

Semicontinuous

2 Sam. 11:26–12:13a

Ps. 51:1–12

Complementary

Exod. 16:2–4, 9–15

Ps. 78:23–29

Eph. 4:1–16

John 6:24–35

Jesus, the Bread of Life

**Goal for
the Session**

Encountering Jesus as the bread of life, adults will consider ways to feed on this life-giving source.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on John 6:24–35

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Wayne A. Meeks

So the people now piously ask Jesus, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” (v. 28). For the reader who has paid attention, however, the question signals one of those recurring themes that reverberate through this Gospel. The “works of God” are, on one level, the miraculous deeds that Jesus performs, equivalent to his “signs” (5:19–23). At a deeper level, they are the whole of his mission in the world, which he must “complete” (*telesthai*), ultimately on the cross (4:34; 5:36; 17:4; 19:30; cf. 14:9–12). For those who come to him, Jesus here defines “the work of God” as faith in himself, God’s envoy in the world (v. 29)—an astonishing claim.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Christopher Morse

“Christ does not reply to the question put to him,” writes John Calvin, when we seek “in Christ something other than Christ himself.” Yet the questioning of Jesus, misdirected as it is, is not disregarded in this passage but used to disclose a more confounding truth. The very signs the crowds look for obscure what is already there for them of life-and-death significance. The demands they make are overtaken by the bread of life that they are given. The works they insistently ask about performing mistake the work God is performing of bringing them to life in faith.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” O. Benjamin Sparks

Perhaps the most startling place for us to end is where the text begins: “Rabbi,” the crowd asks Jesus, “when did you come here?” It is a play on words. On the surface they want to know when he came (geographically) to where they discovered him. But they also mean (even without knowing, as is typical of John) that they want to know when the Son of God came here to earth. He came from God, and he came to do the work of his Father, to give his life for the sake of the world, so that those who trust in him might receive everlasting life. Do we believe the good news—not caring whether believing brings us material prosperity or personal happiness—for that new, transformed life along the way?

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” William H. Willimon

“Faith,” as the word is used here, means more than clarity about the facts, belief in a set of propositions. Faith means encounter with a person, one who is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (14:6). The one who speaks to us in this peculiarly metaphorical way is the one who desires not only that we think about him but that we feed on him, ingest him, implying that we could starve to death without him.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

John 6:24–35

Focus on Your Teaching

In today's consumer culture, many adults unconsciously apply the values of the marketplace to how they choose a community of faith. A family may be attracted by a church with a vibrant program for children and youth. Others may be drawn to a strong music program, a contemporary worship service, or to the church known to have a dynamic preacher. While any of these things may satisfy our appetites for what we think we want, our spiritual hunger may remain unsatisfied. Some adults may find it challenging to apply a different standard to their faith than the marketplace suggests. Others may welcome an encounter with the bread of life that will satisfy that deep hunger.

O God, I yearn to encounter you in your Word. Guide my preparation, that I may also lead the adults who seek to encounter you. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- loaf of bread
- Bibles
- pens
- paper
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for August 9, 2015

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 2: Resource Sheet 1, pens, paper
- option 3: three or more kinds of bread

In John's Gospel, Jesus uses the phrase "I am" to identify himself as bread, light, door, shepherd, resurrection and life, way, truth and life, and vine. Each is intended to reveal who Jesus is so that people might have faith.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, place the loaf of bread on a table along with a Bible and a candle. For option 3 in Responding, obtain three or more kinds of bread or grain products, such as tortillas, naan, pita, or rice cakes.

Welcome participants. Call attention to the loaf of bread and ask participants to name stories from Scripture that use bread as a key element. Remind the group that in the last session they explored one story where bread played a key role, and that in this session they will continue an exploration of John's Gospel.

Pray the following:

Holy God, we come seeking to meet you in your Word. Make us receptive to what we may encounter here together. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

EXPLORING

Invite participants to set the context for today's session by reviewing the last session's focus scripture. Ask them to scan John 6:1–21. Then remind the group that often before an episode of a TV series airs, there will be a brief recap of the relevant points of past sessions in order to bring viewers up to speed. Say, "Previously in the book of John . . ." and begin by saying that after Jesus healed on the Sabbath, he and his disciples went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Invite a volunteer to name the next thing that happened. Continue eliciting details in the narrative until both accounts (the feeding story and Jesus walking on water) have been told.

Tell adults that today's session continues the story. Invite the group to listen for the questions of the crowd and Jesus' responses as a volunteer reads John 6:24–35 aloud. After

the reading, distribute paper and pens and form pairs. Ask one person in each pair to read quickly over the passage and jot down the crowd's questions while the other reads the passage and records Jesus' answers. Ask the pairs then to discuss the following:

- ✧ What do you notice about the crowd's questions? About Jesus' answers?
- ✧ What do the questions and answers reveal about the crowd's understanding, or lack of same, of the feeding miracle they had experienced just the previous day?

In the larger group, invite participants to report significant points of their conversation. Call the group's attention to the phrase "food that perishes" in verse 27 and to the crowd's reference to manna in verse 31. Ask someone to read aloud Exodus 16:1–3 and 13–21. Discuss:

- ✧ What was God's directive to the people about gathering manna?
- ✧ In the focus scripture, the crowd refers to manna. Jesus speaks of the food that perishes. What do you think Jesus means when he speaks of the food that endures?

Distribute Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on John 6:24–35). Ask participants to read the "What?" "Where?" and "So What?" excerpts in silence. Discuss:

- ✧ Based on what you have read in these excerpts, how would you define the works of God?
- ✧ What is the relationship to faith and to a transformed life?

To transition to Responding, ask someone to read aloud the "Now What?" excerpt. Discuss:

- ✧ What is the difference between faith as belief in a set of propositions and faith as an encounter with a person, Jesus Christ?

Encourage the group to reflect on what it might mean to feed on Jesus, to ingest him.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session.

1. **Spiritual Reading of Scripture** By engaging in the spiritual reading of Scripture, adults will experience the formational power of feeding on the Word. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Savoring the Word). Have someone read aloud the quotation from Guigo II the Carthusian. Briefly review the four steps of spiritual reading of Scripture. Then, following the instructions on the sheet, engage the group in a sacred reading of the focus scripture.

Encourage participants to use the resource sheet at home to engage in spiritual reading using any short passage of Scripture, a hymn text, or a piece of poetry.

2. **Soul Food?** Adults can assess the ways they invite people into their community of faith to see if what they are offering is an invitation to partake of the soul-satisfying bread of life. Ask someone to read aloud the question that ends the "So What?" excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. In the larger essay from which it is taken, the writer observes that we are accustomed to inviting people into the community of faith for the wrong reasons—that we are good marketers rather than true witnesses to the bread of life. Form pairs and invite participants to make a list of all the needs and desires they can think of

EASY
PREP

that motivate persons with a consumer point of view who are approaching a potential church home. In the larger group, ask each pair to report. Then ask:

✧ How do faith communities “market” themselves to appeal to these consumers?

Distribute pens and paper. Ask participants, in their pairs, to create an ad that, instead of promoting the “services” your church can provide to consumeristic seekers, focuses on an invitation to partake of the living bread. After allowing time to work, have volunteers read their ads. Give the ads to your pastor or a member of your governing board for their consideration. Encourage participants to reflect on and pray about what kind of invitation they convey to those who coming seeking a church home.

- 3. Partake of Bread** In reflecting on what bread provides as sustenance and how it functions, adults can explore more deeply how the bread of life sustains our spiritual life and provides nourishment for our faith journeys. Form small groups. Call attention to the tray or plate of different breads and invite each group to choose one of the breads, with each person taking a piece. In their small group, ask them to talk about how people might use this bread in a meal. What might accompany it? What nutrients does it provide?

Remind the group that while bread is often just an addition to a full meal in our culture, it may be the mainstay of the diet for those in the developing world. As they discuss, encourage them to use their mind’s eye to imagine the importance of rice, naan, tortillas, or other grain products to these people.

In the larger group, invite small groups to report their observations and insights about the nature and significance of bread. Then form a circle. Ask each person in turn to offer their piece of bread to the person to their right, with the words, “(Name), the bread of life will satisfy your hunger.” Encourage adults to reflect on Jesus, the living bread, as they eat bread in the coming week.

CLOSING

Invite the group to listen as you read the questions slowly that were asked by the crowd: *Rabbi, when did you come here?* (pause) *What must we do to perform the works of God?* (pause) *What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you?* *What works are you performing?* (pause) *Sir, give us this bread always.*

Close by reading verse 35 and the following sentence:

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Let us continue to reflect this week on following Jesus, the bread of life. Friends, go in peace.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for August 9, 2015, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

Focus on John 6:24–35

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Wayne A. Meeks

So the people now piously ask Jesus, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” (v. 28). For the reader who has paid attention, however, the question signals one of those recurring themes that reverberate through this Gospel. The “works of God” are, on one level, the miraculous deeds that Jesus performs, equivalent to his “signs” (5:19–23). At a deeper level, they are the whole of his mission in the world, which he must “complete” (*telesthai*), ultimately on the cross (4:34; 5:36; 17:4; 19:30; cf. 14:9–12). For those who come to him, Jesus here defines “the work of God” as faith in himself, God’s envoy in the world (v. 29)—an astonishing claim.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Christopher Morse

“Christ does not reply to the question put to him,” writes John Calvin, when we seek “in Christ something other than Christ himself.” Yet the questioning of Jesus, misdirected as it is, is not disregarded in this passage but used to disclose a more confounding truth. The very signs the crowds look for obscure what is already there for them of life-and-death significance. The demands they make are overtaken by the bread of life that they are given. The works they insistently ask about performing mistake the work God is performing of bringing them to life in faith.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,”
O. Benjamin Sparks

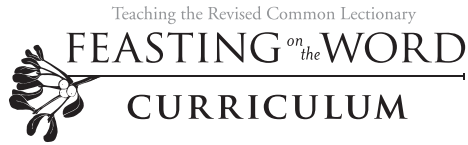
Perhaps the most startling place for us to end is where the text begins: “Rabbi,” the crowd asks Jesus, “when did you come here?” It is a play on words. On the surface they want to know when he came (geographically) to where they discovered him. But they also mean (even without knowing, as is typical of John) that they want to know when the Son of God came here to earth. He came from God, and he came to do the work of his Father, to give his life for the sake of the world, so that those who trust in him might receive everlasting life. Do we believe the good news—not caring whether believing brings us material prosperity or personal happiness—for that new, transformed life along the way?

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,”
William H. Willimon

“Faith,” as the word is used here, means more than clarity about the facts, belief in a set of propositions. Faith means encounter with a person, one who is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (14:6). The one who speaks to us in this peculiarly metaphorical way is the one who desires not only that we think about him but that we feed on him, ingest him, implying that we could starve to death without him.

August 2, 2015
Jesus, the Bread of Life



Adult
Resource Sheet 2

Savoring the Word

Reading seeks for the sweetness of a blessed life, meditation perceives it, prayer asks for it, contemplation tastes it. Reading, as it were, puts food whole in the mouth, meditation chews it and breaks it up, prayer extracts its flavor, contemplation is the sweetness itself which gladdens and refreshes.

Guigo II the Carthusian, *The Ladder of Monks*¹

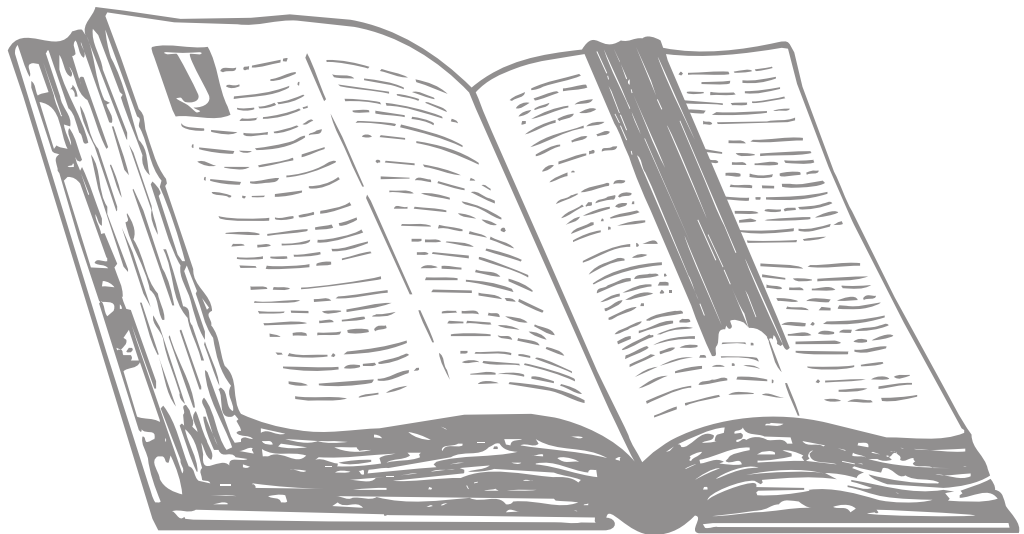
Spiritual reading of Scripture is a way of reading Scripture that is formational rather than informational. One ancient practice, called *lectio divina*, is a fourfold rhythm of listening and personal response that can be used by individuals or groups.

Lectio (reading): Read a short passage of Scripture. Read it again more slowly (*with a group, ask a second person to read the passage*). As you read or listen to the reading, be alert for a word or phrase that jumps out or seems to be addressed personally to you. Repeat it slowly to yourself (*in a group, invite persons to say the word or phrase aloud*).

Meditatio (reflection): As you read the passage a third time, or as it is read aloud to you, let it evoke a response in you—a word, an emotion, an image, a memory (*in a group, invite persons to name this response*). Hold it and savor it.

Oratio (prayer): Reflect on the meaning of the word from Scripture and whatever response it evoked in you. What might God be saying to you?

Comtemplatio (contemplation): Allow your prayer to move into a time of silent reflection.



1. From Norvene Vest, *Bible Reading for Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 91.