

JESUS PROVIDES

▶ The Point

Jesus cares and meets the needs in our lives.

The Passage

Mark 6:34-44

The Bible Meets Life

Operation Christmas Child® is an event in which individuals pack shoeboxes with toys and gifts for children. In 2016, more than eleven million boxes went to kids all over the world.² I have a friend who delivers these boxes to children. On one occasion, he was delivering to a crowd of children in Bosnia. The children had no way of knowing what was inside their boxes, opening them with joy to find coloring books, yo-yos, dolls, and more.

My friend noticed a young boy off in a corner, and asked one of the other workers about him. "He's blind," the worker replied. My friend was apprehensive as he approached the boy with a box, because he didn't want this blind child to receive a coloring book and crayons!

When the boy opened his box and felt the contents inside, my friend was stunned into silence. The boy pulled out a portable CD player—the perfect gift for a child who can't see! Throughout His life and ministry, Jesus showed us that God knows exactly what we need—and that He provides.

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. (See 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 (see vv. 30-32)—but things didn't go quite as expected.

What does the Bible say?

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.

Mark 6:34-44

- ³⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.
- ³⁵ And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late.
- ³⁶ Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."
- ³⁷ But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?"
- ³⁸ And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish."
- ³⁹ Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass.
- ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties.
- ⁴¹ And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all.
- ⁴² And they all ate and were satisfied.
- ⁴³ And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish.
- ⁴⁴ And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

GET INTO THE STUDY





DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 53 of the PSG: "What was something provided for you as a child that you didn't appreciate at the time?"

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Prior to the group gathering, purchase or prepare a combination of fresh bread and fish sticks for your group members to enjoy. (Note: you could cook the fish sticks at home and wrap them in foil to keep them warm, or you could bring a portable

griddle to your meeting place and prepare the fish sticks on location.) As you present the food, tell group members you are "providing" them a way to connect with this session's Scripture passage.

Note: If you would prefer to avoid the fish sticks altogether, you could bring gummy fish to the gathering as a replacement.

GUIDE: Direct group members to "The Bible Meets Life" on page 54 of the PSG. Introduce the theme of God's provision by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to "The Point" on page 54 of the PSG: "Jesus cares and meets the needs in our lives."

PRAY: Transition into the study by confessing that God has provided many things in your life that you have failed to adequately appreciate. Pray that the Holy Spirit would bless you and your group members with a new awareness of God's care and provision as you study His Word together.

	10 minutes
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Notes



STUDY THE BIBLE

tes	Mark 6:34-37	
	³⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. ³⁶ Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." ³⁷ But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?"	
	READ: Mark 6:34-37 on page 55 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.	
	GUIDE: Encourage group members to read page 55 of the PSG in order to gain some background information on what the disciples had been through prior to the situation described in Mark 6:34-37.	
	RECAP: Read the third paragraph on page 56 of the PSG:	
	Here's a truth: Jesus is in the business of helping desperate people. He knows what our souls need. He understands how to give us the replenishment that will truly satisfy us. He was about to prove this to both the hungry crowd and the stunned disciples.	
ALTERNATE QUESTION: What can we	DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 55 of the PSG: "Where do you see evidence of God's compassion in the world today?"	
learn from the imagery of sheep	DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 56 of the PSG: "What distractions may hinder us from recognizing ministry opportunities?"	
and shepherd in these verses?	Note: When discussing "ministry opportunities," encourage group members to think specifically about the opportunities we have to join God in demonstrating His compassion to the world.	

TRANSITION: As we move to verses 38-44, we'll see more than a famous miracle

performed by Jesus. We'll see a clear picture of Jesus' provision.

Mark 6:34-37 Commentary

[Verse 34] 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. (See Mark 6:30-32.)

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. When Jesus and His disciples arrived at their destination, they found another multitude—and no chance to rest.

Seeing the crowd, Jesus was moved with **compassion.** Jesus didn't just see a crowd of people. He saw **sheep without a shepherd.** That phrase suggests both lostness and a lack of spiritual leadership. Jesus' compassion wasn't just concern—it was concern in action. Jesus began to teach them **many things.** Mark's Gospel does not provide the content of Jesus' teaching on this occasion, but in Luke's account of these events, he wrote that Jesus "welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing" (Luke 9:11).

[Verse 35-37] Apparently Jesus' teaching went on for an extended period of time because it **grew** late. The disciples became concerned and approached Jesus. Given their situation, the disciples made what probably to them seemed like a logical suggestion. They told Jesus, "Send [the people] away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But Jesus had another plan. Instead of relying on someone else to solve the problem, He told the disciples, "You give them something to eat."

Jesus' statement challenged the disciples to change their perspective. Unfortunately, the disciples continued to focus only on the magnitude of the problem. Their response, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" displayed skepticism and probably a fair amount of frustration.

The disciples' response also suggests they thought Jesus was telling them to go to the surrounding villages themselves to locate (and purchase) food for the crowd. They still had not realized that Jesus saw opportunities where they saw only challenges. Jesus' 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. (See 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.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Mark 6:38-44

³⁸ And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." ³⁹ Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. ⁴¹ And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all.

DO: Direct members to complete the activity "A Resting Picture" on page 57 of the PSG. If time permits, encourage volunteers to share their responses.

Use the space below to create something that represents rest for you—the kind of rest that is both satisfying and energizing. You can draw a picture, write a list, tell a brief story, or do anything else that represents true, life-giving rest.

What steps can you take to bring Jesus into your moments of rest each week?

READ: Mark 6:38-44 on page 58 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Encourage group members to read page 58 of the PSG in order to learn about Jesus' desire to provide for us both physically and spiritually.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 58 of the PSG: "How do we balance the importance of meeting physical needs and spiritual needs?"

Note: Encourage group members to first discuss what are some of the major physical and spiritual needs present in your community. Then, ask them to give their thoughts on how to balance those two resources in terms of how to allocate your time, energy, and other resources.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 6**, "Help Wanted," to help group members engage the themes of physical and spiritual needs in a visual way. (*Note:* Consider dividing members into subgroups of two or three people in order to provide a little more privacy.)



Mark 6:38-44 Commentary

[Verse 38] One of the first steps to problem solving is taking 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're not told how much time or effort the disciples put into the search, but we're 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. (See 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 commanded that the people sit down in groups on the green grass. In obedience to His command, the people sat down in groups hundreds and fifties.

[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 (see Luke 6:12-16), before raising Lazarus from the dead (see John 11:41-42), and before His arrest and crucifixion. (See Mark 14:32-42.)

In this case, Jesus 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. (See 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 were obedient to Jesus' commands and participated in the miraculous feeding of the crowd by handing out the food to the multitude.

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.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes **ALTERNATE QUESTION:**

Mark 6:38-44 (continued)

⁴² And they all ate and were satisfied. ⁴³ And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴ And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

SUMMARIZE: Help group members work through the major points from page 59 of the PSG:

- 1. "Jesus was calling His disciples to do the impossible; after all, it would take two hundred days' worth of wages (see Mark 6:37; Matt. 20:2) to purchase enough food to feed such a large number—yet these twelve disciples had abandoned their jobs to follow Jesus and had no wages!"
- 2. "Surely this miracle had an impact on the thousands gathered there, but the greatest beneficiaries should have been the twelve disciples."
- "Today, don't miss the truth that Jesus is sufficient for you. Wherever Jesus has brought you, He will sustain you, for He is the only one who is able to fully provide for you—physically and spiritually."

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 59 of the PSG: "Where do we have opportunities to participate in God's provision for others?"

Note: Encourage group members to answer this question based on your community, specifically. Where have you seen opportunities to join God's work in providing for your neighbors?

GUIDE: Refer back to "The Point" for this session: "Jesus cares and meets the needs in our lives." As time allows, encourage volunteers to share any final thoughts and questions.

How has God

proven to be

sufficient for the challenges in your life?

Mark 6:38-44 Commentary (continued)

[Verse 42] This verse seems simple and straightforward: **They all ate and were 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.

[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 broken pieces and of the 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.

[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. (See 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 1,000 and 3,000 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.



Read the article "The Miracles in Mark's Gospel" in the Winter 2017-2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles "Bread and Bread Making in the Ancient World" (Fall 2011), "Fish in the Sea of Galilee" (Winter 2009-2010), "Jesus and the Crowd" (Fall 2009), and "Galilee in Jesus' Day" (Winter 2006-2007) relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator.



LIVE IT OUT

Notes

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 60 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following suggestions for putting their trust in God's provision this week:

Communicate. Take five minutes to thank God for bringing you as far as He has, for giving you what He's given you, and for doing what He's done 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 both lists each day this week.
- ▶ **Care.** Be a channel of God's care and provision in the life of someone else. Find one person with big needs to be met this week and help that person out of love for Christ and because of the way He has provided for you.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 60 of the PSG:

We've all received gifts in our lifetimes. Some of us have received gifts that were especially meaningful or transformational. All of us have the chance to receive the life-giving, life-changing gift of a relationship with Jesus—the only One who can truly meet our needs.

PRAY: Conclude by offering a simple prayer of thanks to God for His provision in your life and in the lives of your group members. Praise Him for all that He has done.



Free additional ideas for your group are available at
BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra