

SESSION EIGHT

I Am the Bread of Life

John 6:22-51; Exodus 16:2; Genesis 3:22

PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants follow the fed crowd across the lake and into the synagogue at Capernaum, where Jesus tells them what the bread meant: labor not for the food which perishes; the true bread from heaven is not the manna, whose eaters died; I am the bread of life. The murmuring of the wilderness returns on new lips, two long-planted discoveries detonate, and the session ends on the sentence that will cost Jesus his crowd: the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church hears in the Bread of Life discourse the meaning of the petition for daily bread at its deepest register (CCC 2835), and reads the manna as prefiguring the true bread from heaven (CCC 1094). Tonight the group stands in the synagogue at Capernaum and hears the true Bread introduce himself.

What You Need to Know

Tonight covers John 6:22-51, ending exactly at verse 51. The stopping point is structural, not arbitrary: verse 51 is the hinge on which the whole chapter turns, and next week begins at verse 52 with the crowd asking the question verse 51 forces. End the session with verse 51 hanging in the air, unresolved. Your discipline at 9:45 tonight buys next week's thunder.

The scene: the crowd from the feeding hunts Jesus down the next morning and finds him at Capernaum, and Jesus opens with a diagnosis instead of a greeting: "you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves" (6:26). They came back for the bread, not the giver. His counsel: "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you" (6:27). Mark the tense with the group: will give. Whatever this food is, at this moment it is still future. The tense matters, and it stays marked all night.

Their question, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" gets a doorway answer: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (6:28-29). Be scrupulously fair here and all night: faith is where Jesus starts, and faith remains the doorway through this entire chapter. Nothing discovered later in John 6 competes with faith; it is what faith, pressed to the end, receives. Establishing that honestly tonight is what makes next week's debate fair instead of rigged.

Then the sign demand (6:30-31), which is almost comic: they ate miraculous bread yesterday and today they ask for a sign, and the sign they propose is manna: "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Session Four loaded this moment: Jewish tradition near the New Testament period looked for the messianic age to renew the manna (an

expectation attested in texts like 2 Baruch 29:8). They are asking Jesus to out-Moses Moses. His correction (6:32-33): it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; "my Father gives you the true bread from heaven," present tense, and the bread of God "is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world" (6:33), wording the Greek leaves tantalizingly open, until verse 35 makes it explicit: the bread is not a what but a who.

Verse 35 is the summit of tonight's first half: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst." Note with the group: hunger and thirst, bread and drink, both satisfied. Isaiah 55's food and drink without money have found their address.

At verse 41, the long fuse planted in Session Four detonates: "The Jews then murmured at him." The Greek verb is from the same family the Greek Old Testament uses for Israel's murmuring in the wilderness over food (Exodus 16:2-3). The group marked the word murmured four weeks ago in Exodus 16:2 without knowing why. Tonight, in the live discovery of Question 5, they find out. The wilderness generation murmured at the manna; this generation murmurs at the true Bread. Scripture repeats itself on purpose, and tonight the group catches it doing so.

Verses 48-50 resolve the manna thread with a severity the group should feel: "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died... this is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die." Session Four's honest ending, the manna was training, not destination, and its eaters still died, becomes Jesus' own argument. The hunger the manna schooled has met its food.

Then verse 51, and read it with the group at half speed: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh." Two things happen in this verse. First, a phrase this study has been waiting seven weeks to hear again: eat and live for ever. The group hunts down Genesis 3:22 live and finds the exact phrase on God's lips at the gate of Eden, the thing humanity was barred from lest they take, and eat, and live for ever. The way back to the food of life is standing in the synagogue at Capernaum, speaking. Second, the tense marked at verse 27 resolves: the bread which I shall give is my flesh, given for the life of the world. Future tense, flesh, for the life of the world: the vocabulary of sacrifice has entered the room.

End the session there. Do not resolve the flesh statement, do not preview the crowd's reaction, do not permit the realism debate to begin tonight no matter who starts it. Question 8 collects predictions and closes the book. And remind everyone: bring your sealed guess next week.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight is harvest for two long plantings. The grumbling motif: Exodus 16:2, marked in Session Four, pays off at John 6:41. The manna thread: bread from heaven that fed but could not make immortal, whose eaters died, resolves at John 6:48-51. Both payoffs are engineered as live discoveries; protect the group's chance to make them.

The Genesis 3:22 echo at John 6:51 is the deepest resonance in the study so far: eat and live for ever, the exact terms of the tree of life, barred at Eden's gate, now offered in Capernaum. Thread A does not fully resolve until the study's final week, but tonight it rings loud enough to raise hair. Let the group find it; walk them to Genesis 3:22 with questions, not answers, if they stall.

Leader-side holds, and tonight they are heavy: John 6:52-71 in its entirety, including the crowd's question, the escalation of Jesus' language, the mass desertion, and every argument about how literally to take him. Also hold: the Last Supper connection, every liturgical echo, and the sealed guesses, which are opened next week and not before.

Voices of the Church

St. Augustine of Hippo

Tractate 26 on the Gospel of John, early 5th century

St. Augustine, preaching on "no one can come to me unless the Father draws him," insisted that the Father's drawing is not force but desire: give me a lover, he said, and he will feel what I am saying. The heart is drawn by delight the way a sheep is drawn by a green branch; that is Augustine's own image for the Father's drawing. We might add: the one who hungers for this bread is already being pulled toward it by the hand that baked it.

St. Catherine of Siena

The Dialogue, 14th century

St. Catherine wrote of the soul that has tasted God and discovered the strangest property of this food: the more it eats, the hungrier it grows, and the hunger itself becomes a kind of happiness, because it is hunger for the one thing that does not run out. Earthly food ends in fullness and then in emptiness again; this bread ends in desire that is itself delight.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (attributed)

Jesu Dulcis Memoria, hymn tradition, 12th century

The great hymn long attributed to St. Bernard sings to Christ: those who taste you hunger still, and those who drink you thirst for more. The tradition that treasured those lines understood John 6 from the inside: the bread of life does not end appetite the way a meal ends it, but converts appetite into love, so that satisfaction and longing finally become the same thing.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1094.** The manna in the desert prefigured the Eucharist, the true bread from heaven; the Church's catechesis has always read Israel's wilderness bread as the sketch of a greater gift.
- **CCC 2835.** Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God: the petition for daily bread reaches its full depth in the Bread of Life, received in the Word of God and in the Body of Christ.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH · LEADER ONLY

Two payoffs fire tonight; protect both as discoveries. The murmuring (Question 5): ask where

this study has heard that word, and let them reach Exodus 16:2 themselves; they marked it four weeks ago. The Genesis 3:22 echo (Question 7): if they stall, ask what God feared at the gate of Eden, and let the phrase land in their own mouths.

Guard verse 52 onward with your life. The realism debate will try to start tonight, possibly within seconds of verse 51 being read. Do not let it. The holding line: the crowd is about to ask your exact question, out loud, next week, and Jesus will answer it. Anything we say tonight, he says better.

The future tense (6:27, 6:51) is marked, not explained. "Will give" points forward to something that has not happened yet in the story. Where it points, we walk next week and the week after.

Sealed guesses: next week. Say it at closing and put it on the take-home: find your sealed My Guess sheet from week one and bring it. Do not discuss what anyone wrote.

Thread D stays silent. If anyone connects tonight's bread language back to last week's four verbs, smile and file it. No confirmation.

Session Goals

1. Hear Jesus' diagnosis of the crowd and his counsel: labor for the food which endures, which the Son of man will give, and mark that future tense.
2. Establish honestly that faith is the doorway of the whole discourse: the work of God is to believe in him whom he has sent.
3. Catch Scripture repeating itself: the murmuring of Exodus 16 returns at John 6:41, and the manna finds its meaning at John 6:48-50.
4. Discover the Genesis 3:22 echo at John 6:51, eat and live for ever, and end the night on the unresolved sentence: the bread which I shall give is my flesh.

Time Note · One Hour Forty-Five with a Shared Meal

0:00 to 0:30, Table. Grace before the meal, eat together without hurry, and let the two Win questions surface naturally over food. Do not turn the table into a classroom.

0:30 to 1:20, Build. Fifty unhurried minutes. Bibles open at the table or moved to the living room, whichever your space favors. The Dig Deeper box is part of the flow, not an extra, and the live discovery moments deserve real hunt time.

1:20 to 1:35, Send. Two questions, no answer boxes, room for silence.

1:35 to 1:45, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer.

If the night truly runs long: Compress Questions 1 and 2 into one movement: read John 6:25-29 straight through and ask both what the crowd came for and where Jesus starts them. Treat cuts as emergencies, not expectations; at this length the session should breathe on its own.

AT THE TABLE

The plainest bread of the study tonight, deliberately: ordinary sliced bread, nothing artisan. Let the contrast between the table and the text do its own preaching.

PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer · Grace Before the Meal

Father, we confess we often seek the gift and forget the Giver. Bless this plain bread and this good company, teach us to labor for the food which endures, and draw us, as only you can draw. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win · At the Table (30 minutes with the meal)

1. What is something you chased hard, a job, a purchase, a relationship, a goal, that did not satisfy the way you expected once you caught it?
2. When has someone seen through your stated reason to your real reason? How did it feel to be read that accurately?

Leader note: these are dinner conversation, not an agenda item. Ask them while people are still eating, and let the meal take its time.

Build · Opening the Word (50 minutes)

1. Read John 6:22-27. The fed crowd tracks Jesus across the lake. What is his diagnosis of why they came, and what counsel does he give? Mark the tense of the last verb in verse 27 and keep it marked all night.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The diagnosis cuts: you seek me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. They came back for the bread, not the giver; the miracle was a meal ticket, not a window. It is the gentlest and most surgical reading of mixed motives in the Gospels, and it reads most of us too.

The counsel: do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, "which the Son of man will give to you." Will give. Future tense. Whatever this enduring food is, at this moment in the story it has not been given yet. File the tense; it is load-bearing, and it does not resolve tonight.

2. Read John 6:28-29. The crowd asks the most practical question in the Gospel: what must we do? What is Jesus' answer, and why does it matter for everything that follows?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

They ask for a task list, and he gives them one item: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." The work is faith. The doorway into everything this chapter will say is believing in the one the Father sent.

Hold this with both hands, because the rest of John 6 gets loud and it would be easy to lose: faith comes first, faith remains the doorway, and nothing Jesus says later competes with faith. Whatever this discourse unfolds, it unfolds inside believing, as what faith, pressed all the way, is given to

receive. We will need this sentence again.

3. Read John 6:30-31. What do they demand, and what is almost funny about the demand? What specific bread do they propose as the benchmark, and why that bread?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

They demand a sign, roughly eighteen hours after eating one. Five thousand fed from five loaves apparently has a short shelf life. The demand would be comic if it were not so familiar.

And the benchmark they set is the manna: our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; he gave them bread from heaven to eat. This study loaded that request four weeks ago: Israel's memory kept the manna in a golden jar, and Jewish tradition looked for the days of the Messiah to renew it. They are asking him to out-Moses Moses. They have no idea what they have just requested.

4. Read John 6:32-35. How does Jesus correct their history lesson, and what two tense-and-identity moves does he make before the great sentence of verse 35? Read verse 35 aloud together, and notice both halves of its promise.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The correction: it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven. The manna was never Moses' gift, and, more startling, "my Father gives you the true bread from heaven," present tense, happening now. And the bread of God is "that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world" (6:33), a phrase the crowd hears as a thing (v. 34: "give us this bread always"), until verse 35 reveals the bread is not a what but a who.

Then the sentence: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst." Hunger and thirst, both answered: bread and drink, the pair this study keeps meeting. And hear Isaiah 55 land: the food without money, the drink without price, that satisfies where everything else fails, has just introduced himself by name.

DIG DEEPER

When Jesus says "I am the bread of life," John's Greek carries the emphatic *ego eimi*, and it is the first of the great I AM sayings with a predicate in this Gospel: bread of life, light of the world, good shepherd, resurrection and the life. How much each instance echoes the divine name of Exodus 3:14 is weighed carefully by scholars, and honesty says the resonance varies by verse. But John's pattern is deliberate self-revelation in the grammar of God, and its first word, of all the words available, is bread.

5. Read John 6:41-43. What does the crowd do at verse 41? Live discovery: where has this study heard that exact word before? Go find it.

They marked the word four weeks ago. Let them hunt; the landing spot is Exodus 16:2. If they stall, ask: who else murmured about bread from heaven?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The Jews murmured at him. And the trail leads home: Exodus 16:2-3, the whole congregation murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and verse 3 names the complaint: bread. The Greek Old Testament and John use the same family of words. You marked murmured a month ago because Scripture repeats itself on purpose, and tonight you caught it doing so.

Feel what the echo claims: the generation that grumbled at the manna is being replayed by the generation grumbling at the true manna. Same complaint, same posture, one lethal difference: this time the bread from heaven is standing in front of them, explaining himself, and the murmuring is aimed at his face. The wilderness never ended; it just moved indoors.

6. Read John 6:47-50. What contrast does Jesus draw between the manna and himself, and how does it land on everything Session Four taught us?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He restates the doorway, he who believes has eternal life, and then draws the contrast without anesthesia: your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die.

Session Four ended with exactly this honesty: the manna was training, not destination; it schooled a hunger it could not itself satisfy, and its eaters, bread of angels notwithstanding, died. Jesus makes our conclusion his premise. The forty-year catechesis in dependence was pointing at someone, and the someone is talking.

7. Now read John 6:51 at half speed, twice. Live discovery: "if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever." Where has Scripture used almost exactly those words before, and about what? Go find it, and read the two verses side by side.

The landing spot is Genesis 3:22. If they stall: what exactly did God prevent at the gate of Eden, and in what words? When it lands, let the silence sit.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Genesis 3:22: "lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever." Eat and live for ever. The precise thing humanity was barred from at the gate of Eden, the food of life guarded by cherubim and flame for the whole length of the Bible, is the precise thing Jesus now stands in a synagogue and offers: if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever.

Seven weeks ago this study ended its first night with humanity exiled and the tree of life guarded, and we said Scripture does not resolve that hunger quickly. Here is the resolution beginning: the way back to the food of life is not a place, and it was never reopened by force. It walked into Capernaum. And then, before anyone can exhale, he finishes the sentence: "and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh." The future tense from verse 27 returns and lands on the word flesh, given for the life of the world. The vocabulary of sacrifice has entered the room, and the room noticed.

8. Stop at verse 51; do not read further. The sentence hanging in the air: the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh. What questions does that sentence force? How do you predict the crowd reacts? Collect predictions and close the book.

Take real predictions around the table and keep them brief. Then close firmly: the crowd asks your exact question next week, and Jesus answers it. Bring your sealed guess from week one.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Hold everything. The questions this sentence forces, how can this man give us his flesh, does he mean it, what would it even mean to mean it, are precisely the questions the crowd asks aloud beginning at the very next verse, and the whole of next week is Jesus' answer and its cost.

One housekeeping item that is not housekeeping: find your sealed My Guess sheet from the first week and bring it next session. Do not open it, do not discuss it. Next week we watch the scene you guessed about, and then we open the envelopes.

Send · Taking It With You (15 minutes)

1. Jesus read the crowd: you came for the loaves. If he read your church attendance, your prayer, your good behavior with the same honesty, what would he say you are actually seeking? Could you stand to ask him?
2. "The work of God is to believe in him whom he has sent." What would change this week if you treated believing, daily, deliberately, as your actual job, the labor Jesus assigned you?

No answer boxes here. Ask, wait, and let silence do some of the work.

Live It This Week

1. Each morning this week, before food, pray one sentence: Lord, I labor today for the food which endures. Then notice, once a day, what you are actually laboring for.
2. Read John 6:22-51 once more on your own, slowly, and underline every I AM, every bread, and every future tense verb. Bring your marked-up text next week.
3. Find your sealed My Guess sheet from week one and put it with your Bible now, tonight, so it cannot be forgotten. Next week we open them.

Scripture Memory Verse

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst."

John 6:35

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, bread of life, you see why we come to you and you feed us anyway. Draw us as only the Father draws, past the loaves to the Giver, past the gift to your face, and make us hungry for the food which endures. Amen.

PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Passages in order of use

- John 6:22-27 · the diagnosis; food which perishes vs. endures; will give
- John 6:28-29 · the work of God is to believe
- John 6:30-31 · the sign demand; the manna benchmark
- John 6:32-35 · the true bread; I am the bread of life
- John 6:41-43 · the murmuring; live discovery to Exodus 16:2
- John 6:47-50 · your fathers ate the manna and died
- John 6:51 · live discovery to Genesis 3:22; the bread is my flesh
- John 6:35 · memory verse

Leader only · do not distribute or read aloud

- Exodus 16:2 · the murmuring planted in Session Four (payoff tonight)
- Genesis 3:22 · eat and live for ever (payoff tonight)
- Deuteronomy 8:3 · the manna's lesson (background from Session Four)
- John 6:52-71 · hold absolutely until next week
- John 6:37-40, 44-46 · the Father's drawing; use if the group asks about verses skipped in the walk