Herod and his brother were appointed rulers over all Judea. At the height of his rule, Herod the Great's kingdom included almost all of the territory between the Dead Sea and the Jordan rift and the Mediterranean, and nearly all of the east bank of the Jordan as well.

Herod the Great (Herod Antipas' father) was a brutal man who issued the murderous decree at the time of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:13) in what has become known as the "slaughter of the innocents." When Herod heard of this "new King," he sought out Jesus to remove the competition by ordering the murder of all male children in Bethlehem and the vicinity who were two years old and under (Matthew 2:16-18).

After ruling for thirty-seven years, Herod the Great died in Jericho about 4 B.C. Augustus (ruler of the Roman world from 31 B.C.-14 A.D.) then divided Herod's kingdom among his sons, per Herod the Great's instructions:

- (1) Archelaus, then 18 years old, received Judea, Idumea, and Samaria.
- (2) Herod Antipas (Archelaus' younger brother) received Galilee and Perea.
- (3) Philip, a half-brother, received the area east and northeast of the Sea of Galilee.

The miracle of Jesus feeding the five thousand happened in the Galilean region, so it occurred under Herod Antipas' rule. Herod Antipas was noted for his cleverness (Jesus called him a fox in Luke 13:32), because he understood that he successfully governed that region only so long as the Romans were content with his decisions.

Herod Antipas was known for answering trouble with violence. Instead of taking the time to properly deal with certain situations, Antipas simply eliminated those who caused problems. When Pontius Pilate sent Jesus to Herod Antipas for trial about a year following this feeding of the five thousand, Herod quickly shipped Jesus back to Pilate, who eventually ordered Jesus' flogging and crucifixion.

Unlike his father, who had tried and failed to have Jesus killed as a child, Herod Antipas saw it happen. He had two brushes with Jesus that we know of:

- (1) Jesus was doing ministry in the Galilean area when Herod ordered the beheading of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12) and heard rumors of Jesus' ministry, and
- (2) He spoke with Jesus before sending Him back to Pontius Pilate, following Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 23:6-12).

Herod Antipas appears more often in the New Testament than the other Herods because he ruled over the areas (Galilee and Perea) where Jesus and John the Baptist spent much of their time doing ministry.

John the Baptist

John the Baptist had been chosen by God to prepare people for the Messiah. Take a moment to read Matthew 3:1-12.

Ordering the execution of John the Baptist marred Herod Antipas' rule. John had denounced Antipas for unethically marrying his brother Philip's wife (Herodias).

Herodias was a granddaughter of Herod the Great, making her Herod Antipas' niece. She was first married to Antipas' brother, Philip, by whom she had a daughter. After Herod Antipas fell in love with his brother's wife, Herodias agreed to leave Philip and live with Antipas. Therefore, they were living in adultery.

Herodias remembered John the Baptist's stinging words and waited for the right moment to seek revenge. When Herodias' daughter pleased Herod by dancing for him, Herodias persuaded her daughter to ask for John's head on a platter as a reward (Matthew 14:1–12; Mark 6:14–29).

Bethsaida in Galilee

The miracle of feeding the five thousand took place near Bethsaida, a fishing village on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Galilee was a region that included the cities of Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum, which formed what has been called the “evangelical triangle,” because most of Jesus' miracles were performed in these cities. Bethsaida was the home of three of Jesus' disciples: Peter and his brother Andrew, and Philip (John 1:44).

Many people today inaccurately assume that Galileans were simple, uneducated peasants who lived in an isolated area. In actuality they interacted more with the world than the Jews of Jerusalem. An international trade route, the Via Maris, passed through Galilee, exposing its residents to many different people and cultures.

Historical accounts reveal that there may have been two Bethsaidas. While a few scholars place the feeding of the five thousand on the northern shore, most scholars agree that the miracle took place in the predominantly Jewish territory of Bethsaida Galilee, on the eastern side of the division where the river Jordan flows into the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is nearly eight miles across at its widest point, and more than twelve miles from north to south. From any point on the rocky shore, all other locations along the Sea's shoreline are visible.

Timing and Symbolism

This massive miracle happened at the height of Jesus' Galilean ministry. Up to that point, Jesus had spent two years in His public ministry. After this miracle, He began withdrawing to focus on teaching smaller crowds and the disciples.

The feeding of the five thousand miracle is filled with lessons at more than one level. It represents much more than supernatural provision to ease the physical hunger of a large crowd. The miracle typifies the full and complete blessing of mankind's physical and spiritual wellbeing found in God alone for Christians of every era.

Now that we have these key historical and geographical details in place, let's dig into the heart of our study!

Lesson 1

When We Need Rest

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. Matthew 14:13

Would you classify your life as busy?

I would venture a guess that at some point (and probably several points) in your adult life, you have admitted this to someone. Between work, home, church, volunteer work, family commitments, maintaining close friendships, and so much more, our calendars and to-do lists rival a Fortune 500 executive.

But in this chaotic pace of life, how often do you intentionally withdraw? Or do you? Perhaps clarifying moments alert you when you need to take a break – such as when you realize that you just shouted at the dog until your neck veins bulged.

Are you tempted some days to throw your cell phone into the nearest puddle, put your calendar in the shredder and head to the beach until further notice?

When our lives become so frantic that we routinely postpone spending quiet time with God in studying His Word and prayer, we need to take a priority inventory.

As we open our study, we see Jesus and the disciples intentionally withdrawing from their chaotic pace of life.

If Jesus can do it, shouldn't you and I at least consider it?

Take a moment to write out Matthew 14:14:



Now read this verse aloud. **Matthew 14:14** (the verse we study in Lesson 2) is our memory verse for this entire study. I encourage you to write it on index cards and place them in various locations where you spend the most time.

In this first lesson, we are studying Matthew 14:13a, which states: *Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.*

Contextually, it sounds as if we are picking up in the middle of a story. This verse begins by telling us that Jesus had just heard some news. Take a moment to read Matthew 14:1-12. According to verse 12, what news had the disciples just told Jesus? _____

Although Scripture does not say how Jesus felt, we know that He deeply loved people. This news must have saddened him. John the Baptist was not just another prophet. He and Jesus were relatives. John's mother (Elizabeth) and Jesus' mother (Mary) were related (Luke 1:36). So Jesus received news that a family member had been cruelly executed (Matthew 14:12).

Horrific events often make headlines in our daily news. Yet we distance ourselves because we realize that they are happening to *someone else*. We tend to be shocked when such atrocities land on our front porch, so to speak.

Can you imagine how that gruesome experience impacted the disciples?

Jesus and the Disciples Retreat

In reading the four Gospel accounts and numerous commentaries, there are three specific reasons why Jesus withdrew with the disciples.

(1) TO PROCESS GRIEF

When you and I receive sad news, we need time to come to grips with it before moving on. Jesus needed to get away to process His grief.

In Matthew 14:13 the word for *withdrew* (Greek *anachōreō*), only appears fourteen times in Scripture and many of these instances involve conflict and grief. In breaking down the Greek word, *ana* means “back,” and *chōreō* means “to make room.” In other words, when you and I hurt, we tend to step back and make room for grief because sometimes it fills us up, doesn't it?

Let's look at a few other places in Scripture where this same word occurs. What grieving do you see in these verses?

Matthew 4:12 _____

Matthew 9:24 _____

Jesus and the disciples were experiencing the shock and early stages of grief over John the Baptist's execution. They needed to step back and make room for processing that grief appropriately.

Have you experienced the death of a loved one?

Did you need to step back in order to process your grief? If so, how did you go about it?

Did stepping back help you?

Although grief played a role in Jesus and the disciples' retreat, two other reasons also played a significant part.

(2) TO AVOID HEROD

When Jesus began His great Galilean ministry, He actively pursued publicity and the crowds. He purposefully set out to make known to people His name and demonstrate His power through mighty works. He intentionally sought out crowds to teach them the rich truths about the Kingdom of God and heaven. He worked in the cities and open places to manifest Himself as the long awaited Messiah offering a Kingdom (Luke 4:43).

Yet this feeding of the five thousand miracle marked the beginning of Jesus' withdrawal due to His popularity. We can certainly relate to that concept in our paparazzi-saturated culture, can't we? We've seen the toll it takes on celebrities who are forced to live in seclusion to avoid being mobbed by avid fans and crazed admirers.

While Jesus still met with people and healed the sick following this miracle, we no longer see Jesus *actually seeking* publicity. He often moves to more remote areas to gradually prepare the disciples for His pending death.

Word of Jesus' teaching and miracles had reached Herod Antipas. Who did Herod believe Jesus was according to Luke 9:7-9? _____

Some have assumed that Jesus' immediate withdrawal to a lonely place was based on a fear that Herod would try to imprison Him. Since Jesus is God, He never did anything based on fear. No one, including Herod, could do anything to Jesus that He did not allow. Even when Jesus was eventually crucified, the Scriptures make it clear that Jesus laid down His own life. No one could take it away without His consent (John 10:17-18). Jesus did not retreat because He feared Herod.

At certain times throughout His ministry, Jesus removed Himself from various situations in order to avoid further antagonizing His enemies. For instance, when Jesus had returned to Nazareth for the first time, the people became so angry that they sought to kill Him.

How did Jesus respond in that situation according to Luke 4:30? _____

Jesus certainly was not afraid of the people or He would not have returned to Nazareth a second time (Matthew 13). We find other examples of Jesus' similar behavior in John 8:59, 10:39, and 11:54.

Jesus' example offers an important lesson about fear. We need not fear anything because God is greater and above anything we might fear.

What does God promise about that truth in the following verses?

Matthew 10:28-31 _____

Romans 8:35-39 _____

1 John 4:18-19 _____

1 John 5:4-5 _____

Potential fear-inducing situations will enter our lives, but we are secure in our Father's hands. Needless fear only cripples us.

There's a huge difference in having fear and the fear having you.

Jesus also withdrew from Herod's presence because He knew that the perfect time to lay down His life as the perfect sacrifice for mankind had not yet arrived. To avoid complication and greater danger to Him and His disciples, Jesus sought privacy.

(3) TO HEAR ABOUT THE DISCIPLES' MISSIONARY WORK

As we come to this particular feeding of the five thousand miracle, Jesus' popularity had reached a public pinnacle. In fact, because of this very miracle, the people wanted to take Him by force and crown Him king. (We'll cover this more in depth later in our study.)

There was a growing intensity to Jesus' public ministry and it had been a time of great activity. He had just sent the disciples out on their first short-term mission journey by themselves, empowered to accomplish great works in His Name.

What were Jesus' instructions to the disciples as He sent them out in Mark 6:7-13? _____

So the Twelve are now returning from their first preaching tour. The Gospels do not reveal how long they were away. It is most likely that Jesus fixed both the time and place for their return. If you have ever participated in any kind of local or foreign mission work, you can

imagine both the eagerness and enthusiasm with which the disciples desired to report the ministry results to Jesus.

Jesus no doubt heard them patiently and wanted to hear more where they would not be interrupted. What did Jesus suggest in Mark 6:31? _____

Did you catch that Jesus and the disciples didn't even have time to eat? Chances are you have had a day (or two, or three) when the demands of your schedule put mealtime far down on the priority list.

When that happens, how do you feel physically? Emotionally?

If you have ever participated in an extended mission trip that lasted several days or weeks, did you find yourself wanting to share every detail with friends and loved ones when you returned? Did it take long?

Not only were the disciples likely worn out from the actual work Jesus had empowered them to do, it's not hard to imagine that they were emotionally spent, as well. They had just seen God perform miracles through their own hands. Talk about exhilaration!

Jesus desired to withdraw with them so He could hear their reports and provide further instructions. Jesus was not afraid for His life, because He knew no one could take it from Him unless He permitted it (John 10:18).

Jesus retreated toward a quiet place to avoid premature confrontation with Herod, to process the death of John the Baptist, and to spend time with His disciples.

The Area of Galilee

During the time of this feeding miracle, Jesus and the disciples were in the area of Galilee. It was a small region, only 50 miles from north to south and 25 miles from east to west.

Josephus¹ tells us that in his time within that small area there were 204 towns and villages. The towns were generally small, but somewhat densely populated.

The remains unearthed by archaeologists over time indicate that several villages and towns in that area likely had populations of more than 5,000 people. Perhaps that is one of the reasons Jesus chose this location for His ministry.

Even though Galilee was a small region, the people tended to form groups, each of which had unique characteristics and lifestyles which differed greatly from place to place. Jesus often tailored his teachings so that they would be meaningful to the people of each particular area. Talk about an excellent example to the disciples (and us today) about reaching the lost with focused intentionality!

During that time, the people around the Sea of Galilee were generally divided into four groups:

- (1) Religious Jews lived on the northwestern side of the sea, where the cities of Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida were located.
- (2) Zealots² lived primarily on the northeastern corner of the Sea in the town of Gamla.
- (3) Herodians³ lived on the western side of the sea, in the land of Tiberias.
- (4) Pagans lived on the eastern side, in the region known as the Decapolis.

In such a thickly populated area, Galilee must have proved difficult to get away from people for any length of time. However, the other side of the sea toward Bethsaida provided quiet solace. Consequently, that's the direction Jesus steered His boat.

¹ Titus Flavius Josephus was a 1st-century Romano-Jewish historian who was born in Jerusalem. Josephus recorded Jewish history, with special emphasis on the 1st century AD and the First Jewish–Roman War, and includes references to Jesus and the origins of Christianity. The earliest description of Jesus outside of the Gospels is found in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*.

² Zealots were a group of Jewish people who opposed with relentless rigor any attempt to bring Judea under the dominion of idolatrous Rome. The members of this party also bore the name Sicarii, from their custom of going about with daggers hidden beneath their cloaks, with which they would stab anyone found committing a sacrilegious act or anything provoking anti-Jewish feeling.

³ Herodians were a priestly party under the reign of King Herod and his successors. Rabbis called them "Boethusians," as adherents of the family of Boethus, whose daughter Mariamne was one of the wives of King Herod, and whose sons were successively made high priests by him. They followed the Sadducees in their opposition to the Pharisees, and were therefore often identified with the Sadducees.

The climate of Galilee is quite tropical with fertile soil. The most productive areas surround the sea. In Jesus' time, wheat, barley, figs, grapes, and olives were produced there in large quantities.

The fertile fields often provided Jesus opportunities to illustrate His teaching:

Matthew 12:1 _____

Matthew 13:1-43 _____

John 12:24 _____

The Sea of Galilee is nearly eight miles wide at its widest point and more than 12 miles long from north to south. It sits 700 feet below sea level, yet in places, the sea plunges to depths of 200 feet. It has many names throughout Scripture, yet they refer to this one body of water.

What names do these passages give the Sea of Galilee?

Numbers 34:11 _____

Joshua 12:3 _____

Luke 5:1 _____

John 6:1 and 21:1 _____

John 6:16 _____

When news of John the Baptist's death reached Jesus, He set sail with the disciples across the Sea of Galilee toward Bethsaida. Bethsaida sat on the shore of the lake about two miles east of Capernaum in the Galilean area.

John's Gospel reports that Jesus and the Twelve went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (John 6:1). Luke's Gospel, more specifically, says they went to Bethsaida (Luke 9:10), which locates the feeding of the five thousand on the northeast shore.

The entire context shows that Jesus withdrew **toward** a city called Bethsaida, not **in** the city. This Bethsaida, where Jesus sought refuge, sat near the northeast corner of the lake, not far from the entrance to the Jordan River, and must be distinguished from the other Bethsaida which was located on the west side of the lake, not far from Capernaum.

A Desolate or Desert Place

Matthew 14:13 tells us that Jesus' destination in the boat was a desolate place. In various versions of Scripture, Mark and John refer to the place as solitary, remote, desert, and quiet. It was evident that Jesus wanted to avoid crowds.

Desolate (Greek, *erēmon*) refers to a solitary, lonely, or uninhabited place. When used as here in the context of geography, it simply means a place sparsely cultivated where there were few or no inhabitants. It does not mean a literal desert. The eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee was uncultivated and chiefly used to pasture flocks.

This desolate place was not a waterless place; rather an uninhabited one. We get the sense of remote wilderness, rather than a desert.

In the following passages, what do the disciples record was present in that remote place?

Matthew 14:19 _____

Mark 6:39 _____

John 6:10 _____

Those passages reveal that there was much green grass in that uninhabited location.

But desolate places can be scary - whether physically or spiritually. Many times in Scripture, desolate or remote places are described as deserts:

Exodus 5:3 _____

Mark 6:32 _____

Luke 1:80 _____

Luke 4:42 _____

Luke 9:12 _____

Acts 8:26 _____

Have you ever intentionally sought out a desolate place? Why?

Sometimes you simply need to retreat from life's dizzying pace to seek the face of God without interruption. In our technology age where we connect to the world at our fingertips, the concept of "withdrawing" proves difficult. It requires intentionally turning off the electronics, shutting out the noise, and actively seeking God's direction.

And the amazing thing? God meets us in those desolate places.

Without fail.

Let's review our Bible memory verse for our study. Write out Matthew 14:14 once more:



Closing

Take a moment to recall the last time you retreated from the chaotic pace of your life. Removing ourselves from familiar surroundings goes a long way to allowing us to break up our routines and experience life in a new and fresh way.

God uses those times of refreshment to rejuvenate and replenish us in service to Him.

Close with prayer:

✠ *Father, thank You for the rich lessons provided in Your Word. I ask that You continue providing opportunities for me to withdraw toward You and away from the world's chaos. Open my eyes to those opportunities and graciously provide the way for me to act on them. In Jesus' name, Amen.* ✠

Notes

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DVD Listening Guide

Lesson 1

The overarching question in this study: *Do I trust God with my all?*

The glorious truth is that you can trust God with your all. He is the source of all good and perfect gifts. His Son gave His all on the cross for you. He gives us our daily bread of body and soul, all we need to support this body and life.

Definition of a miracle: True miracles are _____ that break the laws of _____ and require God's _____.

There is a huge difference in _____ fear and fear _____ you.

Lesson 2

When Desperation and Compassion Move Us

But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. Matthew 14:13-14

Have you ever experienced a day that turned out vastly different than you planned? Perhaps you intended to complete a certain to-do list that day. Work. Family time. Fun time. Chores. Perhaps even tackle a long overdue project.

Then something unexpected detoured your plans.

Maybe it was a *someone* who altered your day's agenda. A call from a friend in need. A family member who needed a favor.

The crowd along the Galilean shoreline experienced an altered agenda once they spotted Jesus' boat. In fact, their plans changed so suddenly that they followed Jesus *on foot*. They didn't take time to arrange alternate transportation. They dropped what they were doing to follow after Him.

No one knew Jesus would be there. He had not scheduled a visit with an area event coordinator. No one booked a venue. He was not an expected guest speaker at a fancy banquet. Or an invited Bible study teacher that day.

Yet when the people saw Him, they flocked toward Him in droves. It didn't seem to matter how they got there. They just needed to get to Him without delay.

Desperation simplifies choices.

Take a moment to write out our study's memory verse - Matthew 14:14:



In this second lesson, we are studying Matthew 14:13-14, which states: *But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

We can almost picture that chaotic scene of an amassing crowd. We see it today when the paparazzi or avid fans follow movie stars and prominent sports figures wherever they go. Or perhaps we see it on television when a truck carrying food to an impoverished area arrives and the disruption that ensues.

Yet even with our modern-day examples, we cannot fully imagine this multitude of thousands, some sick and needing help, that descended on Jesus and the disciples. Such a sight must have staggered the senses.

The Crowd

The crowd (Greek, *ochlos*) in this instance refers to a confused throng. It is basically a multitude of people who haphazardly flocked together. They weren't an organized political party or a unified religious group. They simply desired to draw near to Jesus.

How many times is "the crowd" or "crowds" referred to in Matthew 14:13-21? _____

Although your count may vary according to which translation of the Bible you use, there are quite a few references in just those few passages, aren't there? The people constantly weighed on the minds of Jesus and His disciples. Frequent mentions in this miracle to "the crowd(s)" reveal how much Jesus esteems and cares about people -- in particular the hungry and poor of the world.

How do you view crowds in your church, particularly around holiday services?

We may find ourselves annoyed at crowds because they get in the way, slow us down, or force us to alter our routine.

Some Christians are more concerned about reaching the pew than reaching the lost.

Yet the heart of Jesus' message in this miracle reminds us that the Church is to be the church for the lost and hurting *of the world*, not just those with similar religious views or an acceptable level of faith and knowledge of Scripture.

Jesus' Response

So how did the crowd know which direction Jesus was headed? Since the Sea of Galilee is only 8 miles across, the crowds could determine Jesus' sailing destination without much difficulty. Even though Jesus desired to privately retreat with the disciples, the people followed Him to the other side of the lake.

Jesus had basically "punched out" from the ministry time clock to get away, rest, grieve, and spend time with the disciples. But He was interrupted instead. How would you feel? Sometimes, we may feel like punching out someone who punches us back in to work when we had other plans for our time, don't we?

When was the last time that you tried to get away only to see your plans thwarted?

How did it make you feel?

How did you react?

Our reaction may be an irritated, "Don't bother me. I've got other things to do." You and I choose our attitude. We decide how we will respond each time. An interruption may annoy us, but we have a choice regarding how we react.

Anger, impatience, and consternation tend to be common reactions to interruptions. But none of those reactions are helpful, *especially* when it comes to ministry.

How does Jesus respond to this interruption?

Mark 6:34 _____

Luke 9:11 _____

Would you have been as graceful? You may not hold down a paid ministry job, but as His disciple there will always be ministry for you to do. How do you know?

Because you're still breathing.

God still has a purpose to use your life for His glory. When we realize the desperate needs of those around us and in the world at large, it tempers our reaction toward compassion, love and kindness.

Thankfully, it is not Jesus' **job** to love us. He simply does. He welcomes the opportunity to love and connect with us in a personal relationship. Jesus did not view that crowd as one giant interruption. He saw it as an incredible ministry opportunity.

Jesus did not see human impertinence but pastoral opportunity. His heart went out to them. He had been working for two years to feed souls, now He extends His compassion to care for their bodies, as well.

The crowd swelled as it made its way along the shoreline toward Jesus. More people joined them from the towns along their route. But not everyone moved along easily. Among them were the sick.

The Sick

The word used for the sick (Greek, *arrōstous*) whom Jesus heals here is an adjective to describe those who were feeble, sickly, and without strength. This wasn't just a thrill-seeking crowd pursuing excitement or entertainment, although some of those people likely existed.

Human need played the biggest factor.

The last time you had a physical ailment, did it affect how quickly you were able to move around?

If so, did you have people assisting you?

Even though some in the crowd may have been quick to travel around the lake, we can safely conclude that it took longer for the sick and hurting to reach Jesus.

Those who were sick needed to make a special effort for that journey. No doubt many would have relied on help from caregivers and made a concerted effort to travel around the lake. The fact that they journeyed on foot speaks of their level of concern, as well as their hope of receiving healing when they arrived.

And they did.

Mark's account states that the crowd *ran on foot...and got there ahead of them* (Mark 6:33). Perhaps a strong headwind slowed down the boat so that some of the people had time to run around the lake and arrive ahead of Jesus.

However, we cannot assume that the crowd who outran Jesus and the disciples stood waiting on the shore before Jesus landed. John 6:3–5 reveals that Jesus arrived first and privately spent time with His disciples on the mountainside before facing the multitude.

No question about it, Jesus was popular. But not because He starred in a rock band or excelled in sports. What caused the crowds to follow Jesus in the following passages?

Mark 2:2-3 _____

Mark 3:9-10 _____

Mark 5:22-24 _____

Luke 5:1 _____

Luke 8:45-46 _____

For Jesus, the needs of people were ever present. There was always going to be sick, hurting, and lonely people following Him. Seeking Him. Desiring His healing touch.

That need still exists today in our homes, churches, schools, businesses, and elsewhere. I would venture a guess that you have been sick, hurting or lonely at some point in your life. Perhaps all three at the same time.

When was the last time you felt any of those?

How did you navigate through it?

Even though some in the crowd were sick and lame, what does John 6:2 reveal as the motive of many there? _____

Some people had not come to learn from Jesus or follow His teachings. Instead, they were watching the miraculous healings Jesus was performing.

They were there to see a show.

Think for a moment how you would respond. If you had planned to retreat and crowds pressed in on you with such shallow motives, would you be a bit frustrated? Maybe even a little bit angry?

Yet once again, we do not read that Jesus responded negatively to anyone in the crowd. He just kept healing and loving them out of His great compassion.

Following Jesus

In this miracle and others, Matthew's Gospel commonly connects two important occurrences: (1) crowds following Jesus with (2) miracles He performed in the presence of crowds.

What miracles did Jesus perform in these passages and who followed Him afterward?

Matthew 4:23-25 _____

Matthew 20:29-34 _____

Matthew alludes to the fact that those who followed Jesus frequently experienced the miraculous. For us that miraculous most certainly includes forgiveness, life, and salvation through God's precious means of grace. Are you as intent about following Jesus as the crowds in those verses?

What does following Jesus look like in your life right now?

The word *followed* (Greek, *akolouthēō*) used in Matthew occurs 92 times in Scripture, with the majority of the references specifically referring to following Jesus.

Rarely do we notice Jesus alone in Scripture unless He was seeking quiet times of prayer with His Father. Jesus seemed constantly surrounded by followers. People vying for His attention.

How do you see the multitudes following Him in these passages?

Matthew 13:2 _____

Matthew 15:30 _____

Matthew 19:2 _____

Mark 1:33 _____

Mark 2:13 _____

Mark 3:20 _____

Luke 12:1 _____

Shepherd and Sheep

Mark's Gospel records that Jesus saw the crowd as *sheep without a shepherd*. What do you believe is significant about that statement?

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, not only takes care of His flock, but models those behaviors to other shepherds -- namely those in ministry or church leadership positions.

Shepherds are responsible for taking care of the needs of their sheep. If you have a flock, you have responsibilities. It is incumbent on our churches to raise up, properly train, and encourage the next generation of shepherds.

What leadership principles are identified in 1 Peter 5:1-11? _____

Peter reminds us that leaders have an obligation to shepherd the sheep and pray for more shepherds. Jesus tells His disciples much the same in Matthew 9:37-38. Regardless of the passing of time, we receive those same instructions as His modern-day disciples.

Let's take a moment to ponder shepherding. God placed Moses as the shepherd over the Israelites for forty years. When Moses deliberated who should take his place to lead the people into the Promised Land, what type of person does he describe in Numbers 27:12-23? _____

God's people need shepherding. In 1 Kings 22, Israel is described as sheep without a shepherd. Doesn't that make you squirm?

Sheep without a shepherd can easily go astray.

How does Jesus describe Himself in these passages?

John 10:11 _____

John 10:14 _____

You and I would be lost sheep without our Good Shepherd. There are three shepherding principles we glean from Jesus feeding the five thousand:

(1) The need always exceeds the resources.

Left to our human understanding hurting people always exceed the number of people ministering to them. The needed finances exceed the finances we have. Ask any shepherd (pastors, ministry leaders) and you'll find that to be true. Our resources are always inadequate until we offer them back to God for multiplication.

(2) I am always inadequate for the task Jesus has before me.

Almost every leader God called felt he or she wasn't quite ready, adequate, or capable: Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and David, to name a few.

If you are a leader in any capacity, have you ever felt similarly?

How did God prove adequate?

What does Paul remind us in 2 Corinthians 3:5?

(3) Jesus is always more than adequate in every task and challenge I face.

Ephesians 3:20 tells us, *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.* The disciples experienced first-hand that Jesus is more than adequate for their inadequacies. His provision faithfully overflows in abundance. We can rely on Jesus when we're humbly shepherding His sheep.

In this season of your life, do you find yourself in a shepherding role? In what capacity?

How do these three points lend insight into what God has called you to do?

Even though you may be His shepherd, you are also His beloved sheep. Loved, protected, and looked after with the greatest care.

As His sheep, we can always trust that our Good Shepherd will provide for our every need.

Compassionate Savior

Matthew 14:14 goes on to say, *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.* Compassion is most powerful when accompanied by action. You and I might feel compassionate about many things, but unless that feeling is accompanied by action, it's not much help to those in need.

Jesus experienced *compassion* for the crowds. In other words, He suffered with them. He felt their pain and hurt. So He went toward them to soothe their hurt, heal their ailments, and feed their soul with His living water. He did not recoil or leave them hurting. His heart went out to them -- and so did His loving actions.

The word *compassion* (Greek *splanchnizomai*) refers to being moved in one's bowels. In other words, Jesus felt their pain in His gut. Even though He is God incarnate, Jesus was not coldly calculating and analytical in terms of the people's suffering.

Much like anxiety and trauma, compassion has an effect on our stomachs. It hits us in the gut.

When was the last time you felt compassion in your gut?

Did you act on that feeling?

What was the result?

God's heart goes out to those in need. It is not an issue of whether people will respond or reciprocate by believing; God's heart and help goes out to those in need *anyway*.

Jesus was infinitely compassionate. He cared about those who were suffering and hurting. Who or what do we see Jesus compassionate about in the following verses?

- Compassion for _____: Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 15:32
- Compassion for _____: Matthew 20:34
- Compassion for _____: Matthew 23:37
- Compassion for _____: Mark 1:41
- Compassion for _____: Luke 7:13, John 11:35

Jesus healed multitudes of people while He walked here. Exactly how many, we will never know. Time and again we see Jesus healing the sick, blind, lame, and paralyzed.

To give us a glimpse into the vast array of people Jesus healed, list who received His healing in these verses:

Matthew 4:23 _____

Matthew 8:3 _____

Mark 10:52 _____

Luke 7:21 _____

John 5:9 _____

John 9:6-7 _____

This list of people Jesus impacted merely scratches the surface. Pause and look over the words you wrote. Doesn't that offer you comfort?

When we hurt in *any* way, we can rest assured that Jesus is present at all times. We never find ourselves alone, forgotten or abandoned by Him.

Have you ever suffered a hurt that He's healed?

How did you recognize Him working and restoring you?

How has this changed the way you view hurting people around you?

Jesus experienced genuine anguish over the suffering of others, whether they were believer or non-believer, Jew or gentile, man or woman, young or old, or wealthy or poor.

May the same be said of His people.

Jesus performed some miracles as signs of His identity. He used other miracles to teach important truths. But in these passages, we see that He healed people because He felt compassion for them. Jesus was, and is, loving, caring, and feeling.

When you are suffering, remember that Jesus suffers with you.

We notice that Jesus healed the sick, but He also did something else simultaneously.
What does Luke 9:11 say? _____

In meeting the needs of this vast multitude, Jesus postponed His own need for rest, privacy, time alone with the disciples, and even time with His Father. He put the needs of those suffering ahead of His own needs.

That paints such a beautiful picture of our compassionate Savior! He needed rest, but compassion moved Him to serve (Mark 6:34).

What does Jesus' compassion qualify Him to be according to Hebrews 4:14-16 and 5:1-2? _____

Our High Priest and Good Shepherd never leaves us unloved or uncared for. John 6:3-5 tells us that Jesus secured a few hours of quiet time with His disciples on the mountainside where no one disturbed them. From this retreat, He came out and saw the multitude gathered below along the shoreline. That sight moved Him to act with compassion.

In spite of all the unbelief that Jesus encountered and His desire to publicly withdraw to be alone with His disciples, His heart was moved at the sight of those who had so rapidly and eagerly followed him.

No one asked Jesus to feed those thousands. He didn't have to. *He wanted to.*

He was concerned about their whole wellbeing -- body *and* spirit. In modeling that behavior, Jesus taught the disciples that He is enough for every situation they would ever face - and they would face much after He returned home to heaven.

Let's review our Bible memory verse for our study. Write out Matthew 14:14 once more:



Closing

Although He lovingly healed their bodies, Jesus cared infinitely greater about healing their souls.

The same is still true today.

Jesus has a very clear view of Hell. He experienced it while He hung on the cross. He victoriously marched through it in our behalf. He understands the horrors awaiting those who do not acknowledge Him as their Savior.

Even after He heals a body, it can become sick or cripple again because we live in a fallen world.

But when Jesus heals a sin-diseased soul, it is *forever freed* from sin's dominion and penalty. Such healing is given through His means of grace. In His resurrection, there is a time coming when both body and soul will be freed from sin in the Resurrection of the dead at Jesus' return.

Blessed assurance.

Close with prayer:

✠*Father, Your compassion stuns me. You are Creator of the universe and all it contains. You breathe and exhale galaxies. Yet You see me. And when I hurt, You are moved to compassion. You shepherd me with such care. Thank you so much, Father. Show me ways that I can demonstrate Your compassion and care to those around me. In Jesus' name, Amen.*✠

Notes

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DVD Listening Guide

Lesson 2

“Crowd” means a _____ or a haphazard _____.

Spiritual rubberneckers are those who just wanted to see a _____.

Those who _____ Jesus experience the _____.

Compassion refers to being _____ in one’s _____.

Lesson 3

When We Forget Our Calling

Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Matthew 14:15

Jesus had been at it all day. Moving among the thousands. Healing the sick. Offering comfort. Telling them about a heavenly kingdom awaiting them. Putting His own needs aside. Focusing on shepherding the lost sheep.

Can you imagine His level of exhaustion – mentally, physically and emotionally? We're never told that Jesus took a break, a drink, or a bite.

He just kept loving on the people.

Take a moment to write out our study's memory verse - Matthew 14:14:



In our third lesson, we are studying Matthew 14:15, which states: *Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves."*

Having followed Jesus around the Sea of Galilee hours earlier, the massive crowd now finds itself stranded late in the day in an uninhabited, remote place. The problem? Finding food to feed the multitude.

The scene recalls the nation of Israel wandering in the wilderness after God freed them from Pharaoh's enslavement. Moses encountered the same problem. Finding food to feed the masses. How did God provide for the Israelites' needs as recorded in Exodus 16:13-15? _____

God's graciously provided manna for His people. Although it was not necessarily the food the people wanted -- it was the food they needed. How does Deuteronomy 8:3-4 reflect this truth? _____

Both the Israelites in Old Testament times and the multitude gathered on that Galilean pastureland with Jesus had problems and didn't know where to find the answer.

Likewise, much of our life is made up of facing and solving one problem after another. Sometimes we can become overwhelmed by the questions and problems pressing in on us. When we face extended periods of angst and stress, our focus to remain physically nourished becomes threatened. Some turn to unhealthy food choices. Some lose their appetite altogether. Such behavior depletes our energy level causing additional angst.

Jesus continually reached out to care for the lost and hurting. He taught and demonstrated that behavior to the disciples numerous times. And even though they witnessed Jesus' example, let's look at the disciples' reaction to the people's need for food.

The Test

At this point, we turn to John's Gospel in order to fully understand this miracle. When Jesus first stepped out of His retirement on the mountainside after He and the disciples first landed and had time together, what does Jesus ask Philip in John 6:5? _____

What does John 6:6 tell us that Jesus already knew? _____

If Jesus already knew what He would do when evening came, why did Jesus ask Philip and not one of the other disciples? It was not a random choice on Jesus' part. Philip originated from that area and would most likely know the resources and places where such food might be available.

So the test clock had started. Did the disciples pass or fail?

Brainstorming 101

If you have ever participated in a brainstorming session, you know that the first round of ideas thrown into the ring are the obvious, most basic, and can be easily dismissed. The first suggestions are the ones that have likely already been tried and failed. The first round serves the purpose of getting those types of routine ideas out of the way toward the deeper embedded fresh ideas. Experts agree that brainstorming sessions on any topic need to make it the third round of ideas before fresh, innovative ideas begin to surface.

Have you experienced that truth?

What was the result?

Right off the bat, Philip's knee jerk reaction reveals that he understands the enormity of the situation that Jesus brings to light. What did Philip say to Jesus in John 6:7? _____

Philip shows a serious lack of initiative with his first round brainstorming suggestion about a lack of funds. A denarius represented the normal day's wage for a common laborer (about 17 cents today). Philip's suggested amount of two hundred denarii totaled nearly six months' wages. Philip only sees that they did not even have a fraction of the money needed to buy enough food, even if they bought the cheapest bread available.

God wants the best for us. That's why He sent His Son.

Philip thinks only of buying and answers only regarding that. He mentions the lowest possible amount, one that would give only "a little something" to each person, not by any means enough to satisfy the appetite. Jesus, of course, wants to bring out the hopelessness of buying food for all these people. Philip stops at the prohibitive price. He stops at hopelessness.

Have you ever seen your situation as hopeless?

Why or why not?

Has your mindset changed back toward hope?

The second brainstorming session yields a slightly better suggestion: What does John 6:8-9 reveal as the second option? _____

So the disciples skirmished around through the crowd and made inquiry. Enter another disciple, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, with his suggestion to hijack a boy's sack lunch. Now if we were grading the disciples on this test, Philip gets an F, Andrew perhaps a C. Andrew gets a higher grade because at least he offered a concrete idea to try out.

Did you notice that Andrew didn't try to "surprise" Jesus and the other disciples? He could have taken the boy's offering, given a miniscule portion to several people, and announced with fanfare that His resourcefulness had saved a few from their growling stomachs. But such action would have robbed God from receiving the glory.

Women tend to be people-pleasers to a certain extent, which can complicate situations unnecessarily. (Yes, I'm raising my hand as guilty.) Perhaps in the past you have "surprised" people by rushing forward with a solution, as well, only to discover it further complicated a situation.

Andrew took his resources to the Source of power. Perhaps Andrew offered the loaves and fish to Jesus tongue-in-cheek to see how Jesus would react. We don't know. But it's obvious to everyone that it was barely enough food for one.

Like deer in the headlights, Philip and the disciples only see a mass of nameless, faceless people. But they apparently do not see (or sufficiently appreciate) Jesus Himself. The solution to the problem was literally staring them in the face. Philip sees only the complete impossibility of the *financial* situation. Andrew sees the complete impossibility of the *crowd/food* proportion situation. The other disciples don't even put forth a suggestion.

Philip is technically correct, but faithfully a bust. Why can't he see Jesus here?

Have you ever confronted a problem that was so far beyond your comprehension that you just shut down like Philip?

What was the outcome?

Philip sounds a lot like us sometimes – slow on the uptake. Jesus pointed out the problem to Philip early in the day when they first encountered the crowd. Jesus was about to spend all day with the crowd healing and teaching – giving Himself to the multitude out of compassion. But before He began, He threw out the test question to Philip.

Although Scripture does not detail Philip's immediate actions, picture a possible scenario with me: Philip heads over to the other eleven and informs them that they are going to have to figure out how to feed all those people while Jesus does His thing.

The only reply that Jesus received from Philip was that it would take more money than they had in their treasury to provide nearly enough for so many people. This scenario reminds us of Jesus' first miracle at Cana at the beginning of His public ministry.

What miracle did Jesus perform in Cana according to John 2:1-11? _____

It is ironic that the last words of John 2:11 tell us, *and his disciples believed in him*. So what happened to the disciples' level of belief in the expanse between Cana and this remote place? Jesus' impact and miracle-working power had not dwindled. So what happened?

Time.

Time has a pesky way of interfering with our memory in times of stress when it comes to God's faithful provision.

Regardless of our faulty memories, God's faithfulness is never faulty.

Now as evening approaches, the disciples cannot stand the pressure any longer. What does Matthew 14:15 tell us? _____

Jewish customs differentiated evenings into a first evening and a second evening. The first evening began at the decline of the day between 3:00-6:00 p.m. The second evening began at sunset. The reference for this feeding of the five thousand is for the first evening, so we know that the day had already been spent teaching and healing.

Despite witnessing Jesus' numerous miracles time and again for two years, the disciples only offer Him the facts about their situation that He already knows. There's too many people. There's not enough food. There's not enough money. There's not enough time.

Not enough.

Have you ever found yourself similarly doubting God's provision?

Jesus does not get upset. The ever-patient Shepherd simply listens.

So as one, they approach Jesus with their idea: scatter the crowd so that at least some of them might be able to find food in the villages along their way back home before everything closes down for the night.

Wouldn't you have loved to see Jesus' face at that point? Jesus thought about the needs of the multitude when the crowd first appeared and He already knew what He would do. The disciples didn't think about the needs of the crowd until late in the day and had no clue how to meet those needs.

They waited until the situation became critical and then just wanted to turn the people away.

The disciples oftentimes seemed quick to dismiss the needy. How do you see them doing so in these passages?

Matthew 15:23 _____

Mark 6:36 _____

Mark 10:13 _____

Luke 18:15 _____

Before we judge the disciples harshly on their lack of faith or compassion, haven't you dismissed the needs of others at one time or another? I know that I have. Or perhaps you know of someone's particular need, yet delay in offering to help.

What might cause that behavior?

During those times when I dismiss the needs of those around me, more often than not self-centeredness has taken over. *I'm tired. I'm busy. I'm not equipped to provide. I don't have enough to go around.* The list of excuses is long and most unflattering -- and all focus on self.

The disciples failed this test spectacularly. Oftentimes, so do we. As His hands and feet on earth, Jesus has given you and me the task of shepherding the lost. He reminded the disciples, as He reminds us today, that we are to extend His love and compassion to help others in need.

In what context are plentiful supplies furnished in time of need in the following verses?

- For _____ in _____: Deuteronomy 2:7
- For _____ in _____: 1 Kings 17:6, 16
- For _____ in _____: 1 Kings 19:1-6
- For _____ in _____: 2 Kings 3:20
- For _____ in _____: 2 Kings 4:1-6
- For _____ in _____: 2 Kings 7:1-8
- For _____ in _____: Matthew 14:20
- For _____ in _____: Philippians 4:19

The disciples' suggestion boiled down to one disappointing mandate: *Send the people away from Jesus*. They did not say that in so many words, but their actions shouted it loud. Without realizing the impact of their suggestion, the disciples want to turn away the hungry from the Bread of Life.

How many times do we suggest a solution to someone without realizing the overarching spiritual impact?

In that Galilean multitude, there were sick and hurting people. Perhaps some had spent all of their money on doctors or medicine. Could they even afford to buy a meal if they needed to?

When my Dad struggled with cancer for two and a half years, I remember the staggering amount of his medical bills. Had he not been covered by insurance, I don't know how those astronomical costs would have possibly been covered. The same principle applied when it was time to lay him to rest.

Have you faced such a financial situation with you or a loved one's health?

Did anyone offer unhelpful suggestions to you? If so, what did that cause you to feel?

In this scenario, the disciples assume that (1) there will be enough food available to the crowd on their way home, and (2) the people have the money to pay for it. Those are two pretty big assumptions.

But Jesus had not forgotten the needs of the crowd. He had purposely waited until the disciples ran out of ideas. After posing the question to Philip, Jesus proceeded entirely unconcerned, as though the problem did not exist, until evening was approaching and everybody, the disciples included, grew hungry.

They did not even think to ask Jesus if He had a solution.

Perhaps the disciples were annoyed that Jesus kept the crowd so long. In stark contrast to how Jesus welcomes the sick and hurting, the disciples become very abrupt with Jesus. They are clearly upset. They do not preface their *command* to Jesus with the usually respectful, “Lord.” They simply tell Jesus, almost literally, the time of day, where they are, and what He should do.

The disciples find the nerve to tell God in the flesh what He needs to do. *Gasp!*

But when you and I reach the end of our patience or resources, don’t we sometimes do the same thing?

They seem to feel that Jesus is so absorbed with people’s spiritual needs that He does not notice their physical ones. Perhaps the disciples’ noses are a tad out of joint that He does not notice their own fatigue. They expected time with Jesus, debriefing, and refreshment. Their disappointment and perhaps exhaustion shows in their disrespectful, abrupt speech toward Jesus.

Through this story, Jesus challenges all His disciples – all the Philips through the centuries – to use a little imagination, under the power of Jesus’ enabling little questions, and so grow a *little* faith.

Let’s review our Bible memory verse for our study. Write out Matthew 14:14 once more:



Closing

Tests can be difficult under any circumstance. And to be honest, you and I may not appreciate them very much. *Especially if we’re worn out.*

But when God administers a test, we can be assured of one very important truth: He is not testing us toward failure. He is testing us toward trust.

Jesus did not test the disciples here just to watch them fail. He wanted them to think outside the box. Consider options that figured Him into the solution equation.

He wanted them to trust that He could provide.

He provides us with forgiveness, life and salvation through the means of grace. He provides for our spiritual needs, and will provide for our physical needs, as well.

And He does this with you and I each day. When our situations seem overwhelming and beyond our capabilities, we can trust that they are not ever beyond God's.

Close with prayer:

✠Father, thank you for loving me enough to test me. When I'm tired, I can offer so many excuses that are self-centered. Focus my mind and heart to notice those in need. Surround me with willing workers with whom I can brainstorm and trust You for the solutions. In Jesus' name, Amen. ✠

Notes

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DVD Listening Guide

Lesson 3

God is always _____ than our _____.

Our culture says to _____ it, but when it comes to faith, _____ it.

Lesson 4

When We're Entrusted to Serve

*But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."
They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish."
And he said, "Bring them here to me." Matthew 14:16-18*

At one time or another, you and I face seasons in life when seemingly overwhelming problems render us ineffective. No matter how we view our situation, we cannot see any practical or financial way to solve the problem.

In those situations, for the most part, we tend to react in three different ways:

- (1) View all available options, choose one, and move forward;
- (2) Ask for help; or
- (3) Give up.

In this Lesson's passage, the disciples combine reactions #1 and #3 in their own way: *they viewed their options and chose to give up*. In a feeble attempt at a solution, they ask a boy for his sack lunch. But never even ask Jesus how He would solve the problem.

Perhaps they don't want to admit to their leader that they can't complete an assigned task. If you work in corporate America, you can relate. Maybe after such a long day, they are simply too exhausted and hungry themselves to muster the energy for problem-solving. If you are a stay-at-home parent, you can relate.

So instead of asking Jesus for help, they offer an unsolicited alternative. Let's pick up our study from there.

Take a moment to write out our memory verse Matthew 14:14 once more:



In this fourth lesson, we turn to Matthew 14:16-18, which states, *But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me."*

Feed Them

We enter our lesson in the middle of a very important conversation between Jesus and the disciples. The disciples have taken it upon themselves to offer Jesus a suggestion: since the massive crowd is growing hungry and the day wanes, send the people away to fend for themselves.

As they watch maybe upwards of 20,000 people milling around the area, they await Jesus' response. Instead of agreeing with the disciples' suggestion, He offers a shocking mandate:

You give them something to eat (Matthew 14:16).

Unexpectedly and almost forcefully, Jesus challenged the disciples to provide food for the vast crowd. It's almost comical to picture the disciples' reaction to Jesus' short, pointed sentence. The Greek language here emphasizes the word ***you***. There is no mistaking Jesus' command.

How would you react in a similar situation?

I would suggest that Jesus' stunning suggestion rendered them speechless. Their minds froze. They could only stare at Jesus like deer in the headlights. *Blink. Blink. Blink.*

There they stand in front of the hungry thousands with no financial or other means to feed the multitude. It was a gargantuan, impossible task in human terms. But Jesus answers those situations with divine solutions. Although the disciples did not have the resources to fulfill His request, they had overlooked the ultimate *Source*.

Are you facing what may seem like an impossible situation?

Regardless of your circumstances, Jesus gently reminds you to look up to see the Source. He alone holds all the answers.

Jesus takes the opportunity to use the disciples' stunned silence as a teachable moment regarding trust.

Jesus excels at waiting for teachable moments.

The disciples had crunched the numbers and even commandeered a boy's sack lunch, but they still did not understand how Jesus expected them to solve the problem.

They were looking for a real solution.

Jesus was looking for real faith.

Challenges tend to throw us off kilter. How do you respond to unexpected challenges?

Some people respond with an openness to new possibilities. They push beyond their comfort zone to accomplish much. Other people would rather have their fingernails removed by the roots than embrace a challenge or change. Which camp do you find yourself in?

Does it depend on the situation?

There is another person in this lesson who plays an important role. As the disciples ponder how to meet the people's need for food, Andrew eventually locates one young boy amongst the thousands who was willing to help. The boy has only a small sack lunch, yet willingly offers it to help the people. Perhaps with childlike innocence and faith, the young boy feels compassion on the people and offers all he has to help others.

How refreshing this boy's attitude appears compared to the disciples! For that matter, I would suspect that some of our own contribution motives tend to be questionable at times.

What do the disciples ask Jesus in John 6:9? _____

Keep in mind from our last lesson that Jesus asked Philip how they would feed the multitude. Now as evening approaches, Andrew asks Jesus the same question almost as if the problem only just then manifested.

Do we find Andrew's lack of faith surprising? After all, the disciples had just returned from their first missionary tour.

What has Philip been doing according to Mark 6:13? _____

After forcing out demons and healing the sick, we would expect Philip to be more optimistic. A bit of faith would be appropriate. After all, he's just seen the impossible happen.

Philip can cite the stats to Jesus (John 6:7), but he cannot see how to help. He can crunch numbers, but can't construct an answer. And although the answer to prayer is standing next to him, Philip doesn't even pray.

Equally disturbing is the silence of the other disciples. Are they optimistic? Read their words and see for yourself in Mark 6:35-36: _____

It doesn't seem to even occur to the disciples to turn the problem over to Jesus.

Only Andrew came close. He offers Jesus five loaves and two fish, but it doesn't come with much faith. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to find much faith among the disciples on the hill that day.

Philip was cynical. Andrew was doubtful. The other disciples were negative. But in the midst of it all, the people were still hungry.

Does that ring a modern day bell? How many times have we observed disciples of Jesus arguing about a solution to the problem while the problem steadily grows worse?

Would such arguing motivate you to act or leave?

The feeding of those thousands did not happen by mere chance. It was brought about purposefully to manifest the power of God. We see this principle throughout the book of Job. The same is true for your situation.

Our weakness reveals how great our God is.

I find it interesting that the disciples who had seen Jesus perform countless miracles were the first to throw in the towel and doubt when things heated up. But in our times of weakness and need, God still cares for us, still loves us and saves us – even from ourselves.

Write out these wonderful examples:

Psalm 116:6 _____

Psalm 18:16-19 _____

We are constantly reminded of our weaknesses and limitations. We see them in our body, finances, church, neighborhood, workplace, culture, and more.

What are your greatest weaknesses or limitations?

Do you have difficulty admitting them? Why or why not?

Do you perceive them as hindrances or enhancements in your relationship with God?

Even when we can only see our limitations or limited provisions, God faithfully provides what we need. Oftentimes, His provision far exceeds our expectations. We see this truth vividly in another instance where a multitude is miraculously fed.

Write out the words of Numbers 11:31-32 _____

God demonstrates His power with great might, yet also uses His children to display His power. We are weak instruments through whom God accomplishes great results. Scripture overflows with examples of God's faithful provision. When we trust Him to provide, He accomplishes powerful results through us. Through whom did God show His power in these verses?

Exodus 4:1-5 _____

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 _____

You and I are no Moses or Paul. Like them we are unique and God uses our individual gifts, talents and passions to show His faithfulness greatly, as well.

The disciples' concern for the needs of the crowd was noble, but basically Jesus tells them to do something about it. *Feed them.* Jesus conveys in that moment that all-encompassing ministry is centered on feeding people, both physical food, which is a part of compassion and care, and also the spiritual food, the Bread of Life.

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, reiterates to the disciples on that Galilean countryside that they are to feed His flock as His appointed shepherds. This mandate appears throughout Scripture into the Church today. What does God say about shepherds in the following verses?

Jeremiah 3:15 _____

Jeremiah 23:4 _____

John 21:17 _____

Acts 20:28 _____

1 Peter 5:2 _____

I particularly love the wording of 1 Peter 5:2. Christ's appointed shepherds are to serve because they are *willing*, not because it is a *requirement*.

Perhaps due to the disciples' own hunger and exhaustion, feeding the multitude that day became a requirement that they were not willing to fulfill. They looked to their own abilities and meager provisions instead of God's overflowing abundance.

Loaves and Fish

In this miracle, Jesus uses loaves and fishes to display God's divine power and provision. The Israelites customarily used flour mixed with water and baked their bread in either oblong or round cakes, approximately the thickness of a thumb. They were usually as large as a plate or platter and were to be broken apart, never cut.

However, the loaves that this boy carried were slightly different. John's Gospel clarifies that they were barley loaves (John 6:9). They were the lowest quality of bread, only carried by the poor. The lad doesn't have five big loaves of Wonder Bread and two large salmon. The barley loaves were small cakes - almost like small pita bread or crackers, made out of barley.

And the fish were just enough to give the barley loaves some flavor - almost like sardines or smoked herring. Meager provisions.

The disciples knew that what they received from the boy and offered to Jesus would not be enough.

Do you sometimes feel that your contribution to Jesus is meager?

Why or why not?

What you and I offer God may seem woefully inadequate, but in His hands it becomes more than enough. God uses and multiplies whatever we offer to Him, whether it is talent, time, or treasure. With this promise we can therefore offer all we have, just as the boy did with his lunch, and see what God can and will do.

How do you see that truth in the following verses?

Exodus 4:1-3 _____

Exodus 14:16 _____

2 Kings 4:1-7 _____

When we access what God has given us and offer it to Him, He abundantly fills our needs and, where He desires, the needs of others.

A Pentecostal minister once confronted an associate who had a growth on his nose but refused to see a doctor. "God will heal me," the man insisted. "If you needed a miracle, God would give you one," the minister retorted, "but right now He's given you a doctor and medical insurance. You need to use what He's given you."

What resources has God given you that you may be overlooking?

Here's a familiar one: "I need to lose weight but can't afford joining a gym." Perhaps He's given you sidewalks in your neighborhood. You need to use what He's given you.

God is not intimidated by the magnitude of our problem. The disciples saw the size of the need and the littleness of the human resources available.

Jesus saw the size of the need and the greatness of God's available resources.

Often God calls us to do tasks for Him that may be technically impossible so that we rely on Him and His provision.

But We Have "Only"

When Jesus uttered the shocking command, *You give them something to eat* (Matthew 14:16), the disciples immediately looked to their own available resources. They did not figure Jesus into the solution. We may find it easy to criticize the disciples, but I would suggest that we tend to do the same. The only difference? The disciples could actually see and touch Jesus. Today, God's power resides in us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, using God's Word and sacraments.

The disciples responded to Jesus that they ONLY had five loaves and two fish. Notice the word ONLY. That single word reveals the disciples' lack of faith.

But they aren't alone. Perhaps you have heard people say: "It's ONLY water." But connected to the Word of God it means salvation. Or "the Bible is ONLY words on a page." No, it is the inerrant Word of life that grows our faith and provides a glimpse into God's character. "Communion is ONLY bread and wine." But in receiving Jesus' body and blood of the sacrifice He made for us, we receive forgiveness, life and salvation.

Many people considered to be pillars of faith in Scripture experienced moments of doubt.

God promises to be with us, gives us faith, and calls us to exercise that faith. Even when the situation seems impossible. Even when the resources seem sparse.

Jesus knew exactly what the disciples had. Yet the disciples didn't understand what – or Who – they had.

In spite of the disciples' doubt and lack of faith, Jesus simply says, *Bring them here to me* (Matthew 14:18).

What a comfort! What a blessing! The disciples overemphasized the problem and underemphasized Jesus.

Five loaves.

Two fish.

Seven total.

Disciples should always count to eight.

There's another important lesson that we need not overlook. Some may ask why Jesus did not supernaturally make use of means *not* at hand instead of using natural and inadequate means already present. Despite what non-believers may suppose, Christ uses *created* things to do redemptive things.

He gives us tangible things – like water for Baptism, bread, and wine – as a vivid reminder of that amazing truth.

How do you see this truth in what Jesus did in John 9:1-6? _____

In Matthew, the disciples are examples of all disciples of all time faced with overwhelming need and underwhelming resources. Yet Jesus demonstrates that to help the needy world, He uses what we have in our hands, offered to Him, for the service of the world.

While the miracle is supernatural, the means Jesus used are natural.

Up until that point, Jesus taught the people, healed people and raised people from the dead, while the disciples were pretty much along for the ride. But not for this miracle. It was test time to see just how much they had learned.

Did you notice that the Teacher is always silent during a test? People can get so frustrated that they don't have all the answers up front for challenges they face. The right answer is simply give Jesus what we have. If God wants seven and all you can give Him is three, He'll add four. If you give Him two, He'll add five.

No matter what you give Him, God is capable of adding or subtracting whatever He needs, to give whatever He desires.

Let's review our Bible memory verse for our study. Write out Matthew 14:14 once more:



Closing

The boy had only his sack lunch. *But he gave his all.*

The disciples didn't even try, because they saw the impossibility before them.

I want to be that kid. I want to put forth my best effort. I want to give God my all.

But at the end of the day, I want to remember that my all will never be enough.

Only Jesus can accomplish what is truly enough.

So if or when God chooses to multiply the work of my hands, I won't ever question Who deserves the credit.

Close with prayer:

✠*Father, there are so many ways that I can relate to the disciples. When opportunities arise to serve You, I tend to look at my own resources instead of to You, my ultimate Source. Father, I ask that You enable me to respond to Your leading and guidance with real faith instead of like a deer in the headlights. In Jesus' name, Amen.* ✠

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DVD Listening Guide

Lesson 4

The disciples were looking for a real _____, but Jesus was looking for some real _____.

Our _____ reveals how great our _____ is.

The disciples had overemphasized the _____ and underemphasized _____.

Disciples should always count to _____.

Lesson 5

When Provision Overflows

Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. Matthew 14:19-20a

The green grass rippled in the cool breeze blowing off of the Sea of Galilee. The azure water reflected the vivid colors of the setting sun. But the disciples likely didn't notice. They were quietly organizing the mass of people into groups, just like Jesus asked. But why did He set them to such a task? They may have been wondering:

What is Jesus planning on doing with five loaves and two fish?

Is He simply going to have the crowd watch Him eat?

Does He really think that small fare will feed this multitude?

The disciples likely had dozens of questions running through their minds, but did you notice one vital aspect? *They obeyed Jesus.*

They may have questioned His method and suffered weak faith, but they still obeyed. And God did a miraculous work.

Do you sometimes have problems believing that God will come through? Do you have a difficult time in the faith department? Welcome to the crowd. When situations in our lives seem impossible and we question how God can possibly bring order to chaos, there is an important lesson here:

Obey God anyway.

Take a moment to write out Matthew 14:14:



In this fifth lesson, we are studying Matthew 14:19-20a, which states, *Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to*

heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied.

Green grass surrounds the Sea of Galilee after the late winter or early spring rains. So during this Passover time, there was plenty of grass for the people to sit on – even such a great multitude. Have you ever been in a crowd that large?

Although we cannot know what the people were thinking, we can relate to a certain extent. At one time or another, chances are you have been part of a large crowd. Whether at a sporting event or concert, we have witnessed people's behavior. They're protective of their space, their stuff, and their stomachs.

Now imagine the scene on that Galilean hillside. Throughout the course of the day, perhaps upwards of 20,000 people witnessed Jesus heal one sick person after another. Shouts of joy probably filled the air numerous times, along with cheering onlookers as lame beggars became walking storyboards of testimony.

They heard Jesus talk about a heavenly kingdom for all who believed by faith. A place where He is preparing mansions for them to live for all eternity (John 14:2).

Can you picture it?

Organizing the Multitude

Now imagine orchestrating order to a milling crowd of that size. Let's break it down so that we can wrap our minds around it.

How much space would 20,000 people occupy? Scripture does not tell us anyone in the crowd went home after they'd been healed or grew tired of watching the healing spectacle.

Today, Madison Square Garden in New York seats 18,200 for a hockey match, 19,763 for a basketball game, and 20,000 people for a concert.

But if you haven't been there, picture a standard football field. A football field is 360 feet by 160 feet. That equates to 57,600 square feet. If you allowed for an average of 3 x 2 feet for a person sitting down, this would allow a total of 9,600 people on a standard professional field.

So there are more than two football fields full of people jammed into this area.

That's a LOT of people. A LOT of hurt. And a LOT of noise.

In the midst of it all, Jesus orders the people to sit. The word for *order* in Matthew 14:19 is actually the word for *command* (Greek, *keleuō*). It is a stronger word than simply to make an announcement. This word denotes authority. Only those with a certain level of power or clout used that word with any effectiveness.

On two occasions in particular, this *command* word was used by rulers in the New Testament. Who was commanding and what are they ordering done in the following verses?

Matthew 14:9-11

Person giving command: _____

Command given: _____

Matthew 27:57-58

Person giving command: _____

Command given: _____

Herod ruled over Galilee. Pilate governed Jerusalem. But Jesus was and is sovereign over all.

How do you see the crowd react to Christ's authority in these verses?

Matthew 7:28-29 _____

Mark 1:21-28 _____

In the Gospels, disciples are often asked to do the little things in preparation for Jesus' big things. Here, He asks them to seat the people. How do you see that same preparation principle in the following verses?

John 11:38-39 _____

Mark 14:12-16 _____

Perhaps such verses desire to teach disciples that in addition to giving Jesus the honor of a little faith, He can also do with the service of a little setting up. He calls disciples through whom He can work so that His truth and love can enter through us into the lives of others. He simply asks that, through the working of the Holy Spirit, we come to Him as we are, however ill-equipped, so that He can use it greatly in His service.

Little is always much in the hands of Christ.

These verses also point to the fact that our God is a God of order. When Moses became exhausted when leading God's people, what advice did Moses' father-in-law provide in Exodus 18:21? _____

Just as in those Mosaic camps, gathering this multitude in groups brought order to chaos. This orderliness accomplished three specific things:

- (1) to facilitate the distribution of food;
- (2) to stabilize the people and keep them from getting into a panic and lunging for the food once they started to give it out; and
- (3) it was a way to count the people.

Have you ever been asked to organize a large group of people? If so, what did that orderliness accomplish?

When Jesus commanded that the multitude sit, we view it through our own culture of actually resting in a sitting position. Jewish people did not sit at meals, they reclined. We see this principle in the original language here. *Sitting* refers to *reclining* (Greek, *anakeimai*), or lying on the grass as though it were a table.

Since Jesus gave the order for the people to sit, we conclude that they were standing. This bears pointing out because Jewish culture denoted standing as a posture of reverence. Jesus taught as He moved among the crowd, so the people afforded Him the respect of standing. It also served as a sign of their confidence in Jesus.

Mark's Gospel tells us that Jesus ordered the disciples to seat the people in groups of hundreds and fifties (Mark 6:40). The grouping here (Greek, *prasiai prasiai*) refers to garden bed by garden bed. What a beautiful, vivid picture! The people were clustered in groups of fifties and hundreds in their colorful garments with green grass aisles between them. From God's perspective, it would have looked like garden beds of flowers among the green grass!

John's Gospel tells us, *Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand* (John 6:4). The mention of the Passover marks the date of this miracle around the time of Nisan, but it does much more. John's narrative explains the action of this multitude when, after the miracle of the loaves, they conceived the plan of forcing Jesus to go with them to Jerusalem to be made a king. We will touch on this more in our next lesson.

Even with the beauty of this garden of people, we are struck with the simplicity of the banquet. It stands in striking contrast to Herod's birthday party when he ordered John the Baptist beheaded.

What does Matthew 14:6-7 state? _____

At Herod's banquet we notice there was dancing and guests to help him celebrate. Matthew 14:9 reveals that Herod's guests were dinner guests. Imagine the pomp and lavishness indulged in at Herod's birthday bash.

Have you ever attended a lavish party? If so, did you dress up?

Was the whole experience relaxing?

Here, Jesus simply and efficiently met the people's basic needs. Physical healing. Food. Fellowship. Nothing fancy needed.

What question does Psalm 78:19 ask? _____

On that spring day in Galilee, God in Christ did that very thing.

Blessing and Giving Thanks

After Jesus asks the Twelve to divide the people into workable groups, He says a prayer of blessing. (I cannot help but wonder if the disciples were peeking during the prayer to see where the delivery trucks were going to come from.)

In traditional Jewish families, from Biblical times to now, sharing meals is a very important part of Jewish family and community life. So important, that special blessings are said at the start and end of the meal.

In Matthew, this must have been the usual grace before a meal. If the words employed by Jesus had been unusual, one or more of the four evangelists would surely have at least intimated that fact. Jesus probably spoke a traditional Jewish blessing such as, "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth."

Do you give thanks or say grace before your meals?

We see numerous examples in Scripture that giving thanks to God for His provision is standard practice. How do you see that truth in these verses?

Acts 27:35 _____

1 Corinthians 11:24 _____

In the Jewish culture, looking up was typical posture for prayer. Looking up into the sky reflected a common practice in connection with prayer, both in the Old and New Testaments.

Write out these examples:

John 11:41 _____

John 17:1 _____

Psalms 123:1 _____

Matthew, Mark, and Luke record that Jesus *spoke a blessing*, which John defines as giving thanks. The object of Jesus' thanks is not stated, so it could refer to either the food or God. However, the fact that Jesus looked up to heaven indicates that the blessing was an act of praise to God the Provider rather than a consecration of food. Similar to our saying grace before a meal, this blessing thanked God for His bountiful provision.

In giving thanks and blessing, Jesus witnessed to the crowd and disciples that all gifts come from God. What do His actions say to us today?

Giving thanks for what we already have is the first step toward blessing.

Breaking Bread Together

Have you ever said, "Let's break bread together"? If so, what does that mean?

Among the Jews, the breaking of bread was done only in the context of a meal. In fact, the Talmud (Jewish Oral Law) uses the term only in reference to the blessing at the start of the meal. Today, the one who says the blessing over the bread is referred to as the one who “breaks bread.” This task was reserved for the head of the household.

The term *breaking bread* is mentioned several times in the New Testament. What stands out to you in the following verses about breaking bread?

Acts 2:42-47 _____

Acts 20:7 _____

Breaking bread served to gather people and communities to pause and enjoy fellowship with one another.

How often do you take time to do likewise?

How do you feel afterwards?

In New Testament times, the phrase *to break bread* was also used to describe the partaking of the Lord’s Supper. It is not accidental that when Jesus distributes the bread, we hear its echoes. The order in which Jesus takes, blesses, breaks, and distributes the bread here matches His institution of the Lord’s Supper, which provides a glimpse of the grand feast to come.

Jesus instituted this special supper while celebrating the Passover with His disciples shortly before His death approximately one year after this miraculous feeding of the five thousand. Perhaps Matthew desired to show that a major way Jesus prepares to feed the world and fuel His church for feeding the world is the Lord’s Supper itself.

How does Paul address the subject of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17? _____

Let's make no mistake. This feeding of the five thousand was a common meal, not Communion. In that Galilean countryside, Jesus broke bread to physically provide food for the hungry multitudes.

There is another spiritual lesson in the sequence when Jesus says a blessing over the bread and then breaks it.

There is a pattern in the blessing and breaking. Have you noticed in your life that right after the blessing stage comes the broken stage?

When God began opening doors for me to teach God's Word and write Bible studies, I experienced an incredible season of blessing. Speaking opportunities started knocking from outside of Texas and I could not have been happier in my marriage, home life, and work life.

Then the most painful break that I have ever experienced shattered my Utopia. My life turned upside down when I found out my husband was leading a secret, double life. Four months later, I was divorced. I had no children. And I was 42 years old. *CRASH.*

Have you ever experienced a season of brokenness after a season of blessing? Explain.

Because I love you, I want to offer you a word of caution: **Don't allow the broken seasons to make you cautious about enjoying the blessings of God.** By His grace, I have known God for 22 years and received many blessings in my life. But none of the knowledge I received of Him in the blessing stage even compares to what I learned about Him in the breaking stage.

God does not give to the world bread that has not been broken. We see that truth in the bread of the Last Supper. We see that truth in Jesus, the Bread of Life, broken on Calvary's cross.

We cannot fully live if we constantly wait for the other shoe to drop, so to speak. Do not let the enemy steal your joy! Rejoice in your blessings, and yes, even your brokenness. Because our brokenness allows God's glorious light to shine through the cracks into a dark world.

The Multiplication Miracle

There were about 20,000 people. Twelve disciples. Five loaves. Two fish. And Jesus.

The people sat orderly. A hush fell over the green slopes. All eyes turned to Jesus. Do you wonder what was running through the disciples' minds?

What is Jesus going to do?

Are we just going to watch Him eat lunch?

Why did He order us to arrange the people for a meal when we don't have any food for them?

I just wonder what the disciples wondered.

The most striking aspect of this massive miracle is that it was performed completely void of fanfare. Jesus didn't put on a show by making a huge pile of fish and bread appear. In fact, we are not told that there was any visible difference.

Jesus simply took the five loaves and two fish, looked up to heaven, gave thanks, and began giving the food to the disciples to distribute.

Did you notice the significance of that order of events? Despite their lack of faith, regardless of their doubt, *Jesus still entrusted those provisions to the disciples to distribute.*

That might not strike you as important, but let me ask you something. If you were the boss and your employees showed such lack of initiative and motivation in the creative process, would you entrust them with the final product launch?

Jesus could have easily brushed the disciples aside as useless and distributed it Himself. He could have placed the disciples in time out until they could be nice. Instead He placed them in charge of distribution.

In the context of ministry, why is that such a crucial point to understand?

Would you have entrusted that task to the disciples? Why or why not?

That is the way ministry works. The Lord chooses to give so that we might give to others from His provision. When Jesus broke the loaves and returned them to the disciples for distribution, He confirmed the work of their hands on His behalf to serve:

Mark 16:20 _____

1 Corinthians 3:9 _____

2 Corinthians 6:1 _____

Even when we prove disappointing to God, God does not withdraw His affection or provision to those who willingly serve Him.

We notice that key point here, as well. The disciples had not completely given up and headed for the hills. They remained with Jesus with their hands out and willing to serve. Despite their doubts, they continued to be faithful to what Jesus asked them to do.

Have you ever experienced similar doubt?

What was the outcome, or is it still a work in progress?

Perhaps you experience doubting days, as well. What then? Continue to spend daily time in His Word, bend your knees in prayer, stay actively involved at church, and serve where He leads.

If Jesus would have acted according to the faith of the disciples, the multitudes would have gone hungry. But He didn't – and He doesn't today. Rather than punish the disciples, Jesus employs them. They end up serving as waiters at this miraculous meal.

Our faith may waiver, but God's faithfulness never does.

God dispenses His blessings according to the riches of His grace, not the depth of our faith. We see that truth in 2 Timothy 2:13. Write it here: _____

They passed out bread they did not request and enjoy the answer to the prayer they didn't even pray.

So the disciples functioned as waiters at this grand feast. Jesus gave and gave and gave, and as He gave there was always more to give. Luke and Mark record that Jesus *continued to give to the disciples*, which tells us that the miraculous multiplication of bread occurred in Jesus' hands – not their own.

Imagine the disciples' surprise when they served the first 50. Then the provisions kept coming for the second 50. The disciples received from Jesus and they gave to the hungry people. They did not generate the food, they simply distributed the provisions they were given.

Jesus did not hold back from giving. Had it been left up to Philip, the hungry crowd would have only received a miniscule portion from what two hundred denarius could purchase.

Jesus kept giving. He gave fish that had never lived and bread containing barley that had never been grown.

Over the centuries, some attempt to explain away this miracle by suggesting that Jesus and His disciples shared their lunch and the crowd followed their good example. But Matthew 14:20a states that the people *all ate and were satisfied*. Shared lunches and bits of fish do not equate with being fully satisfied.

God promises to feed the hungry. Write out these verses:

Luke 1:53 _____

Luke 6:21 _____

If you are hungry, Jesus will satisfy you. How do you see that truth in Psalm 23:1? _____

In Matthew, the word used to describe that the people were *satisfied* is a word used of fattening animals. The verb used (Greek, *ecortasqhsan*) is used of animals that are fed to capacity with grass. So what we behold is a great, gluttonous feast.

The miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish is not described—indeed, it is not even mentioned as such. Only after everyone had eaten to their satisfaction did they realize a miracle occurred.

There is something about sharing a meal together. Although the Gospels do not reflect one single conversation that took place among those in the crowd, we might take a moment to ponder. There's something that happens in the context of community from which we can learn a lesson.

Because of the geographic area, there were people present from many different towns. Perhaps some of them had never met. But in a gathering like this for that length of time, lots of conversations can take place. People find out what they have in common - a relative or line of work. They find out who's hurting, why, and perhaps how they might help. They talk about Jesus. Then they share a meal of camaraderie.

There's something special about community. How are you doing in yours?

Let's review our Bible memory verse for our study. Write out Matthew 14:14 once more:



Closing

When the disciples wanted to give up, Jesus asked them to seat the crowd.

When they handed Jesus the five loaves and two fish, they didn't have faith. But Jesus gave thanks.

For what? The weariness? The crowds? The sick? The chaos? No. He thanked God for a basket of bread and two small fish.

He ignored the doubt and focused on His Father.

We need to understand His perspective because we often see more mouths to feed than bread to go around. More wounds than physicians. More cynical Christians than missionaries afire.

You and I cannot simply give up and take a seat. As God's representatives, how can we possibly tell the world that we can't help?

We don't.

We look up and trust. We take His basket of provision to share it, giving thanks to our Provider, with hopeful optimism.

Close with prayer:

✝Father, so often when I believe I don't have all that I want, I have trouble looking to You and giving thanks. But You have promised to always provide exactly what I need. Thank you for teaching me once again the difference between need and want. And when I don't think it's enough, forgive my unbelief and remind me that my little is always enough in Your hands. In Jesus' name, Amen. ✝

Notes

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DVD Listening Guide

Lesson 5

Three reasons to organize the crowd:

- 1) facilitate _____
- 2) stabilize the _____
- 3) _____ the people

Giving _____ for what we already have is the first step toward _____.

God does not give to the world _____ that has not been _____.

Lesson 6

When Leftovers Remind Us

*And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.
And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women
and children. Matthew 14:20b-21*

I don't know whether to offer congratulations or sympathy! We have arrived at our final lesson in this study. What treasures God has taught us! We started our journey traversing the Sea of Galilee with Jesus and twelve worn out disciples. Then we shadowed Jesus and the disciples as they spent a very long, yet incredible, day in the beautiful Galilean countryside among thousands.

We saw Jesus administer a test to the disciples, which they failed spectacularly. We witnessed Jesus put His grief and exhaustion aside to heal and minister to thousands. And then the highlight – Jesus multiplied five loaves and two fish to feed 20,000+ people until they were completely satisfied.

But the day isn't quite over yet.

Take a moment to write out our study's memory verse - Matthew 14:14:



In our study's final lesson, we conclude by studying Matthew 14:20b-21, which states,
*And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about
five thousand men, besides women and children.*

Abundant Leftovers

Don't you find it interesting that after recording a great miracle, Matthew outlines the trash pick-up? Somehow it seems anti-climactic.

Yet these verses do not simply record an incident of tidiness and conservation. They demonstrate the full circle of discipleship. In our earlier lesson, Jesus asks us for a little set up so He can accomplish big ministry. Here we learn to follow-up on meetings with a personal touch.

If you have been a part of a large ministry event at your church or other location, did you simply fulfill the role you were asked to do and then go home? Why or why not?

Let's think that through for a moment. You are asked to serve God by serving a meal at a sizeable church function. The place is going to be filled to the brim with people. You and other volunteers cook, organize the crowd, then feed all the people. But what if everyone then went home believing our job to be 100% fulfilled? The fellowship hall would be a wreck. The garbage would be piled high. And no one would think to follow-up with any first-time visitors.

Trash detail may not be our favorite chore, but it's a necessary one. We may get busy and forget to follow-up with first-time visitors, but it's a vital part of ministry.

In Jewish culture, bread was regarded as a particularly significant and representative gift of God. It was required that scraps that fell on the ground during a meal be picked up.

The Twelve Baskets

Matthew 14:20 specifically mentions that there were twelve baskets of broken pieces left over. This startling revelation highlights that there was more fish and bread leftover than what the disciples had originally handed to Jesus. Wow!

In American culture, we realize that at meals some people tend to overfill their plates. We like to eat. Period. We see that same principle here, but in the context of need. Some people took pieces of bread from the disciples which they could not even take a bite of since they were so full. But Jesus intends that none of His gifts go to waste. The miraculous food was not to be discarded.

This scene is reminiscent of the heavenly banquet described in Isaiah 25:6-9: Write it out here: _____

What similarities or differences do you see in that heavenly banquet to this miraculous feeding of the five thousand?

During biblical times, baskets were common containers usually made from reeds, twigs, or other natural materials. They varied widely in strength, shape and purpose, although they usually had handles of some sort, and sometimes lids.

They were commonly used for bread and fruit (due to their breathable, woven construction) but were also used as cages for pet birds or other animals. They varied in size from small to medium (carried by hand or on the shoulder or head) to large (carried on a pole between two people).

The New Testament makes reference to two kinds of baskets. The basket used by the disciples here (Greek, *kophinos*) was normally carried by one person to hold individual provisions. They were small wicker baskets that were carried as part of their daily attire. It was like an old school lunch box.

This basket is used in the New Testament only in reference to the leftovers collected in the feeding of the five thousand. Write out the other instances here:

Mark 6:43 _____

Mark 8:19 _____

Luke 9:17 _____

John 6:13 _____

The other type of food basket mentioned in the New Testament (Greek, *spuris*) was considerably larger. Write out these verses where we find this same basket referenced:

Acts 9:25 _____

Matthew 16:9-10 _____

This second type of basket was large enough to carry the apostle Paul! And in Matthew's recording of the feeding of the four thousand (a separate miracle of Jesus), there were seven of these larger baskets used.

Significantly, Matthew also tells us that after this feeding of the five thousand there was twelve baskets of food left over. A reference to the fish is not seen here in the original text. The baskets contained only bread. These *broken pieces* (Greek, *klasmatwn*) refer to fragments or pieces. Here, it likely does not mean crusts and half-eaten food left over, but rather untouched portions that remained.

What significance do you believe would be most obvious for the number twelve?

As you likely guessed it is not mere coincidence that there were exactly twelve baskets of leftovers. Jesus had provided individual baskets of leftovers for each of His disciples.

The number twelve carries important symbolism in Scripture. How do you see the number twelve significant in Genesis 35:22-26? _____

The number twelve associated with the sons of Jacob from whom descended the twelve tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:21; Numbers 1:1-16). This number represented the people of God.

Twelve also later applied to the New Testament people of God (the Church), led by the twelve apostles (Matthew 19:28).

But let's step into that scene at the feeding of the five thousand again. As dusk approached after a long day, and a lengthy food serving session, the disciples eventually sit down with Jesus, each with his own basket of abundant leftovers.

Even though it seemed Jesus focused His time and energy on providing for the masses, He did not forget to provide a powerful witness and reminder for His faithful followers.

We do not know what those twelve disciples were thinking, but can you imagine the sense of wonder and impact that day's experience had on them?

When was the last time you sat back and marveled at the wonder of God's provision in your life? What was it?

There were twelve baskets: one for each of the Twelve, but none for Jesus. He who created the bounty made an opportunity for the Twelve to share their abundant portions with Him.

Each basket of leftovers testified to what Jesus alone had accomplished. And in entrusting those provisions to the Twelve, He gave them the privilege of feeding the nations spiritually with the Bread of Life that will never be exhausted.

As God faithfully pours out His abundance on us, He expects us to remember the poor and needy and support His Church. From all that He gives to us, we have the privilege of giving a portion back to Him.

Who Were the Multitude?

As we have walked through this study, I have referenced that the crowd was approximately 20,000 people. Even though Matthew states that those who were miraculously fed is reckoned as *about five thousand*, he concludes this miracle with four important words: *besides women and children*. (Matthew 14:21) Why do you believe that would be important?

All four Gospels record this miracle, but only Matthew noted that the number resulted from a tally of men only. The number of men was listed separately because in the Jewish culture of the day men and women usually ate separately when in public. The children ate with the women.

Is that hard to imagine in our culture today? Why or why not?

If you study Scripture carefully about the status of women when Jesus walked the earth, you will see how He dramatically altered their status by the impact His teaching had on men's hearts. So this counting of only men does not reflect that Jesus views women as unimportant or lesser. This counting simply reflects the Jewish culture of the day.

Large families were very important to Jewish people. We see throughout Scripture instances where men strived and were blessed with many children – especially male children to whom they could pass down their inheritance and birth rights. How do you see that truth in God's promise to Abraham?

Genesis 17:15-21: _____

So taking into consideration the Jewish culture's propensity for large families, we can see how the number of people at this mass feeding miracle might well exceed 5,000. Even if each man only brought himself, his wife, mother and one child, the number would arrive at 20,000. However, the actual number that day could have easily exceeded that amount. Since some of the people were sick and likely had caretakers with them who may not have been related to them, we can imagine those numbers swelling even further.

The size of the crowd is amazing in light of the fact that the neighboring towns of Capernaum and Bethsaida probably had a population of only 2,000-3,000 each.

What Happened After This Miracle

In Matthew's Gospel, we do not see the crowd's reaction to the massive feeding miracle that Jesus performed. To gather a glimpse, we turn to John.

Take a moment to write out John 6:14-15: _____

When the day draws to a conclusion, the crowd finally begins to realize what has taken place. After all, the people lived in that area. They knew the available, inadequate food resources for such a task. Yet they never saw a massive pile of food arrive. But every single one of them had just shared in a meal that completely satisfied them.

We see in these verses that they are so affected by this miracle that they begin thinking of ways to kidnap Jesus and carry Him triumphantly into Jerusalem to be crowned an earthly king.

But Jesus knew it wasn't His Father's timing.

Just as we saw Jesus avoiding Herod's scrutiny immediately before this feeding of the five thousand, here we see Jesus avoiding the crowd's intent to crown Him as their earthly king.

The crowd would have found little resistance from the disciples because they still did not grasp that Jesus referred to a heavenly kingdom, not an earthly one, where He would be crowned King.

How do you see this truth in the conversation between James and John in Mark 10:35-37? _____

The people, including the disciples, were awaiting a human messiah, a deliverer of their physical nation. And when they saw the way that Jesus provided for them, they wanted to force Him into an earthly kingship.

So Jesus withdrew by boat once again, and headed to Capernaum. Yet the crowd would not give up.

What did they do according to John 6:24? _____

Have you ever experienced a similar pursuit of you by a person or people who believe you can fill their needs? If so, what happened?

How did you convince them that they had the wrong job in mind for you?

As the people arrived in Capernaum the next morning, they were not seeking Jesus as much as their next free meal. Think about it. Wouldn't you want a king who provided free food? Talk about a popular government program! They wanted a miracle-working prophet who provided free meals and freedom from the Roman government. Yet Jesus sees through their plan.

What does Jesus tell the crowd in John 6:26? _____

The people were looking only to be filled with what sustained their physical existence. Yet Jesus tells the people that they need to strive *for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you* (John 6:27).

When Jesus reveals to the crowd that they need to crave *the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world*, how do the people respond in John 6:34? ____

Then Jesus declares to them the truth of His identity. Write out Jesus' words from John 6:35: _____

In those amazing words, Jesus provides a detailed explanation and application of the feeding miracle. The bread of life is not a thing, but a Person. A divine title.

Jesus is not the cake, nor the caviar, nor the chocolate, but the bread – the substance – of life. HALLELUJAH!

Ordinary bread can support physical life for a while, but Jesus is the bread that gives *eternal life*!

It may be easy for you and I, as New Testament believers, to look on this miracle and have joy-filled hope because we live in the truth of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection. But, sadly, the people only see their own disappointment at thwarted plans.

What does John 6:66 reveal? _____

The *disciples* referred to here are not the Twelve, but others who had chosen to follow Jesus. After hearing those devastating words from the people, Jesus turns to His Twelve disciples and asks them if they also wish to leave Him (John 6:67).

What is the faith-filled reply of Peter in John 6:68? _____

The disciples knew Jesus was the real deal. I pray that this study has showed you the same wonderful truth.

Conclusion

In this miracle, we studied Jesus' compassion for the souls and bodies of people, His miracle-working power to provide for our every need, and His beautiful orderliness in the work He sets out to perform.

The miracle is a spiritual lesson for disciples of every generation. The hungry multitude is always present. There is always a little band of disciples with seemingly pitiful resources. And always there is the compassionate Savior.

When disciples give Him their all, Jesus multiplies it to feed thousands. The thousands who were fed in that Galilean field had their hunger satisfied for a short time. Those partaking of the Bread of Life in the living Christ are satisfied for all eternity.

So, as disciples what little thing can you do?

A little human set up? A word of hope?

Dr. David Livingston, the famous missionary-explorer to Africa, had a medical condition which required a regular diet of milk. He kept a goat which supplied the necessary milk. Dr. Livingston was praying one morning and told the Lord, "Everything I have is yours, Lord."

He was visited that same week by the tribal chief and he noticed that the chief was eyeing his goat. Desiring to show God's love, he took the goat and gave it to the chief. In return, the chief presented him with the staff which he was carrying.

Later that day, Livingston confided in one of his friends, "I don't know why I was so stupid as to give my goat away. All I have to show for it is this stupid stick." His friend replied, "You don't understand. That isn't just a stick, it is a scepter. You no longer own one goat. Now you own all the goats in the village."

When the Lord calls us to faith and moves us to respond, giving Him our lives, we find that He has given us a scepter in return.

And we have been walking around thinking that it was just a stick.

One thing we clearly understand from this miracle: when Christ is there, the weary find rest and the hungry soul is fed.

Close with prayer:

✠ *Father, thank You so much for the opportunity and freedom to study Your Word in such depth. As Your child, You have entrusted me to serve You with all that You provide. Father, remind me to never waste what You provide. Help me remember that leftovers from You still abundantly meet my needs. Open my eyes to see those around me who need to feed from Your Bread of Life. Help me to shine Your light into a world that needs You. In Jesus' name, Amen.* ✠

Notes

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DVD Listening Guide

Lesson 6

With the baskets, Jesus provided a reminder that He is always _____.

In response to what God has done, we offer Him our _____ as well as
our _____.

Ordinary bread supports _____ life, but _____ is the bread that
gives _____ life.

Reference Map



Map from www.followtherabbi.com.

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About the Author

By God's grace, Donna Pyle has a passion for studying and teaching from His life-giving Word. Her clear, down-to-earth style encourages women of all ages to dig into Scripture with enthusiasm and expectation.

Not raised going to church regularly, Donna understands how intimidating it can be to open and try to understand the Bible. After walking with the Lord for 22 years now, she loves to mentor and encourage all women embarking on their new path of faith.

Since launching Artesian Ministries in 2007, Donna has authored 23 Bible studies and traveled throughout the United States and internationally to speak and teach from Scripture. She has published several shorter Bible studies in the Lutheran Woman's Quarterly, and written numerous devotions and magazine articles. She is the contributing author of the LWML's new Donna Pyle Bible Study Series, which includes 8 downloadable studies of 4-5 lessons each.

Donna's inaugural DVD Bible study series, *Your Strong Suit*, based on the armor of God, released in November 2011 in partnership with the LWML. In August 2012, Concordia Publishing House released Donna's book, *The God of All Comfort* (an in-depth Small Group-based Bible study) to excellent reviews. She is currently writing her second book for CPH under the guidance of her agent, Rachelle Gardner of Books & Such Literary Agency.

Donna enjoys blogging about faith-based issues on the Artesian Ministries' blog. She is active on Facebook and Twitter where she uses our social media-driven age as a conduit to spread God's love, joy, and hope. She is a member of Salem Lutheran Church in Tomball, Texas, where she sings on the worship team. Donna has been involved with the LWML since 1997 and loves partnering with them in mission work and providing women's Bible studies. She is a passionate supporter of Love146 to end child sex trafficking and exploitation.

Donna is a native, life-long Texan and fuels her creativity with Chick-Fil-A®, Starbucks®, and Twizzlers®. She enjoys digging for the treasures in Scripture, writing, traveling, spending time with family and friends, and torturing her cats with feather toys.



About the Lutheran Women's Missionary League

The Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) is an official auxiliary of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Since 1942 the LWML has focused on affirming each woman's relationship with Christ, encouraging and equipping women to live out their Christian lives in active mission ministries and to support global missions.

This dynamic organization encourages women of all ages and ethnicities to prayerfully and financially support the spread of the Good News about salvation and eternal life in Jesus Christ across the nation and around the world. Lutheran Women in Mission take to heart the lesson of "The Widow's Offering" in Luke 21:1-4. They joyfully fill their Mite Box with monetary offerings that have resulted to date in \$100 million dollars given to the praise and glory of God!

The LWML is actively involved in developing inspiring and doctrinally sound Bible studies and devotional materials for women, both young and old. In addition, resources are provided that serve as meeting helps, leadership guidelines and vibrant program enhancements.

This Bible study and other products are available through the LWML Catalog or by calling 800-252-LWML (5965).

Order online at www.lwml.org/store.

For more information about the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, visit the website at www.lwml.org or connect with us on Facebook at facebook.com/TheLWML.

The LWML extends its appreciation to Donna and Artesian Ministries for creating this study.

About this Bible Study

Aside from the resurrection, Jesus' feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. Even though Jesus dealt with doubting disciples, fatigue, personal grief, and limited resources, God desired to use that spring day to feed the masses with the Bread of Life. The disciples find one boy willing to hand over his basket of provisions. Five loaves and two fish. Not nearly enough. Until they offer it to Jesus.

Through this 6-lesson DVD Bible study and workbook, we invite you to dig deep into Scripture to see a compelling picture of our compassionate Savior. Sometimes, in seasons of stress and brokenness, we keep our eyes down. Trudging forward. Never looking up to see our Provider.

Yet when Christ is present, the weary find rest and the hungry soul is satisfied. Come and be fed by the only One who provides for your every need and fills you ... body and soul ... with Overflowing Abundance.

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