

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

The Bread of Life

Goal for the Session Youth will examine the metaphor of bread and model hospitable ways of offering bread to others.

■ 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

Young people are neither more nor less self-interested than the rest of us. Like all of us, youth can be guilty of practicing their faith with a view toward its tangible rewards: What will God do for me? Like the crowds who sought Jesus because he had given them physical food once and now they were hungry again, we all sometimes think of faith as a means to an end—when, in reality, faith is an encounter with Jesus himself. In this session, help youth explore how the metaphor of Jesus as the Bread of Life can transform their faith from taking to giving.

Holy God, be with me, preparing my heart, mind, and voice to teach. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- plate
- bread or crackers
- Bibles
- newsprint
- markers
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- pens or pencils
- small slips of paper

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, contemplative music, music player
- option 2: copies of Communion liturgy from a worship bulletin, hymnal, or pastor's resources
- option 3: construction paper, markers

For Web Connection

- computer with Internet access

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, get a list of members who are ill or homebound and prepare a plate of bread or crackers (gluten-free if necessary).

Greet the first participant to arrive and offer him or her a piece of bread, saying, “This is the bread of life.” Invite that person to do the same for the next participant to arrive, and so on, until all have been greeted and served; the last person to arrive may then serve you.

Say: “While this was not a service of Communion, the words and gestures we shared were similar to those that are used in Communion.” Lead a reflection on this activity by exploring the following questions:

- ✪ What do we mean when we say, “This is the bread of life”?
- ✪ What or who does the bread of communion represent?

Explain that the metaphor of “the Bread of Life,” representing Jesus, comes from John 6:35, part of the Scripture passage the youth will be exploring in this session. Pray:

Holy God, thank you for calling us together to study your Word and reflect on our faith in Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. Amen.

EXPLORING

Remind the youth of last week's Scripture passage, Jesus' feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1–15). Set the scene by explaining that it is now the next day; the crowd that Jesus fed is hungry again, and the people go looking for him. Invite the youth to read John 6:24–35 silently, and then ask a volunteer to read the passage aloud.

Because this passage and the concepts it expresses are complex, begin your exploration by considering the crowd's four questions to Jesus one at a time. Ask the youth to identify each

of the questions (vv. 25, 28, 30), while you or a volunteer write them on a posted sheet of newsprint. For each of the crowd's questions and Jesus' responses, discuss:

- ✧ Does Jesus answer the question? Why or why not?
- ✧ How might you put Jesus' answer in your own words?
- ✧ To what extent does the crowd understand Jesus' answer?

Point out that the crowd's last words in this passage are not a question but a demand: "Sir, give us this bread always" (v. 34). Discuss Jesus' response by exploring the following questions:

- ✧ Jesus says, "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry" (v. 35). What does it mean to "come to" Jesus?
- ✧ Jesus also says, "whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (v. 35). What does this mean? How is this like or unlike coming to Jesus, as in the previous sentence?

Have the youth work on the resource sheet in small groups, in pairs, or individually, depending on the size of the class.

To explore these concepts further, distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Faith). Give participants time to respond to the questions on the resource sheet, and then invite them to offer their reflections on each of those questions to the whole class. When everyone who wishes to contribute has done so, ask:

- ✧ What are the main similarities and differences between our personal definitions of faith?
- ✧ What difficulties do we share in being faithful?
- ✧ How does the idea that faith is a gift of God, rather than something we grow by our own ability and strength, affect your understanding of what it means to be a Christian?

Returning to the metaphor of Jesus as the Bread of Life, wrap up your exploration of John 6:24–35 by inviting the youth to place themselves in the Scripture passage as part of the crowd and considering the following questions:

- ✧ Just the day before, Jesus fed you—miraculously—with fishes and loaves of bread. How do you feel now, knowing that today's bread is spiritual rather than physical?
- ✧ Jesus tries to make clear that he, the "bread of life" (v. 35), is a gift from God to you. What will you do with this gift?
- ✧ How might you offer Jesus' gift of himself to others?

Invite participants to continue to reflect on this final question as you move through the rest of the session.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

1. **Now What?** Youth will reflect artistically on what it means to receive and give the "bread of life." Give each person a copy of Resource Sheet 2 (Now What?) and play some soft contemplative music while participants engage in the activities on the resource sheet. When time is up, gather the group and invite those who are willing to show or recite their artistic interpretation of John 6:35. Ask: How will you put these reflections into practice in your everyday life?

EASY
PREP

Consider asking a pastor to provide insights into the meaning of the symbols used in Communion or even to join your class for this activity, offering in person her or his reflections on Communion and Jesus as the bread of life.

If the youth are willing and able, arrange for them to deliver the greeting cards in person.

- 2. Communion Reflection** Youth will reflect on the words, gestures, and ideas behind Communion as the church's expression of Jesus' self-giving hospitality. Distribute copies of the Communion liturgy similar to that used in your church: key elements of such liturgy are an invitation to the Lord's table, a prayer of thanksgiving, and the Words of Institution. Read the liturgy together, and then explore the following questions:
 - ✧ Where do you see ideas and language from John 6:24–35 in the liturgy?
 - ✧ How has your study of Jesus' words in John 6:24–35 changed your understanding of Communion or helped you understand it better?
 - ✧ In what other ways does the church model Jesus' self-giving and hospitality?
- 3. Offer the Bread of Life** Youth will offer their friendship and Jesus' words to persons in the congregation who are ill or homebound. Divide the list of recipient names among participants, and then set out construction paper and markers to make simple greeting cards. Suggest that the cards contain lines of Scripture from John 6:24–35, a personal note, and appropriate decoration. When all are finished, invite everyone to sign each card; then, lead a reflection on this activity:
 - ✧ What gives the cards the power to touch someone's life in a meaningful way?
 - ✧ How might we make these gifts even more meaningful?

CLOSING

Gather the group in a seated circle, and give each person a small slip of paper and a pen or pencil. Invite the youth to take a moment of silent reflection, thinking of at least one way that they might offer the bread of life to others. Have them write their idea(s) on the slip of paper. When all are finished, pass the plate (used in Gathering) around the circle and have the youth place their slips of paper on the plate.

When the plate returns to you, lead the group in a closing prayer:

Dear God, we offer you these gifts of our time, our energy, our creativity—our very selves. Use these gifts to build up your reign and the lives of your children, helping us in the process to continue to grow as your faithful followers. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

■ ENHANCEMENT

WEB CONNECTION

On an Internet-connected computer, go to The Brick Testament's interpretation of "The Flesh and Blood of Jesus" (<http://tinyurl.com/pzteefj>). This series of six LEGO® scenes covers selected verses that occur later in John 6, after Jesus again refers to himself as "the bread of life" (John 6:48). After paging through the scenes together, explore the following questions:

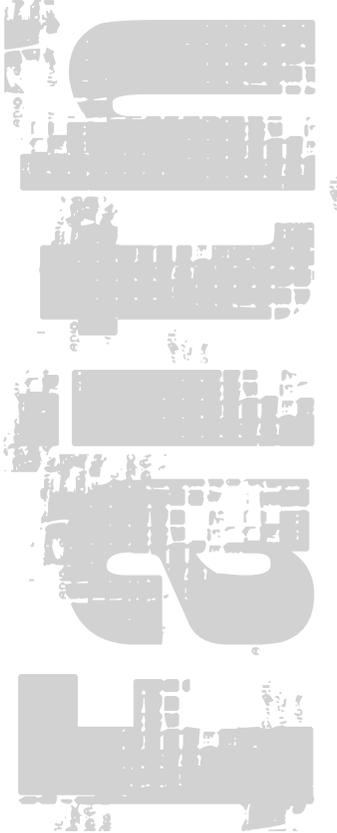
- ✧ What new insights on Jesus as the Bread of Life have you gained as a result of viewing The Brick Testament scenes?
- ✧ How would you answer the people's question in John 6:52: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

August 2, 2015
The Bread of Life



Youth
Resource Sheet 1

Faith



Define *faith* in your own words.

Jesus says, “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35). How is your own faith reflected in Jesus’ words?

In the “What?” excerpt on page 1, Wayne A. Meeks says, “For those who come to him, Jesus here defines ‘the work of God’ as faith in himself.” In the “Where?” excerpt, Christopher Morse speaks of “the work God is performing of bringing [the crowd] to life in faith.” These statements suggest that faith is a work of God—i.e., God gives us faith. How does this idea square with your understanding of faith?

Now What?

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

“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.

From “Homiletical Perspective” by William H. Willimon

              	<p>Instructions: Circle key words in the paragraph above and write down important words and phrases from John 6:35. Then use the space below to sketch or compose a visual or poetic interpretation of what these ideas mean to you and what it means to offer the “bread of life” to others.</p>