

Feeding of the Five Thousand



Scripture Reference:

[John 6:1-14](#)

Suggested Emphasis:

Jesus is powerful and gives us what we need. We can ask for God's help when we're in need.

Memory Verse: "My God will use his wonderful riches in Christ Jesus to give you everything you need."

[Philippians 4:19, ICB](#)

Story Overview:

So many people wanted to hear Jesus preach that a crowd followed Him to a remote location. As mealtime approached, the only food that was found was a boy's lunch containing five small loaves of bread and two small fish. Jesus instructed the apostles to divide the food among the crowd of 5000 men (in addition to women and children). Everyone ate as much as they wanted, and then there was still food left over at the end of the meal.

Background Study:

Jesus had been teaching for about two years when he sent his disciples out in pairs to teach. They went from town to town, teaching people about God and the need for repentance. They were able to drive out demons and heal the sick ([Mark 6:12](#)). Right before the event in today's lesson, John the Baptist was beheaded. The disciples all came together again to be with Jesus. They wanted some time alone with Him, but a crowd of people showed up. It seems everyone had heard about Jesus and wanted to spend time with Him.

The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle (besides the resurrection) found in all four gospels ([Matthew 14:13-21](#); [Mark 6:30-44](#); [Luke 9:10-17](#)). It took place in a remote area on the east shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus and His disciples took the boat over to the shore, but the crowd seemed to have hurried around the lake to join them there.

Philip, Andrew, and Peter were originally from nearby Bethesda ([John 1:44](#)), and they might have known some of the people in the crowd. They would have known what food was available in the area and how much the food would cost. For this reason, they asked Jesus to dismiss the crowd so that everyone could buy their own food.

Jesus surprised the apostles by telling them to feed the crowd ([Mark 6:37](#)). They looked among the crowd to see what the situation was. The only food that they came up with was two small fish and five small barley loaves. It would be impossible to feed the crowd.

Barley loaves were inexpensive and would have been about the size of hamburger buns. The bread might have been something like pita bread. If packed in a lunch, the fish were probably similar in size to sardines in a tin, but they were probably dried and salted.

Jesus organised the crowd by having the disciples divide them into groups of fifty. It was springtime, and the hill was covered with grass on which the people could sit. There were women and children – we don't know how many – in addition to the five thousand men ([Matthew 14:21](#)).

None of the gospel accounts detail exactly how the food multiplied as it was prayed over and divided. Miraculously, five loaves and two small fish became enough food for the whole crowd. The leftovers were more than the original amount of food.

Jews always gathered the scraps because they regarded bread as a gift from God. Small wicker baskets were part of the clothing of the day. They would have been useful for carrying all sorts of things.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Pack small snack parcels for the children today and bring them to your session. This could be small pita bread and some type of fish (sardines are especially smelly and will help make the story stay in the children's minds for years to come!). You could have individual packs or one to share. Help everyone unpack and eat their snack before you tell the story.

How about a real teacher challenge today? If you were a mother living in New Testament times, how would you pack the lunch? No paper and no plastic!

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The Story:

Many people heard about Jesus. They heard that he was a good teacher and helped people to learn more about God. They heard that he could make sick people well. Sometimes, big crowds of people gather to hear Jesus speak.

One time Jesus and His apostles wanted to spend time together away from the big crowds of people. Where could they go to be alone? They decided to get into a boat and sail to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. They could rest and talk together in the quiet of the grassy green hills away from cities and people. So they sailed across.

The Sea of Galilee is not very big. It is not actually a sea but a lake. The people could see Jesus and His apostles landing the boat on the distant shore. The people wanted to be with Jesus so much that they decided to follow Him. They walked around the lake to the other shore. Soon, a huge crowd of people gathered again to hear Jesus preach. There were five thousand men plus women and children. Jesus knew that the people must really be serious if they walked all the way around the lake. He did not rest but spent all day teaching the people about God.

When evening came, the apostles began to wonder how all of these people were going to eat. They were far away from any towns. Maybe Jesus should stop preaching so the people could walk to a town and buy some food. Jesus knew the apostles were worried. He asked one of the apostles, "Philip, where are we going to buy bread for all of these people?"

Philip was from a town near there, and he knew that it would cost a lot to buy food for over five thousand people. Philip answered Jesus, "I would have to work for eight months to earn enough money to feed this crowd!"

Andrew was another apostle. He had been asking people in the crowd if they had any food. He found one boy who had brought his lunch. The boy did not have much food. He only had two small fish and five small loaves of bread. Andrew did not know how this small amount would feed over five thousand people, but he took the food to Jesus anyway. He knew that Jesus could do anything!

Jesus said, "Divide all of the people into groups of fifty and tell them to sit down on the grass." Soon the whole crowd was divided into small groups.

Then Jesus did a wonderful thing! He prayed to God to thank Him for the food, and then he began handing bread and fish to people. Jesus began with only two fish and five loaves of bread, but every time he handed them to someone, more bread and fish would appear. Jesus gave bread and fish to everyone in the whole

crowd. Everyone ate bread and fish until they were full!

Finally, when everyone was finished, they cleaned up all of the small pieces of bread left over. The leftover bread was enough to fill twelve baskets full!

Jesus fed over five thousand people from two little fish and five small loaves of bread. Jesus was powerful enough to take care of a whole crowd of people. Jesus is powerful enough to take care of you and me.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download these illustrations and the slideshow.](#) Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story, while reflection questions encourage them to internalize its meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. [Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.](#)

Review:

1. What did the people do when Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee? (They followed Him)
2. What was the problem that happened? (People needed to eat a meal, but there was not enough food for the people to eat)
3. Whose lunch did Jesus feed the crowd with? (A boy's lunch)
4. What food did the boy have in his lunch? (Two small fish and five small loaves of bread)
5. How many men were in the crowd that Jesus fed? (Five thousand)
6. Who else was in the crowd? (Women and children)
7. What did Jesus do before giving the fish and bread to the crowd? (Prayed and thanks God for the food)
8. What did the apostles fill twelve baskets with after the meal? (Leftover bread)
9. Who did the people say Jesus must be after seeing the miracle? (The Prophet God sent)
10. What did you learn about God from this story?
11. What did you learn about Jesus from this story?

Reflection:

1. Imagine you are in the crowd of people sitting outside on the hills, listening to Jesus teach. What do you feel? What do you hear? What do you see?
2. How many people do you think there were total, since there were 5000 men and an unknown amount of women and children?
3. Do you think the food given to the crowd tasted good?
4. How do you think the disciples felt when they realized there wasn't enough food to feed everyone?
5. Do you think the disciples doubted Jesus could feed the entire crowd?
6. How do you think the boy felt that Jesus used his lunch to feed the crowd?

7. What do you think the boy did when he went home after hearing Jesus teach and seeing the miracle?
8. What can you pray and thank God for, like how Jesus thanked God for the bread and fish?
9. What is something you wonder about in this story?
10. What do you need God to help you with? What miracle would you like God to do in your life? (Suggestion: pray and ask for God's help, pray and ask for God to do miracles that glorify Him)

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. [A variety of prayer methods are found here.](#)

Song Suggestions:

- [Jesus' Love is a-Bubblin' Over Song](#)
- [One, Two, Three Jesus Loves Me Song](#)
- [Yes! Jesus Loves Me](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- Have a picnic snack of bread and fish today. If the weather is nice, consider eating outside and sitting on the grass while you tell today's story. Be sure to clean up all of the scraps!
- Talk about what it would have been like to have been there that day. Discuss that from the perspective of different characters: Jesus, Philip, Andrew, the boy and the crowd.
- Older children can use a bible concordance to find out what types of fish were found in the Sea of Galilee. Also, learn more about the types of bread that were eaten. Sample different types of fish.
- Calculate how much it would cost to feed 5000 men (estimate how many women and children). Maybe you could plan on having each person eat a hamburger, fries, and drink. How many groups of 50 would that have been?
- Older children can do a "gospel harmony" – Read each gospel account of the story and jot down the facts you learn from each. Note what is similar and what is unique in each gospel account of this story.



Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable

reflection page. [Free printables for this story.](#)

Crafts:



Draw bread and fish on a paper plate or round paper.

- Print bookmarks, trading cards or timelines ([printable pages](#)).
- Visit the [Teaching Ideas](#) page for additional activities and crafts.

Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page with text \(Ministry Spark\)](#)
- [Colouring page \(Free colouring\)](#)
- [Craft: Cute fish mobile made from toilet paper or paper towel tubes. \(Catholic icing\)](#)
- [Craft: Loaves and fishes necklace using macaroni \(Busy bee kids crafts\)](#)

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