

LESSON FIVE

A HUNGRY CROWD

*When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples,
“Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.”
So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces
of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.*

JOHN 6:12-13



REFLECTION

At first glance, the need often looks greater than the resources. We might think what we have been given to accomplish the task is insufficient—until we place them in the hands of someone who knows what to do with them. God can often take a little gift and make something great out of it. Think of a time when God provided for your needs in an unusual or surprising way. How did that experience strengthen your faith?

SITUATION

We live in a world of fast-food restaurants and readily available sources of food. We can hardly imagine a crowd of several thousand, hungry and without relief. They have been receiving “spiritual” food in the form of teaching from Jesus throughout the day, but now their physical needs are beginning to distract them. Jesus takes this opportunity to offer his followers a valuable lesson.

OBSERVATION

Read John 6:1–15 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

¹ Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. ³ Then

Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, ⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there).

¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴ After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

¹ After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. ³ And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.

⁴ Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. ⁵ Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” ⁶ But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.

⁷ Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.”

⁸ One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, ⁹ “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?”

¹⁰ Then Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. ¹¹ And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.” ¹³ Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

¹⁵ Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

EXPLORATION

1. Why do you think the people went out to see Jesus without bringing along any food? (This event is also described in Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; and Luke 9:10–17.)

2. Why did Jesus ask Philip how they could feed the crowd?

3. What can we learn from Philip’s response? What was the larger obstacle for Philip: the lack of food or the costs involved in feeding such a large crowd?

4. What do you think was Jesus’ purpose in having the disciples gather up the leftovers?

5. What did Jesus want his disciples to learn from this event?

6. Who are you most like in this story? Philip? Andrew? The boy? The people? Why?

INSPIRATION

Interestingly, the stress seen that day is not on Jesus’ face, but on the faces of the disciples. “Send the crowds away,” they demand. Fair request. “After all,” they are saying, “You’ve taught them. You’ve healed them. You’ve accommodated them. And now they’re getting hungry. If we don’t send them away, they’ll want you to feed them, too!”

I wish I could have seen the expression on the disciples’ faces when they heard the Master’s response. . . .

“You give them something to eat.” . . .

Rather than look to God, they looked in their wallets. “That would take eight months of a man’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?”

“Y-y-y-you’ve got to be kidding.” “He can’t be serious.”

“It’s one of Jesus’ jokes.”

“Do you know how many people are out there?”

Eyes watermelon wide. Jaws dangling open. One ear hearing the din of the crowd, the other the command of God.

Don’t miss the contrasting views. When Jesus saw the people, he saw an opportunity to love and affirm value. When the disciples saw the people they saw thousands of problems.

Also, don’t miss the irony. In the midst of a bakery—in the presence of the Eternal Baker—they tell the “Bread of Life” that there is no bread.

How silly we must appear to God.

Here’s where Jesus should have given up. This is the point in the pressure-packed day where Jesus should have exploded. The sorrow, the life threats, the exuberance, the crowds, the interruptions, the demands, and now this. His own disciples can’t do what he asks them. In front of five thousand men, they let him down.

“Beam me up, Father,” should have been Jesus’ next words. But they weren’t. Instead he inquires, “How many loaves do you have?”

The disciples bring him a little boy’s lunch. A lunch pail becomes a banquet, and all are fed. No word of reprimand is given. No furrowed brow of anger is seen. No “I-told-you-so” speech is delivered. The same compassion Jesus extends to the crowd is extended to his friends. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. What problems in your life seem to have no solutions?

8. Do you find it difficult to trust God to meet your needs? Why?

9. What does this story teach about the way God provides for his people?

10. In what ways has God given you wisdom and strength to overcome difficulties in your life?

11. Based on this event, how do you think God wants you to deal with your doubts?

12. How does the faith of other believers inspire you to trust God?

LIFE LESSONS

It’s never about how much we have to offer, but rather if we will offer whatever we have. Jesus had the power to create food out of thin air or from the rocks on the hillside, but he chose to work with a small gift from a little boy. Sometimes, the greatest miracle happens when we let

go of some little possession and put it into God's hands. What God does with what we give him becomes secondary to the delight of participating in his work in the world.

DEVOTION

Father, why do we doubt you? Time and again you have proved your faithfulness, yet our faith falters. Thank you for continually providing for our needs. Keep us from doubt. Fill us with faith in you. Remind us that you are bigger than all of our problems and needs.

JOURNALING

What keeps you from completely trusting in God to meet your needs?

FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of John during this twelve-part study, read John 6:1–71. For more Bible passages on God’s provision for his people, read Genesis 2:15–16; Exodus 16:1–31; Psalm 20:7; Proverbs 3:5–10; and Matthew 6:25–34.