

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 66** and ask **Question #1:**

What was something provided for you as a child that you didn't appreciate at the time?

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG, page 67** to the story about Operation Christmas Child®. Tell about the child who was blind and received a Walkman® as a gift, God's perfect provision.

SAY: "Today we will look at how Jesus demonstrated He cared for the needs of the people and met those basic needs through the feeding of the five thousand."

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 67: Jesus cares and meets the needs in our lives.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to teach us that He cares for us and is the Source of our provision.

SESSION 6 JESUS PROVIDES



The Point

Jesus cares and meets the needs in our lives.

The Bible Meets Life

Many people relegate Jesus to solely the spiritual realm—as though the spiritual life is separate from all other areas of life. Jesus saves the whole person. He seeks to

help us and sustain us in every area of every life—and we can trust Him to do so. As Jesus meets our every need, we can be a conduit of His care in the lives of others

The Passage

Mark 6:34-44

The Setting

After healing Jairus's daughter, Jesus continued His ministry in the region of Galilee. Jesus received a disappointing reception in His hometown of Nazareth, after which He sent the disciples out on their first mission adventure without Him (Mark 6:1-13). Upon their return, in an effort to get away from the crowds for some much needed rest, Jesus and His disciples headed for a secluded spot (vv. 30-32)—but things didn't go quite as expected.

Mark 6:34-37

34 When he went ashore, he saw a large crowd and had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then he began to teach them many things.

35 When it grew late, his disciples approached him and said, “This place is deserted, and it is already late.

36 Send them away so that they can go into the surrounding countryside and villages to buy themselves something to eat.”

37 “You give them something to eat,” he responded. They said to him, “Should we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?”

KEY WORDS: **Two hundred denarii** (v. 37)—In the first century, a denarius was worth about one day’s wage for a laborer working in the fields. Two hundred denarii was roughly eight months of income.

Verse 34. In a world where people often can feel lonely and isolated, the fact that Jesus knows our needs and meets them resonates deeply. Perhaps this is part of the reason why Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand is among the most well-known miracle accounts in the Gospels. Its significance is underscored by the fact that it is the only one of Jesus’ miracles to be found in all four Gospels (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:34-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14).

1 ▶ Jesus and His disciples needed a break. They had been traveling around sharing the good news about the kingdom’s arrival. Jesus directed the disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee to a solitary place where they could recharge their batteries (Mark 6:30-32). Luke indicated they were headed toward the town of Bethsaida on the northeast shore of the lake (Luke 9:10).

But the crowds that followed Jesus wherever He went made this next to impossible. While Jesus and His disciples were in the boat moving across the Sea of Galilee, the people were following them along the shoreline to meet them at their landing spot. The distance was probably in the range of four or five miles on foot. When Jesus and His disciples arrived at their destination, they found another multitude—and no chance to rest. ◀

STUDY THE BIBLE

Mark 6:34-37



10 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 68.

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Mark 6:34-37.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** to provide the contextual background for the feeding of the five thousand.

SAY: “Ever had days like that? It’s been a long day—or week!—and all you want to do is come home to rest and relax. Instead, you are greeted with a mountain of problems and obstacles to overcome as soon as you pull into the driveway. So it was with the disciples: they needed rest and refreshment—but more people with more needs were waiting for them when they got to where they were going.”

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 70**, to the paragraph that begins: “In the first century, sheep were a metaphor people understood.” Ask group members to review the page and share characteristics of sheep and why they needed a shepherd to take care of them.

SAY: “People are just like sheep in this regard.”

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 69**, to the verses about sheep scattered as sheep without a shepherd. Ask a group member to read:

- 1 Kings 22:17
- Ezekiel 34:5-6

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 2** to provide more details about the phrase *sheep without a shepherd*.

DISCUSS: Question #2 (PSG, p.): **Where do you see evidence of God’s compassion in the world today?**

2 ▶ Of course, Jesus could have dispersed the crowd easily. He had cleared a crowd of mourners at Jairus’s house, and He certainly had the authority to tell these people to go back home. Or, He could have gotten back in the boat and sailed for another destination. But He didn’t do either. Instead, He was moved with **compassion**. Jesus didn’t just see a crowd of people. He saw **sheep without a shepherd**. Sheep are generally helpless without the guidance and protection of a shepherd. Without a shepherd, sheep can find neither food to eat nor water to drink. They can wander into deadly situations or get lost with no hope of finding their way home. They are susceptible to predators and to the elements. The phrase *sheep without a shepherd* suggests both lostness and a lack of spiritual leadership.¹

Jesus’ compassion was more than just an emotional feeling; it included a tangible aspect. It wasn’t just concern—it was concern in action. Jesus saw the needs of the people and then did something to meet those needs. He began to teach them “many things.” Mark did not to provide the content of Jesus’ teaching on this occasion, but in Luke’s account of these events, he wrote that Jesus “welcomed them, spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing” (Luke 9:11). ◀

3 ▶ **Verse 35.** Apparently Jesus’ teaching went on for an extended period of time because it **grew late**. The disciples became concerned about their situation and approached Jesus. They identified two logistical problems: they were in a remote location and it was already late. They had come to a secluded spot intending to get away from the crowds for a while. However, that plan had not worked out as intended and being in a deserted area now worked against them—at least from the disciples’ perspective. They were losing the daylight and the crowd of people would now be growing hungry and would have a long trip home ahead of them.

Verses 36-37. Given their situation, the disciples made what probably to them seemed like a logical suggestion. They told Jesus, “**Send [the people] away so that they can go into the surrounding countryside and villages to buy themselves something to eat.**” On the surface, the disciples’ advice to send the people away made sense. If the people were sent away, there apparently was still enough time before dark for them to reach the surrounding villages to find food to eat and perhaps a place to stay for the night if

their homes were too far away. But Jesus had another plan. Instead of relying on someone else to solve the problem, He put the ball right back into the disciples' court with His words: **“You give them something to eat.”**

Jesus' statement challenged the disciples to change their perspective. During their time with Jesus, the twelve disciples had experienced a great deal—powerful teaching, a storm stilled, exorcisms, healings, a resurrection, and so much more. They themselves had performed exorcisms and healings when Jesus sent them out to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God and repentance in His name and with His authority (Mark 6:7-13). ◀

4 ▶ Unfortunately, the disciples continued to focus only on the magnitude of the problem. Their response, **“Should we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?”** displayed skepticism and probably a fair amount of frustration. It may have even been said with a degree of sarcasm and disrespect.

The disciples' response also suggests they thought Jesus was telling them to go to the surrounding villages themselves to locate food for the crowd. However, even if they could have located enough food to feed the people, they faced a huge financial obstacle. Feeding such a large group of people would have required a tremendous sum of money—**two hundred denarii**. A denarius was roughly equivalent to a Jewish agricultural worker's daily salary, so two hundred denarii would have been more than half a year's wages. The disciples almost certainly did not have that kind of money. So Jesus' suggestion that they should provide everyone in the crowd with a meal probably seemed like a ridiculous idea to them. But the disciples still had not realized that Jesus saw opportunities where they saw only challenges. His instructions to His disciples to feed the people was not an unreasonable demand. It was a teachable moment, a chance for them to show that they had matured in their faith.

The account of this miracle in the Gospel of John provides some additional details. John indicated Jesus specifically asked Philip where they could find enough food to feed the people, and Philip was also the disciple who pointed out that feeding such a large group would cost two hundred denarii (John 6:5-7). John also noted that with His question Jesus was testing Philip (Mark's account indicates the test applied to the other disciples as well) and that Jesus already knew what He was going to do to resolve this situation. ◀

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** to show the flow of the conversation between Jesus and His disciples regarding what to do about the people with darkness closing in.

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS** on page 69 and **PSG page 68** to explain the phrase *two hundred denarii*.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 4** to give further explanation about *two hundred denarii*.

DISCUSS: Question #3 (PSG, p. 26): **What distractions may hinder us from recognizing ministry opportunities?**

(Alternate: How can we develop Christ-like compassion?)

TRANSITION: “In the next verses we discover how Jesus miraculously provided for the crowd of people.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

Mark 6:38-44



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Mark 6:38-44.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 71**, to the two ways the father provides for his children:

- *He provides for them physically*
- *He provides for them spiritually*

Note his statement: “When they grow up and move out of my house, if I have only taken care of them physically, I have not done my job as a believer.”

SAY: “Sometimes it is easy to think spiritual things are all that matter. But God created us as whole beings: spirit, soul, and body. Physical needs are important too.”

GUIDE: Refer members to **PSG page 71**, and ask a volunteer to read James 2:15-16.

Mark 6:38-44

38 He asked them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.”

When they found out they said, “Five, and two fish.”

39 Then he instructed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass.

40 So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.

41 He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed and broke the loaves. He kept giving them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.

42 Everyone ate and was satisfied.

43 They picked up twelve baskets full of pieces of bread and fish.

44 Now those who had eaten the loaves were five thousand men.

5 ▶ Verse 38. In solving many problems, one of the first steps is to take an inventory of one’s available resources. In response to the disciples’ protests, Jesus directed them to locate whatever food was readily available to them: “**How many loaves do you have? Go and see.**” We are not told how much time or effort the disciples put into the search, but we are told the results—and, from a human perspective, it wasn’t very encouraging. They could only find five loaves and two fish.

Loaves of bread were a staple item among the poor of Jesus’ day. These loaves were not like the loaves of bread we see on the shelves of our grocery stores. They were flat, round, made from barley, and slightly larger than a modern roll. The fish would have probably been dried and cured with salt. John’s Gospel indicates that the fish and loaves came from a young boy. Andrew, Peter’s brother, had found the youngster and brought the food to Jesus, but Andrew still wondered out loud about the impact such a small amount

could make (John 6:8-9). Jesus was about to demonstrate the difference that could be made with even such a small amount of food through the power of God.

Verses 39-40. Taking the next step toward meeting the people's needs, Jesus directed that the crowd be organized. He told His disciples to have the people sit down in groups. The disciples had the people sit down in groups comprised of fifty or one hundred people. This would have created dozens of smaller pockets of people spread out around the area where Jesus had been ministering.

Despite their skepticism, the disciples followed Jesus' commands. Their faithfulness in this task allowed them to become Jesus' hands and feet in the middle of an incredible miracle. As believers, we should remember that even when Jesus' demands make little or no sense to us, we have no idea as to the ways He can and will use our obedience for the good of others and the glory of God.

Mark's Gospel mentions that the people sat down on **the green grass**. This is indicative that the event took place in the spring, since that is the only time of year when much green grass can be found in Israel. It also would have meant that it was around the time of Passover (John 6:4).

Verse 41. Jesus approached this task like He had approached so many other tasks during His ministry: He prayed. Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus' taking time to talk with His Father before moving forward with the most important events in His life. For example, He prayed before choosing His twelve disciples (Luke 6:12-16), before raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:41-42), and before His arrest and crucifixion (Mark 14:32-42).

In this case, He prayed that His Father would bless the gift of the food that had been provided. Mark did not give the exact details of the blessing. It may have been a prayer of thanksgiving to show gratitude for what had been given—much like when we say “grace” over a meal today. Such a prayer recognizes that God is the ultimate source of our daily bread (Matt. 6:11; Luke 11:3). In first-century Israel, it was the common practice before a meal for the head of a Jewish household to bow his head and ask for God's blessing on the food about to be enjoyed, after which he broke the bread and gave it to family members.

After the prayer, Jesus **broke the loaves** and **divided the two fish**. Jesus gave these to His disciple who in turn gave the loaves and fish to the people. Despite their initial skepticism and lack of understanding, the disciples continued to be obedient to Jesus' commands

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 5** on pages 72-74 for further explanation about Jesus' provision that day:

- *He took inventory of the available resources. (Describe what the five loaves and two fishes were equivalent to for comparison.)*
- *He organized the crowd.*
- *He prayed.*
- *He broke the bread and divided the fish.*
- *He distributed the food through the disciples.*
- *Everyone was satisfied.*
- *He collected the leftovers.*

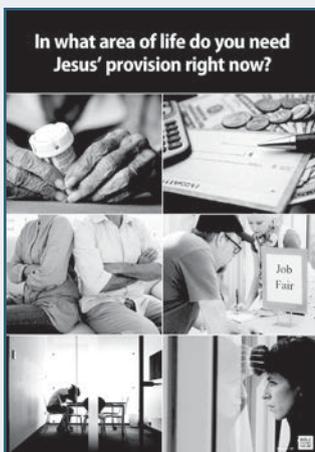
OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: You have people in your group known for their abilities as cooks and hosts/hostesses. How would these individuals plan for feeding a large crowd?

- *number of guests*
- *main entree*
- *sides*
- *plates, dishes, utensils*
- *drinks*
- *table settings*

Compare this process to how Jesus provided for the crowd.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 6** to point out that no need is beyond the capabilities of Jesus to meet.

LEADER PACK: Display **Item 6: Help Wanted** to help group members engage these themes in a visual way (Note: Consider dividing members into subgroups of two or three people each). Ask group members to consider the many ways God helps us and provides for us.



DISCUSS: Question #4 (PSG, p. 73): How has God proven to be sufficient for the challenges in your life?

and participated in the miraculous feeding of the crowd by handing out the food to the multitude. “They had recognized the need and were used by Jesus in meeting the need. God uses people who put themselves at his disposal.”²

Through His disciples, Jesus distributed the loaves and fish—and the food simply never ran out. As long as there was a need, Jesus was able to provide for that need. The scene was reminiscent of Elijah’s experience with the widow in the Sidonian city of Zarephath. With God’s blessing, her flour and oil never ran out during the famine-filled days of Ahab’s ungodly reign over Israel (1 Kings 17:8-16).

Verse 42. This verse seems simple and straightforward. **Everyone ate and was satisfied.** However, the statement takes on added significance when one considers the scope of the miracle. Starting with just enough provisions to make about two small fish sandwiches, Jesus fed an enormous crowd of people. But He didn’t just give enough to tide them over. They were all satisfied. Their hunger was alleviated. The event recalls God’s provision of quail and manna in the wilderness during the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. Through Moses, God gave the Israelites specific instructions about gathering what they needed. No one had too little, and no one had too much (Ex. 16:13-32).

Verse 43. Jesus didn’t just provide enough to satisfy the crowd’s needs; He went above and beyond what was expected. After distributing the miraculous meal, the disciples were charged with collecting the leftovers—and there were a lot of leftovers. In fact, the leftovers were more than what they had started with.

The uneaten food comprised **twelve baskets full of pieces of bread and fish.** The Greek term translated **baskets** was used to refer to wicker food baskets, but it also could have referred to large baskets that people (particularly Roman soldiers) used to haul things. The number **twelve** is significant in Scripture, and some have connected the baskets with God’s ultimate (and abundant) provision for the twelve tribes of Israel. However, it could simply mean that each of the twelve disciples had their own basket to fill. Mark’s Gospel does not indicate what the disciples did with the extra food, but such a large amount of leftovers does remind readers that we serve a loving and generous God. He does not deal in scarcities when it comes to meeting the needs of His people. ◀

6 ▶ Verse 44. The crowd really was quite a gathering, numbering **five thousand men**. While that is certainly an impressive number, it doesn't tell the whole story. The Greek word for "men" specifically refers to males, rather than a universal term for all the people present. The five thousand did not include the women and children present for the meal (Matt. 14:21). The total crowd could have been between 10,000 and 15,000 people. The population of the largest cities in that area ranged from between one thousand and three thousand residents. That means the crowd Jesus drew would have been incredibly large for that day. The population of entire towns may have come out to hear Him teach!

John recorded in his Gospel that this miracle had an effect beyond simply satisfying the hunger of the crowd. It also brought more attention to Jesus and continued to pique curiosity in His prophetic credentials. After being fed, some began referring to Jesus as "the Prophet" (John 6:14), a title with messianic undertones.

The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand reminds us that no need is beyond the capabilities of Jesus to meet. He knows exactly what we need and how to meet those needs. While Jesus certainly has the power to meet our physical needs, He meets our deeper spiritual needs as well, providing that which will satisfy our souls, not just our stomachs. Jesus' purpose in coming into our world as the Messiah was about so much more than just meeting people's physical needs. He didn't just come to provide people with bread for life; He came as the bread of life (John 6:35). He gives eternal life to all those who believe in Him, who repent of their sins and place their faith in Him for the forgiveness of those sins.

That God knows what we need and is capable of meeting our needs should provide a sense of peace in our lives, but it should also encourage us to be content with what God provides. In his letter to the Philippians—written while he was imprisoned in Rome—Paul told his readers that he had learned the power of contentment because he was confident God would supply any genuine need in his life (Phil. 4:10-19). Like Paul, in faith we can bring all our needs to Jesus because we know He cares about us and has the power to meet all our needs! ◀

1. James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 108.

2. Rodney L. Cooper, *Mark*, vol. 2 in *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 106.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 73**, to the paragraph that starts with: "Surely this miracle had an impact on the thousands gathered there, but the greatest beneficiaries were the twelve disciples. Through all the day's events, Jesus had been teaching His disciples:"

- Jesus had led **the disciples** to that spot for rest.
- Jesus asked **the disciples** to help feed the people.
- **The disciples** saw every aspect of the miraculous feeding unfold.
- **The disciples** were the ones who cleaned up afterwards.

DISCUSS: Question #5 (PSG, p. 74): Where do we have opportunities to participate in God's provision for others?

(Alternate: How do we balance the importance of meeting physical needs and spiritual needs?)

DO: Encourage group members to take a few minutes to complete the activity "**God Will Meet Your Needs**" on **PSG page 74**.

LIVE IT OUT**5 minutes**

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:** **Jesus cares and meets the needs in our lives.**

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 75)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

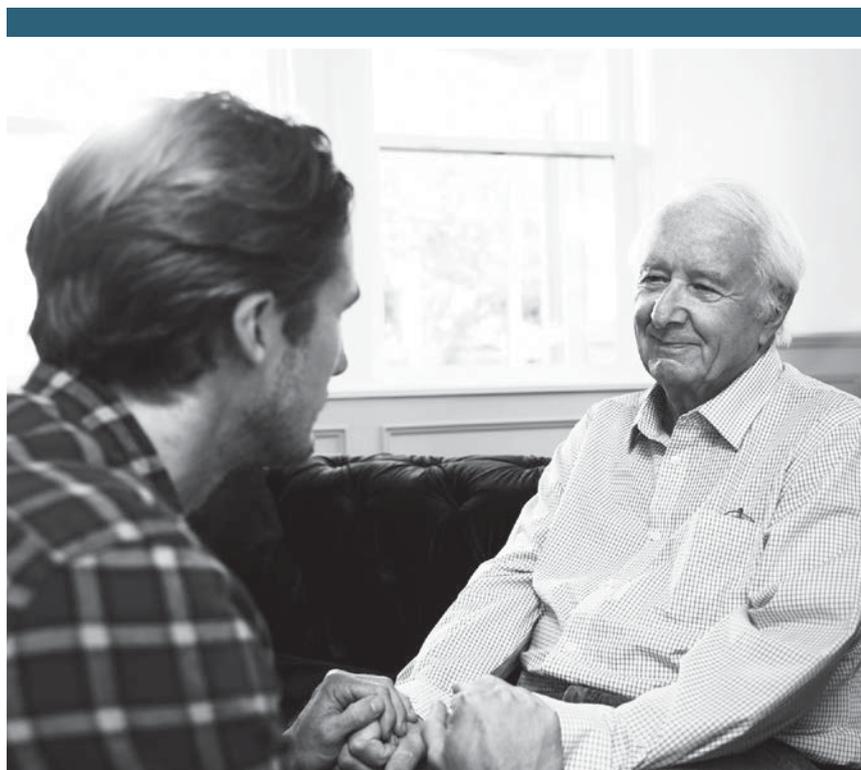
GUIDE: Remind group members that providing for our needs is what God does. Trust Him to supply every need in your life.

PRAY: "Father, when we are vulnerable and desperate, and feel like our situation is hopeless, remind us by Your Spirit and Your Word that You are faithful to meet our needs. Help us to trust You for Your provision in our lives."

LIVE IT OUT

How can you put your trust in Jesus' care and provision this week?

- ▶ **Communicate.** Take five minutes to thank God for giving you what He's given you and for doing what He's done for you so you can have a relationship with Him.
- ▶ **Count.** Make a list of the ways you have seen God provide for you in the past. Then, make a list of things that you need Him to provide now. Pray over the list. Frequently refer back to the list over the weeks to come to see how He has cared for you.
- ▶ **Care.** Be a channel of God's care and provision in the life of someone else. Find one person with big needs and help that person as an expression of thanks for the way God has provided for you.



BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



An oven similar to this would have been typical in an Old Testament Era dwelling. A cooking pot is on top of the oven.

Both the Old and New Testaments used bread as imagery. The following are examples (all from the ESV):

- ▶ **Numbers 14:9** Joshua and Caleb told the Israelites they could conquer the Canaanites “for they are bread for us.”
- ▶ **Psalms 80:5** Asaph refers to God feeding them with the “bread of tears.”
- ▶ **Proverbs 4:17** The ungodly eat the “bread of wickedness.”

▶ **Proverbs 31:27** The good wife “does not eat the bread of idleness.”

▶ **Isaiah 30:20** The Lord gives the “bread of adversity.”

▶ **Isaiah 55:2** “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread?”

▶ **Matthew 6:11** “Give us this day our daily bread.”

▶ **John 6:35** “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life.’”

▶ **John 6:50-51** “Jesus answered, ... “This is the bread that comes down from heaven. ... I am the living bread.”

▶ **Acts 2:42** “They devoted themselves to ... the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

▶ **Acts 20:7** “On the first day of the week, ... we ... gathered together to break bread.”

The excerpt above is from the article “Bread and Bread Making in the Ancient World” (Fall 2011), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Some of Jesus’ most famous miracles were accomplished by providing for large crowds. He continues to provide for us, especially through His free gift of eternal life.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, “Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All,” on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.



MINISTRY GRID
training made simple

Get expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid.

MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife