

THE GENEROUS HEART

• A BIBLE STUDY FEAST FOR ALL •

Session 6 – The Feeding of the Five Thousand: **LOVE**

..... APPETISER

The following background notes are provided to help you in preparation for the main teaching and follow-up activities. A summary of the content is provided in the teaching video to be shown in the 'Today's Special' section of this session.

*'For the Lord is good and his **LOVE** endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.'* (Psalm 100:5)

In Psalm 100:5 we are reminded of God's love and faithfulness throughout the generations. Our story for today is the only miracle of Jesus shared in all four Gospels. This is obviously a story that should be remembered through all the generations. In this session we will move among the different Gospel accounts while focusing on Matthew 14:13-21:

'When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed those who were ill.

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

"Bring them here to me," he said. And he told the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.'

Our Scripture starts when Jesus heard the news of John the Baptist's beheading. It's understandable that Jesus wanted to move away from the crowds to grieve in private. Unfortunately he was unable to do this, as word of his presence spread quickly and the people left the towns by foot to follow him and hear more of what he had to say. Imagine the scene as Jesus came to the shore and saw all the people waiting for him. Instead of turning them away, *'he had compassion on them and healed those who were ill'* (Matthew 14:14). They were in a remote location and the day was getting late.

SHOUT

'Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.' (Psalm 100:1).

In Psalm 100:1 we discovered that the 'shout' was a declaration of allegiance to the king and a recognition of the sovereign's power. The disciples witnessed Jesus performing miracles, but did they understand they were in the presence of God himself? In John's account, Jesus turned to his disciple

Philip and asked, *“Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”* He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.’ (John 6:5-6)

- **What** was the test?
- **What** was Jesus trying to discover about Philip’s faith?
- **Did** Philip recognise who Jesus was?
- **Did** Philip understand that the one who healed the sick before his very eyes could easily cater for a hungry crowd?

When we look at our own circumstances or the potential ministry of our church, we often see the limitations. The need is too great and we feel we don’t have the resources to know where to start. Jesus gently asks, ‘Where is the source of your strength, your hope and your daily bread?’ Our shout of allegiance to the King reminds us that we serve a mighty God, the source of our faith and hope.

WORSHIP

‘Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.’ (Psalm 100:2).

In Session 1 we considered the Hebrew word *abad* that combined worship with service. In Luke’s Gospel we find a group of tired disciples, shaken by the news of John the Baptist’s death. They thought it was finally time to rest, but here Jesus was asking them to serve. It’s fair to say that they were struggling to find a joyful song to sing as they surveyed the hungry crowd.

‘Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.” He replied, “You give them something to eat.” (Luke 9:12-13)

It was through the worship and service of the disciples that Jesus fed the thousands gathered that day. They thought they would have to do it in their own strength and imagined repeat trips to the local town to gather food for the crowd. They searched for man-made solutions to a God-sized problem which led to their understandable weariness. Jesus calls us to give our time, finances, gifts and talents, but he also promises his miraculous strength to serve the needs of those around us.

KNOW

‘Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.’ (Psalm 100:3).

As the crowd gathered and Jesus approached them on the boat, he didn’t see the same thing that the disciples saw. Like many of us would have done, they saw an inconvenience, another job to do, something else to think about and maybe even felt a pang of guilt at their tiredness getting the better of them. Jesus saw something different. He saw lost sheep.

‘When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.’ (Mark 6:34)

In that moment Jesus knew that he needed to gather this flock into his care and show the disciples that they were part of the flock as well. Through his help they would feed, teach and care for the rest of the flock with Jesus leading them as their Shepherd.

ENTER

‘Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.’ (Psalm 100:4)

Jesus invited the disciples to feed his flock and take part in a miracle. In John’s Gospel we read how Jesus asked Philip where bread could be bought to feed the people.

‘Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”’ (John 6:7-9)

How was such a small offering ever enough to meet the needs of all those people? In the hands of Jesus, anything we have to offer, whether it be a small packed lunch or half a year’s wages, can be blessed and multiplied.

“Bring them here to me,” he said. And he told the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.’ (Matthew 14:18-19)

The small offering of the boy’s lunch, when offered from a heart of praise and thanksgiving, was turned it into an abundant feast.

LOVE

*‘For the Lord is good and his **Love** endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.’ (Psalm 100:5).*

‘They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.’ (Matthew 14:20-21)

Can you imagine the stories told by the fireside when thousands of families returned home to the neighbouring towns? Can you imagine the boy telling his parents how the packed lunch they had prepared in the morning had fed thousands by the evening?

This story of the miracle of Jesus, and God’s faithfulness to his people, was passed down through generation to generation. Its importance is emphasised by its presence in all four Gospels and it serves as a reminder that our faithful God will take what we offer to him in service and use it for his glory.

Let Psalm 100 realign your worshipping heart.

- **Shout** your allegiance to King Jesus.
- **Worship** and serve him with a heart full of gladness.
- **Know** that you are part of his precious flock and discover more of his wisdom.
- **Enter** into his presence with a heart of thanksgiving and praise, recognising he will abundantly bless whatever you have to offer.
- **Love** God and others, remembering that his faithfulness continues from generation to generation.

STARTERS

There is a lot of content to cover in this final session. As a result, there is only one shorter starter.

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

When actor Danny Dyer took part in the BBC programme ‘Who do you think you are?’ he discovered that he was related to King Edward III. And TV host Alexander Armstrong traced his roots back to William the Conqueror.

- **How** would you react if you found out that you descended from royalty?

- **Which** person in history would you like to be related to? Why?
- **Ask** the group if they have looked into their family tree.
- **Do they** have any interesting stories to share about the generations that have come before them?

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TODAY'S SPECIAL

Today we are focusing on the following verse from Psalm 100:

'For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.'
 (Psalm 100:5)

Watch the teaching video to discover how this verse links with our theme for today - the story of the feeding of the five thousand.

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MAINS

'For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.'
 (Psalm 100:5)

In Psalm 100:5 we are reminded of God's love and faithfulness throughout the generations. The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle of Jesus that is shared in all four Gospels. Throughout these sessions we have taken the words of Psalm 100 and explored the theme of each verse. Today we will look at the story of the feeding of the five thousand with fresh eyes reviewing the themes covered in each session.

SHOUT

'Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.' (Psalm 100:1).

In Psalm 100:1 we discovered that the 'shout' was a declaration of allegiance to the king and a recognition of the sovereign's power. The disciples witnessed Jesus performing miracles, but did they understand they were in the presence of God himself?

Read John 6:5-6.

- **What** was Jesus trying to discover about Philip's faith?
- **In what** ways does our limited human perspective diminish our view of what God could do with what we have to offer?
- **As you** look at the needs of your local community, where have you placed similar limitations on God with regard to the offerings of the local church?

In every situation we need to remember the mighty God we serve, the source of our faith and hope. **Shout** your allegiance to King Jesus.

WORSHIP

'Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.' (Psalm 100:2).

In Session 1 we considered the Hebrew word *abad* that combined worship with service.

- **In the** story of the feeding of the five thousand, how does Jesus remind the disciples about the importance of meeting the needs of those around us?
- **How** is our service an act of worship? Do you see your own service in this way? If so, in what way?

Jesus calls us to give our time, finances, gifts and talents, but he also promises his miraculous strength to serve the needs of those around us.

Worship and serve him with a heart full of gladness.

KNOW

'Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.' (Psalm 100:3).

Read Mark 6:34.

As Jesus looked at the crowds he saw lost sheep needing a shepherd.

- **What** did the disciples see?
- **In what** ways do you empathise with the reaction of the disciples?
- **Who** are the lost sheep in your local community and church?
- **What** do they need in order to be part of the flock and to discover the Shepherd?

With God's help we are called to feed, teach and care for the rest of the flock following the example given by Jesus.

Know that you are part of his precious flock and discover more of his wisdom.

ENTER

'Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.' (Psalm 100:4).

It is Philip who raises the financial practicalities of what Jesus is asking in John 6:7.

'Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" (John 6:7)

- **What** are the financial obstacles that cause us to place limitations on what God can do in our local community and church?
- **As we** look at the level of need in our communities, do you think we are sometimes overwhelmed by the size of the problem? **If so**, how?
- **What** does the offering of the small boy teach us about God's ability to multiply whatever we have to give?

The small offering of the boy's lunch, when given from a heart of praise and thanksgiving, was turned into an abundant feast.

Enter into his presence with a heart of thanksgiving and praise, recognising that he will abundantly bless whatever you have to offer.

LOVE

'For the Lord is good and his Love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.'
(Psalm 100:5).

Read Matthew 14:20-21.

'They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.' (Matthew 14:20-21)

On that day, generations of people were fed both physically and spiritually. The story of the boy's offering, blessed and multiplied by God, continues through to the present day.

- **What** do we discover about God's love and faithfulness from this miraculous story?
- **Do you** believe that God can work miracles with your financial giving? **If so**, then how does it influence your willingness to give?

This story of the miracle of Jesus and God's faithfulness to his people was passed down through generation to generation. Its importance is emphasised by its presence in all four Gospels and it serves as a reminder that our faithful God will take what we offer to him in service and use it for his glory.

Love God and others remembering that his faithfulness continues from generation to generation.

DESSERT

Over the six sessions we've explored Psalm 100 through a range of stories from Scripture. We watched the struggle of the rich young ruler as he tried to live out the greatest commandment and give his all to Jesus.

We witnessed the faithful service of the woman of Shunem supporting Elisha's ministry while expecting nothing in return.

We saw the foolishness of Nabal, the frustration of David and Abigail's giving heart as her wisdom and guidance kept the peace.

We looked on as Mary took the expensive perfume and lavishly poured it on the feet of Jesus, filling the room with her fragrant offering.

Finally, we saw Jesus take the smallest offering and multiply it to serve the needs of his flock.

- **Which** story has challenged your attitude to giving the most? **Explain** why.

The theologian Walter Brueggemann talks of the way that Psalm 100 reorients the lives of worshippers, helping them to align their priorities with God.

- **Has** this been your experience? **If so**, in what way?

PRAYER

To bring these sessions to a close, read together Psalm 100:1-5 from *The Message* paraphrase.

'On your feet now – applaud God! Bring a gift of laughter, sing yourselves into his presence. Know this: God is God, and God, God. He made us; we didn't make him. We're his people, his well-tended sheep. Enter with the password: "Thank you!" Make yourselves at home, talking praise. Thank him. Worship him. For God is sheer beauty, all-generous in love, loyal always and ever.'

SIDES

The 'Sides' and 'For Sharing' courses provide additional activities that can be used as part of the main session or at another time. Ideally these would be used after the 'Mains' course of the main session.

I'LL FIGHT?

Watch ['I'll Fight: The Salvation Army's Founders' Day 2019'](#) or read the speech shown below.

'While women weep,
I'll fight.
While little children go hungry, as they do now,
I'll fight.
While men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now,
I'll fight.
While there is a drunkard left,
While there is a poor lost girl upon the streets,
While there remains one dark soul without the light of God,
I'll fight – I'll fight to the very end!' (attributed to William Booth)

Within The Salvation Army these words are regularly shared as part of our core vision. In the story of the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus gives the responsibility of feeding the people to the disciples. God promises to use anything we have to offer care for his flock.

- **What** part does our financial giving play in fighting for those whom God sends our way?
- **Is our** level of giving in line with our willingness to fight for those who need to see God's love and faithfulness through us? **If not**, why not?

TOMORROW'S FISH AND CHIP PAPER

At the end of a long day the disciples were tired and probably wanted to sit with Jesus and rest in his presence. Instead, they were greeted by a large crowd and Jesus saying, *'You give them something to eat'* (Matthew 13:16). In this activity we're going to explore what following Jesus' command looks like in our own community.

Distribute a pile of local newspapers to the group and ask them to skim through the pages.

- **In what** way is God calling you to feed your local community?
- **What** kinds of mental, physical and social needs are highlighted in the pages of the newspaper?
- **How** could your financial giving make a difference in the lives of the people in these pages? **Who** would your church need to connect with to find out the needs of your community?

Spend time in prayer as a group reflecting on the stories you have read and the issues discussed.

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FOR SHARING
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A CELEBRATION OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

Reflect on the history of your church and its place in the local community. Resist the temptation to focus on ways that your church is falling short when it comes to meeting the needs of the flock. Instead, reflect on all that has been offered throughout the generations and the possibilities of what God can do with your church going forward.

- **What** examples are there of God’s faithfulness in your own community and church?
- **How** has God used your giving as a church to care for his flock?

It may be that your church is smaller than it used to be and your offering as a gathering of believers has changed.

- **What** encouragement does the feeding of the five thousand bring as you consider what God was able to do with the boy’s small offering?

Spend some time in prayer as a group, looking to the heavens, giving thanks and handing everything you have to offer to God.

BACKGROUND MUSIC

Listed below there is a selection of music that fits with the theme of today’s session.

- **‘Great is His Faithfulness’** - Charity Gayle
- **‘Forever’** - Chris Tomlin

SALVATION ARMY SONGBOOK

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| 8. ‘Come, let us all unite to sing’ | 29. ‘Have you ever stopped to think how God loves you?’ |
| 24. ‘God’s love is as high as the heavens’ | 32. ‘How deep the Father’s love for us’ |
| 25. ‘God’s love to me is wonderful’ | |
| 26. ‘Great is thy faithfulness’ | |

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Takeaway!

A psalm. For giving grateful **PRAISE**.

SHOUT for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

WORSHIP the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

KNOW that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

ENTER his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

For the Lord is good and his **LOVE** endures for ever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

(Psalm 100: 1–5)

- **Shout** your allegiance to King Jesus.
- **Worship** and serve him with a heart full of gladness.
- **Know** that you are part of his precious flock and discover more of his wisdom.
- **Enter** into his presence with a heart of thanksgiving and praise, recognising he will abundantly bless whatever you have to offer.
- **Love** God and others, remembering that his faithfulness continues from generation to generation.

NOTES:
