

SESSION 4:
LIFE IN A HOPEFUL WORLD

LOOK UP: LARGE GROUP TEACHING GUIDE

BIG IDEA

In this session students will learn that Jesus doesn't ask for perfection from his disciples, he asks for us to listen and trust as he works both in us and through us to help others. To experience God's hope and share that hope with others, we can reflect on the reality that we are made in God's image, we can re-center ourselves by spending time with God, and we can reconnect with our circle and our faith community.

FOR THIS SESSION, YOU'LL NEED:

- Session 4 slides and means to project them
- **Session 4 Video: *Life in a hopeful world*** and a means to play it, if you are using the videos included with this curriculum during your **Look up** teaching time
- Several loaves of bread (enough for each student to have a “chunk”)
- If you're doing small groups during this gathering, be sure to check the “You'll need” list at the top of the **Look inside small group discussion guide**

*If you are using the videos included with this curriculum in your **Look up** teaching time, show **Session 4 Video: Life in a hopeful world** here to open your teaching session.*

A DIFFERENT CROWD

Read Mark 6:30–44, or invite a student to read.



SLIDE: MARK 6:30–44 (2 SLIDES)

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him everything they had done and taught. Many people were coming and going, so there was no time to eat. He said to the apostles, “Come by yourselves to a secluded place and rest for a while.” They departed in a boat by themselves for a deserted place.

Many people saw them leaving and recognized them, so they ran ahead from all the cities and arrived before them. When Jesus arrived and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then he began to teach them many things.

Late in the day, his disciples came to him and said, “This is an isolated place, and it’s already late in the day. Send them away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy something to eat for themselves.”

He replied, “You give them something to eat.”

But they said to him, “Should we go off and buy bread worth almost eight months’ pay and give it to them to eat?”

He said to them, “How much bread do you have? Take a look.”

After checking, they said, “Five loaves of bread and two fish.”

He directed the disciples to seat all the people in groups as though they were having a banquet on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. He took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them, broke the loaves into pieces, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. Everyone ate until they were full. They filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of bread and fish. About five thousand had eaten.

Mark 6:30–44

Say: In our previous session we read a story of Jesus healing two people. You might remember that the crowd in that story was very busy. People did not seem to understand why Jesus would stop for a woman who had been sick and alone for years, or for a girl who was already dead.

Explain to students that in today’s story, the crowd is a dramatic contrast. This group of people really knew how to “stop in their tracks.” They wanted so badly to hear what Jesus had to say to them that they thought of nothing else—including what they were going to eat.

Meanwhile, the disciples were tired and hungry. They felt that way at the start of this story; imagine how much more they were feeling toward the end of the day. They were probably about to fall apart.

Say: **Often we refer to this story as, “Jesus feeds the 5,000.” But if we look a bit more closely at verse 37, it becomes clear that Jesus isn’t planning to help these people on his own. He’s going to work through his very tired, hungry, and imperfect disciples.**

Read verses 35–37, emphasizing Jesus’ words.



SLIDE: MARK 6:35–37

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Mark 6:35–37

Ask the group: **On a scale of 1–10 (10 being the highest), how anxious do you think the disciples were feeling at that moment? Where would you be on that scale if you had been there with a large hungry crowd surrounding you and neither enough food nor money to care for them?** Allow students a moment to chat about their answers, or invite them to respond by a show of hands.



SLIDE: HOW ANXIOUS WERE THE DISCIPLES? WHERE WOULD YOU BE ON THAT SCALE?

Notice that Jesus doesn’t just give the disciples a big job to do and walk away. Nor does Jesus do the job himself. Ask students to read silently verses 38–41 on the slide again, and raise their hands to share: How does Jesus give his disciples tools to face the challenge? In what ways does Jesus work with them?



SLIDE: MARK 6:38–41

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After checking, they said, “Five loaves of bread and two fish.”

He directed the disciples to seat all the people in groups as though they were having a banquet on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. He took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them, broke the loaves into pieces, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.

Mark 6:38–41

Say: **Remember, a few weeks ago we observed Jesus stepping into the unsteady boat with his disciples at the beginning of their journey with him. Now we see the same disciples in another unsteady situation—this time without a boat. But as the disciples listened to Jesus and developed trust, they were being given the power to meet the needs of others *with* him. They were plenty anxious, but not alone.**

Why doesn't Jesus just feed the crowd himself?



SLIDE: WHY DOESN'T JESUS FEED THE CROWD HIMSELF?

Ask students to discuss with a neighbor, and then share some of their answers with the large group.

GROWING IN JESUS' CIRCLE

While we don't know for sure why Jesus didn't just feed the crowd himself, we can see throughout the Gospels and the Book of Acts that Jesus' strategy to spread his message and miracles included teaching us to do what he did and gifting us with the Holy Spirit. Through this story we can see that among this smaller group of disciples, Jesus was growing a circle of care whose purpose wasn't just for their own well-being. Ultimately, they were being equipped to go and "do what Jesus did," helping others to know and experience his peace as well.

In the midst of their own insecurities and imperfections—and even when they were tired, and hungry, and anxious—they had the opportunity to pass God's power on.

It's important to point out that *who* performed this miracle is up for debate. Did the miracle happen in Jesus' hands? The disciples'? The crowd's? It's possible that the miracle itself was something everyone shared that day. Look at how the story finishes:



SLIDE: MARK 6:42–44

Everyone ate until they were full.

They filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of bread and fish.

About five thousand had eaten.

Mark 6:42–44

Point out that there was so much food to go around. More than anyone expected. The disciples initially had very little hope that they had enough to make a difference to the thousands around them. But then they saw Jesus turn a little into a lot.

Ask: **How do you think Jesus' followers felt differently about their anxiety after that meal?**



SLIDE: HOW DO YOU THINK JESUS' FOLLOWERS FELT DIFFERENTLY ABOUT THEIR ANXIETY AFTER THAT MEAL?

After giving the group time to respond, say: **Let's imagine that the crowd didn't know that the five loaves and two fish came from the disciples. But they did see Jesus take a small amount of food and use it to feed thousands, including them. If you were part of the crowd that day, what hopes would you have about following Jesus after seeing him create a seemingly endless supply of bread and fish?**



SLIDE: WHAT HOPES WOULD YOU HAVE ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS AFTER SEEING HIM CREATE AN ENDLESS SUPPLY OF BREAD AND FISH?

MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

Say: **Maybe you're like me and sometimes find it hard to believe God can work through you to bring help and hope to others. But here's an important thing to remember: In order to feed the crowd that day, and to do the many other miracles their circle would eventually do, Jesus didn't ask for perfection from the disciples. What he needed was their trust.**



SLIDE: JESUS DIDN'T ASK FOR PERFECTION FROM THE DISCIPLES. WHAT HE NEEDED WAS THEIR TRUST.

As followers of Jesus, there are some characteristics about ourselves we can learn from this story. An important one is that we are made in God's image. That means we are uniquely crafted to reflect and even share in God's power.



SLIDE: WE ARE MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE.

Point out that the disciples—and maybe even the people in the crowd—were empowered to do the same work as Jesus in this story. That's just one of the ways we share God's image.

Say: **We can also observe that we are made to know God. When we're focused on listening to God, the pressure to be perfect or do everything "right" doesn't matter so much. In order to work in us and through us, what God needs is our trust.**



SLIDE: WE ARE MADE TO KNOW GOD.

Say: **And through this story, we learn that we are made to be connected with others. It was the way the disciples worked together that enabled them to offer help and hope to those around them. We are at our healthiest—and our most powerful—when we really see each other and begin working with one another.**



SLIDE: WE ARE MADE TO BE CONNECTED WITH OTHERS.

Explain that when the group of disciples looked around, they had what they needed to get started. They had a strong circle that was connected with one another. They knew God and had spent time listening to and learning from Jesus. And they were able to reflect God's power and be part of helping and healing others.

Say: **Remember when our life starts to feel unsteady—whether we're anxious about food or rest or what we're supposed to do next—we can reflect, re-center, and reconnect.**



SLIDE: REFLECT. RE-CENTER. RECONNECT.

REFLECT on the fact that we are made in God's image. That means we're uniquely designed to experience God's power ourselves, and then reflect that power to others.

RE-CENTER by spending time with God. We are made to know God. And when we're focused on listening to God, the pressures of the world around us don't matter so much. The Daily Replay can be a habit that brings you back into that space each day where you can listen to what anxiety is trying to tell you, and experience a sense of hope that brings freedom to you and others around you.

RECONNECT with our circle. We are made to be connected with others. We are at our healthiest—and our most powerful—when we really see each other and begin working with one another. Just like in the passage, it's how bread—and hope—gets shared.

At this point it would be helpful to share a personal story from your own experience or another relatable example of the power of stopping to reflect, re-center, and reconnect. Maybe your story is

about a time when you were worried about how something might turn out or you were concerned that you wouldn't have enough of something, but God used other people to increase your sense of hope. Or perhaps you could share a story of a time when even though you felt inadequate, God used you to share hope with someone else who was struggling.

Say: This week I challenge you to meet with someone from our church [or faith community] who somehow gives you hope, and talk with them about how reflecting, re-centering, and reconnecting helps them be hopeful. As God's people, we are welcomed into a large circle of people just like us who want to follow Christ, let God transform their lives, worship together, and serve others. Getting to know people in our community will help you to know that you never have to handle struggles on your own.

Remind students of your church or community's policies on appropriate boundaries for a minor meeting with an adult. Let them know that the person they meet with should be a trusted adult, and encourage them to talk their decision over with a parent first.

LEADER TIP

A young person who is shy or new to your church may find this week's challenge a daunting one. Consider gathering names and contact details of adults who you've noticed are particularly hopeful and are willing to meet with and listen to students, and making the list available to students who need it. Or, invite those adults to join your student meeting for this session and introduce them personally.

Say: As we look inside this week, we'll also reflect on a prayer that connects us with God's people all around the world, and has been prayed since Christianity began. We can pray this prayer knowing that we're connecting with God, and at the same time we're being rooted in a big, caring community of faith. We're not perfect, but we're a group of people who are trusting in and walking with God through our own fears and anxieties. And just like the people gathered in the Bible story passed the bread around in response to Jesus and watched something beautiful happen, today we keep passing bread around to each other—sometimes it's a symbol of hope, sometimes it's a celebration of friendship, sometimes it's help at just the right moment. God is at work in all of it.

LEADER TIP

It's important that no one is left out of this exercise. Make sure allergen-free options are available according to your students' needs.

Bring out loaves of bread, and prepare to pass them around the room. While standing in front of the students, take off a large chunk, and break it in two.

Say: **Before we close, we're going to take a moment to reconnect with one another, and do what the disciples did. As we pass this bread around, take some and break it into two.**

One piece is for you to eat—and while you do, take a moment to re-center and think about God's presence right here with you.

Then, take the second piece and offer it to someone else in the room. As you do, help them reflect on the fact that they are made in the image of God. You could give them a word of encouragement, or simply call them by name and tell them "You are made in God's image." In doing so, we're spreading hope to one another even before we leave this room. Let's make sure that everyone in this room is connected with our caring community today.

Explain the allergen-free options, and then give your group several minutes to pass and share the bread. You may wish to play quiet music in the background. If your group is large, hand the bread loaves to your adult leaders and ask them to distribute them throughout the room.

LEADER TIP

You and other adults in the room might want to take some extra bread so you can go to one or more students who don't seem to be approached by any other students. Please make sure that every student is given some bread and encouragement—whether it's from a peer or from an adult.

Once everyone has had a chance to participate in the activity, close in prayer, referring to the image of Jesus multiplying the food for the crowd. Point out his power already inside the disciples to feed themselves and others. Ask God to make your group aware of the needs of others, and open to sharing God's hope with those who hunger for it.

Divide into small groups at this point, or use the Session 4 Look inside material whenever your ministry meets in small groups this week.