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John 4–6

“Real Satisfaction”

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The only miracle of Jesus that’s mentioned in all four Gospels is the Feeding of the 5,000, which is a greater miracle than it seems on the surface, considering [Matthew 14:21](#) refers to the crowd being that number “...besides women and children.” This inference is that there would have been at least 10,000 to 15,000 people there!

To set the scene, Jesus is with his disciples on a mountainside. [Luke 9:10](#) tells us they were on the outskirts of a little fishing village called Bethsaida.¹ All of a sudden, Jesus looked up and “saw a great crowd coming toward him.” ([John 6:5](#)) We read in [Mark 6:34](#) that Jesus “had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” While Jesus was filled with great compassion toward the crowd, the disciples demonstrated little or no compassion at all.

The disciples’ first solution was to have Jesus send the people away. ([Mark 6:36](#)) Someone has said the disciples are like assistant pastors, plus they’re the A-postles, since there are no B-postles! So Jesus’ assistant pastors quickly assessed the situation and came to the conclusion that they were incapable of doing anything to meet the need. It’s as if they’re saying, “It’s best, Jesus, if you would just send them on their merry little way.” Jesus, filled with compassion for the crowd, asked Philip a simple question: “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” ([John 6:5](#)) Philip answered, “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” ([John 6:7](#)) So their second solution was that their money was not sufficient to even make a discernable difference. Andrew was their third solution to the problem. He brought a boy with his lunch to Jesus to illustrate the fact that what was available was completely inadequate. Jesus’ solution, however, was for them to watch and see how incredible God is, and how, in spite of all appearances, God can do the miraculous with bits and pieces.

Jesus took the boy’s lunch and, “looking up to heaven,” gave thanks and distributed them to the disciples to put before the people. It’s not known just how the miracle happened. It could have been the case that the

¹ *Bet* means house and *sayda* means fishing. In Jesus’ day, Bethsaida was a fishing village on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Today, Bethsaida is a few miles from shore because the Sea of Galilee has receded.

baskets were continually full, like the widow's jar of oil in [2 Kings 4:1–7](#). Regardless of how it happened, it happened, and [John 6:12a](#) says, “[T]hey all had enough.” In the original Greek, the meaning is that they were all glutted like someone who has to be rolled away from the table at a Thanksgiving feast. After they had their fill, Jesus told them to “gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” It’s interesting to note the disciples gathered 12 baskets of leftovers – one *doggie bag* for each one!

There are a few important points that need to be made about this account. First, Jesus in his grace did not chastise his disciples for their lack of faith. Second, it’s amazing to consider the fact that a little bit in God’s hands produces miraculous results. And third, God’s work continued in spite of their lack of faith, which leads to the reasonable conclusion that God will accomplish his purposes through us or in spite of us.

Jesus withdrew in the evening while the people were satisfied and sleeping. Jesus knew they had it in mind “to come and make him king by force,” so “he withdrew to a mountain by himself.” The next morning they realized Jesus was gone, so the anxious crowd’s mood seems to indicate the question on everyone’s mind was, “We need Jesus, where is he?” ([John 6:24–26](#)) When they found him on the other side of the Sea of Galilee they wanted to know why he left them. Jesus gently rebuked the people by saying that they were only looking for him because he gave them their fill. The people, instead of being drawn to Jesus for who he was, were drawn for what he could do for them. It’s as though they saw Jesus as Mr. Fish and Chips!

In spite of their lack of understanding, the fact is that Jesus didn’t soft-sell his message at any time in his ministry. One example would be [Luke 14:26–28](#). Jesus said some pretty difficult things, including: hating your life and your family, carrying your cross and counting the cost of following him. In this case, Jesus was basically saying, “Don’t strive after what is temporary and perishable, but spend your energy seeking after the eternal life that I, the Son of Man, can give you!”²

In [John 6:28](#) their response was to ask, “What must we do to do the works that God requires.” Jesus told them they just needed to put their faith and trust in him. It’s hard to believe but they still don’t get it. They keep focusing on the food and the miraculous signs. They said, “What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert.” Jesus, once again, attempted to get them to see that it’s God who gives them physical bread, as well as “the true bread from heaven.” Amazingly, they say, “[F]rom now on, give us this bread.” You have to ask the question, “Will they ever get it?”

The point they continued to miss is that there is an insatiable hunger and thirst in the soul of every human being that can only be satisfied by a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus was saying to them, “Feed on me and you will never be hungry or thirsty again,” which is similar to what Jesus said to the woman at the well. He declared to hearers in plain and simple language: “I am the bread of life.” ([John 6:35](#))

In [John 4:1–42](#), Jesus asked this woman to give him a drink of water, and because she was a Samaritan and he was a Jew (to say there was a longstanding cultural animosity between Samaritans and Jews is an understatement!), she got a little sassy with him. He told her, “Woman, if you only knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” Like the people in this account, who only thought about physical things, she said, “You don’t have a bucket to draw water…” In [John 4:13–18](#), Jesus exposed the thirst of her heart: “I just need some man to love

² Paraphrase of John 6:27.

me!” Jesus, speaking in spiritual terms, basically said, “Drink of me and you’ll never thirst again. Feed on me and you’ll never hunger again.”

The focus of this teaching is to help us understand that when we come to him – not with a list of how Jesus can “meet my needs,” but how he can satisfy our souls for eternity – and surrender our lives to his Lordship, he satisfies us in ways that relationships or jobs or success or food or sex or money or fame...never can!

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [John 6:1–15, 22–59](#) to provide an overview of today’s study.
3. Read and discuss [John 6:24–26](#).
 - a. Do you think people today look at Jesus as a “need-meeter” rather than Savior?
 - b. Are you familiar with people churches that embrace this philosophy of ministry?
 - c. What are the characteristics of this type of church?
 - d. Do they teach that the Bible teaches that Jesus requires their absolute surrender to his Lordship, and that he did not come into the world to make them feel better and have a better life and standard of living?
 - e. What are the dangers in having this type of philosophy?
 - f. Has it been your experience that the churches you’ve attended have a consumer-driven approach to teaching about Jesus?
 - g. Spend time talking about the trend in some churches that view God as a fix-it-all, or the one who will help people get your weight under control or quit smoking or help people develop better family or marriage skills.
 - h. Read and discuss [Luke 14:26–28](#).
 - i. What does the Bible have to say about following the Lord for who he is rather than what he can do for someone?
4. This miracle, done in spite of the disciples’ lack of faith, shows that God will accomplish his purposes with or without us.
 - a. Why should we have faith and trust in God if he’s going to do what he wants, when he wants, with or without me?
 - b. Does God desire us to experience the joy of participating in his work?
 - c. Does God grow us during times when we lack faith?
 - d. [John 6:6](#) indicates that Jesus was testing Philip.
 - i. Why did God test Philip?
 - ii. Are there other examples in the Bible of God testing people?
 - iii. Does God test us today?
5. Read and discuss [Matthew 5:6](#).
 - a. Read and discuss a quote from former tennis champion, Boris Becker.

i. “I had won Wimbledon twice before, once as the youngest player. I was rich. I had all the material possessions I needed. It’s the old song of movie stars and pop stars who commit suicide. They have everything, and yet they are so unhappy. I had no inner peace. I was a puppet on a string.”

6. Read and discuss **John 6:66–69**.

- a. Do you think some people decide to turn away from the Lord because he doesn’t meet their every want?
- b. Do they miss the major point that the Lord has “*the words of eternal life*”?

7. If you have access to the Internet in the room where your group meets, you may want to show the humorous video clip titled *Me Church*.

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGEmlPjgjVI&feature=related>)

8. Close your time by allowing everyone in your group to: (select someone to read this Scripture) reflect on **Matthew 5:6**; realize that the Lord is all they’ll ever need; ask the Lord to give them a deep longing for relationship with him; thank the Lord for loving them and ask him to fill them up so they would be content, that they would no longer seek the things that cannot satisfy the longing of their heart.