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INTRODUCTION

This five-part small group study introduces a Jesus so personal, so rich in love, that participants are captivated heart-first. Paul Miller's winsome insights—conveyed through an energetic, interactive format—lead participants to discover Jesus' beauty for themselves. In watching Jesus, participants find their eyes opened to a rich encounter with God's love and their hearts empowered to love others.

This interactive study is divided into five units. Since the concepts build upon one another, it is ideal to go through it in sequence. For example, the more you study compassion (Unit One), the more you wonder what the boundaries of compassion are. Units Two and Three (*Honesty* and *Dependence*) provide those boundaries. Finally, the last two units show us what love leads to (oneness) and what the journey entails (humility, sadness, and joy).

Unit One: Compassion

We watch Jesus interact with people to discover the three steps of love: looking, feeling compassion, and acting.

Unit Two: Honesty

We study how Jesus relates to different people during meals to find that a commitment to truth and justice must balance compassion.

Unit Three: Dependence

We see how Jesus' dependence on his Father, rooted in a deep understanding of Scripture and a life of prayer, shapes all of his relationships and allows him to say no to others' attempts to control him.

Unit Four: Faith

Are compassion, honesty, and dependence enough? Jesus reveals to his disciples how faith in God gives us the energy to love.

Unit Five: The Passion

Death is at the heart of love. The final unit of *The Person of Jesus* traces Jesus' journey to the cross and shows how, in the low place of humility, we learn to see clearly because God lives there.

UNIT FOUR: FAITH

SUMMARY

If someone could perfectly balance compassion and honesty while fully depending on God's guidance to love others, one problem would remain: how do we get the energy to love? Faith in God provides the energy for love. Closely associated with Jesus' dependence on his heavenly Father is Jesus' faith in him.

At the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus tells his disciples that he provides the energy for life and love. The disciples fail to understand Jesus, however. While out on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples turn inward when faced with a simple problem instead of turning toward Jesus.

In this unit, we pull together the threads of love with an in-depth look at Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4. Jesus enjoys this woman's character, yet he is honest with her about her worldly vices. Jesus' conversation with her is a perfect blend of compassion and honesty.

The closing lessons of this unit reveal the goal of love: oneness. Jesus' relationship with his Father is a perfect model of oneness, which leads to his complete joy. Jesus is so truly joyous that the Pharisees rebuke him for rejoicing at parties too much. Real joy for everyone comes from returning to the sanity of the Father's love, through faith and repentance.

Chapters in *Love Walked Among Us*—15 through 18

LESSON 1: FAITH EMPOWERS LOVE

SUMMARY

As our lesson begins, Jesus and the disciples, exhausted from ministry, are interrupted by a huge crowd of people when they take a retreat. Jesus miraculously feeds the people. They respond by trying to make him king by force. They want a Messiah in their own image who will do their will. Instead, Jesus offers himself as true bread.

Chapter in *Love Walked Among Us*—15: Faith Empowers Love

OUTLINE

1. The Morning: An Interrupted Res 5 mins
 2. Late Afternoon: The Prophet and the Shepherd 10 mins
 3. After Supper: Seizing the Energy of God 15 mins
 4. The Next Morning 10 mins
- Total: 40 mins*

GOALS

Love: Faith empowers love.

Faith: There is a huge difference between religion and Jesus.

Jesus: King Jesus is worthy of our worship.

LESSON PREPARATION

As always, heart preparation is the most important form of lesson preparation. What do you find your source in during the day—work, people’s opinions, success? Be thinking about what it would mean for you to feed on Jesus.

LESSON 1: FAITH EMPOWERS LOVE

SECTION 1: The Morning—An Interrupted Rest 5 mins

Introduction: In this lesson we will follow Jesus through an intense 24 hours of ministry and see how faith is his fuel. The hardest part of love isn't knowing what to do; it's having the energy to do it. Ruth Graham, Billy Graham's wife, was asked, "What is the hardest part about marriage?" She replied, "It's so daily." It's the "hanging in there" that's hard. It's continuing to show up for life when we want a break.

Let's get a feel for the situation before we read the text.



Historical Background

Big Picture: Revolt is in the Air

First-century Judea was a troubled province of the Roman Empire. Josephus recounts numerous first-century "messiahs" who rallied the Israelites to throw out the Roman invaders. The prophets had promised the Jews that God would one day free them from their oppressors. Even some educated Romans expected that a world deliverer would come out of Palestine. Suetonius writes: "There had spread all over the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judea to rule the world."¹ Tacitus writes about the Jews, "In most there was a firm persuasion, that in the ancient records of their priests was contained a prediction of how at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers, coming from Judea, were to acquire universal empire."²

The Immediate Situation (Mark 6:14–29)

- John the Baptist had been beheaded by King Herod Antipas. On a trip to Rome, Herod Antipas had fallen in love with his brother Philip's wife, Herodias. She said she would marry him if he got rid of his first wife. So they had a double divorce and got married.³ John the Baptist publicly condemned Herod, so Herod imprisoned him and then had him beheaded at the instigation of Herodias at a drunken feast.

1. Suetonius II, *The Lives of the Caesars*, Book VIII, G.P. Goold, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 289.

2. Alfred John Church. William Jackson Brodribb. Sara Bryant, *Complete Works of Cornelius Tacitus, edited for Perseus* (New York, Random House, Inc., reprinted 1942), 5.13.

3. H. W. Hoehner, "Herodian Dynasty," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 323.

- So Jesus' relative (John the Baptist), another messiah-like figure, has just been killed at the same time that Jesus' popularity has skyrocketed.
- Jesus had also sent out the twelve disciples two by two to the surrounding villages and instructed them to teach to the people there.
- After their return, Jesus suggests a short "vacation" to the other side of the lake. Scholars point out that the other side of the lake is also out of Herod Antipas' territory.

Let's look at what happened when the Twelve returned from their missionary journey.

Read: Mark 6:30–34

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." ³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ 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.

1. How do you see Jesus practicing the kinds of love we have discussed in previous units? Hint: Where does he say "no"? Where does he say "yes"?

Write their answers.

- The crowd follows Jesus and interrupts his rest.
- He begins the day by saying "no" (retreating) and ends the day by saying "yes" (teaching them many things).
- He looks, he feels, and he helps.

SECTION 2: Late Afternoon–Feeding the Crowd 10 mins

Read: John 6:5–13

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” ⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, ⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” ¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. ¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

2. Why does Jesus test Philip? What do you think he is doing? Why not just feed the crowd himself?

Jesus presents the disciples with an overwhelming need to see what they will do.

3. When Philip is faced with an overwhelming need, what do you think Jesus wants him to do?

To turn to Jesus with that need.

4. I like Philip’s answer, partly because it tells us what kind of person Philip is. Tell me about Philip.

He is so matter-of-fact. His answer isn’t spiritual at all. He is rooted to the earth.



Historical Background: Barley and Fish

The little boy’s food is the simple meal of a poor person. Barley will grow in almost any soil; it was the food of the poor. The fish mentioned are called “opsarians” in Greek. These small, sardine-like fish found in the Sea of Galilee were usually salted.

Let's continue watching Jesus with this large crowd.

Read: John 6:14–15—The Crowd Wants to Make Jesus King

¹⁴ After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

5. What is going through the minds of the people? Why are they thinking this way?

- Jesus is a walking welfare state. They will never have to work again!
- Anyone with this kind of power could drive the Romans into the sea.

6. How would the current political climate have reinforced their desire to make Jesus king? (Hint: If King Herod had just killed your relative and you had incredible miraculous power, what would you do?)

The Jews wanted to be rid of the Roman scourge. They would get revenge!

7. What kind of Messiah do the people want?

Answers will vary.



Insight: The Creation of Religion

It seems to the people that the murder of John the Baptist makes this an ideal time to crown Jesus king and throw the Romans into the sea. Moreover, if Jesus resists them, they will just force him. They want a Messiah who will take away pain from their world; a god made in their own image who will serve them. Their view of problems is an “if only” view: If only my husband would just listen, then life would be so much better. If only my wife would stop nagging, then life would be perfect. We are watching the creation of religion. Instead of a Good Shepherd, they want a celestial farmhand they can control, someone who will do their bidding. Instead of wanting the energy of God, they want God to do their work for them. They want God, but on their terms.

8. What kind of Messiah is Jesus?

Answers will vary.

Discuss this chart briefly.

	MAN-MADE RELIGION	JESUS
The problem is...	Other people	Me
Ability to change...	Comes from within	Needs to come from the outside, I need grace
I need a god who will...	Make my life pain-free and allow me to fulfill my desires	Deliver me from my own desires
Who needs to be in charge?	Me	God

9. What would you think if someone said to you, “You know, you really should be the president of this company. You would do better than the guy who is in there.”

You would eat it up, even though you might not say so.

10. How would you feel if over 5,000 people came to you and said something like that?

You would be overwhelmed!

11. What temptation does this remind you of (making bread, jumping from the temple, or getting all the kingdoms of the world)?

Either getting all the kingdoms of the world or jumping from the temple.

12. Imagine this scene. How would Jesus have gone about dismissing the crowd of 5,000 people by himself?

Various answers.

Most likely, fairly vigorously.

13. What is the contrast between Jesus’ initial compassion and how he responds to the crowds? What frees Jesus to initially have compassion and later say no to the crowd?

Teach what they don’t say.

He feeds on his Father, not on people’s approval. Jesus rests in his Father’s love for him. You can’t put Jesus in a box and expect him to react the same in every situation.

Notice how Jesus’ dependence on his Father gives him, first, the freedom to let them intrude into his vacation and then, the freedom to intrude into their agenda. His freedom leads him to tear down walls and then put them up. He seamlessly moves from “yes” to “no” and back again.

Let's see what happens the next day.

Read: John 6:22–29—The Crowds Look for Jesus

²² The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. ²³ Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. ²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” ²⁶ Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” ²⁸ Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

What is the crowd interested in?

Breakfast.

What does Jesus want to give them?

Spiritual food.

14. Why does Jesus' definition of “the work of God” seem strange?

This “work” isn't really doing anything. It is turning to Jesus and trusting in him. The work of God isn't what we give to him but what he gives to us.

Read: John 6:30–31

³⁰ So they asked him, “What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹ Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

15. In effect, what are the people asking Jesus to do here?

They want breakfast—a lifetime supply of free bread. Translation: “Moses gave us bread in the wilderness, Jesus. You could do the same.”

Read: John 6:32–34

³² Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “from now on give us this bread.”

What does Jesus offer the crowd instead of manna?

Himself.



Jesus Insight:

Jesus is either the most arrogant person who ever lived or he is actually the bread of life coming down from God. Jesus says it even more strongly in these next couple of verses:

Read: John 6:35, 37

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.



Insight: Jesus’ Faith and the Disciples’ Faith

- 1. Before Jesus feeds the crowd:** He stretches the disciples’ faith by giving them a problem that they can’t solve—25,000 really hungry people.
- 2. After Jesus feeds the crowd:** He says no to their demand to be a human king because his faith in his Father is so strong. Because he knows his Father loves him, he doesn’t need the crowd’s love or approval.
- 3. When the crowd chases Jesus:** The next morning on the beach in Capernaum, the people want breakfast. But Jesus offers himself as breakfast for their souls!



Insight: Chain of Love

Jesus describes a chain of love (energy, if you will) coming from the Father to him, and then to us. Notice how all these extraordinary elements of the chain match one another.

- Extraordinary compassion: concern about a large crowd of people when Jesus was exhausted and could easily have sent them away.
- Extraordinary humility and hatred of using power for self: Jesus actively and powerfully rejected their desire to make him king.
- Extraordinary power: Jesus turned five loaves and two fish into thousands of loaves and fish. Like God, he created something out of nothing.
- Extraordinary claim: to be the very life of God coming down from heaven, the only thing that really satisfies in life.



Insight: Why a Model of Love Is Not Enough

1. Trying to imitate a model of love, like Jesus, doesn't give us the power to love. We might be inspired, but we do not necessarily change.
2. In fact, a good model can leave us depressed, because it doesn't deal with our weariness with life. Many of us are just trying to get from one end of the day to the other.
3. Nor does a model of love deal with our inward bent toward sin. Often we don't even want a model for love—we just want to enjoy life and have other people see how reasonable we are.
4. Or, even better, we want others to learn how to love us and anticipate our every need.
5. But Jesus is more than a model. He offers the power for love and life.

16. What do you think about Jesus from this lesson?

LESSON 1 APPLICATION

1. What did the Spirit help you see about either Jesus or yourself through this lesson?
2. What do you have faith in other than Jesus? How does that show up in your life?
3. What would it be like to feed on Jesus as the bread of life instead? Discuss as a group.