



# *I Am the Bread*

Jesus provides spiritual food that always satisfies.

## JOHN 6:26-40

**MEMORY VERSE:** JOHN 6:33

**STUDY** John 6:26-40, noting the ways Jesus affirmed His deity. Use Explore the Text on pages 85-89 to gain insight into the crowd's failure to recognize Jesus's deity. Reflect on how recognizing Jesus as God is key to us accepting the eternal satisfaction He offers.

**CREATE** a teaching plan for your group using the ideas on pages 90-92. Focus on helping the group recognize that what Jesus offers us far exceeds our expectations. Consider ways to incorporate the Music Idea (p. 92) into the group time.

**GATHER** the following items:

- Extra *Personal Study Guides* (PSGs)
- Any materials needed for the options on page 92.

**Prepare to display:**

- Pack Item 2** (*Outline of John*)
- Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Seven Signs in John's Gospel*)

**CONSULT** the Explore the Bible website for ways to use a current news event to start and conclude the session ([goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras](http://goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras)).

**REINFORCE** the session by enlisting volunteers to host a group meal. Focus on the good gift of food for both sustenance and also for enjoyment. Invite the group to discuss how this meal serves as a symbol of how we will spend eternity celebrating and enjoying the presence of Jesus with other believers.

## FIRST THOUGHTS

### KEY DOCTRINE

#### *God's Purpose and Grace*

Believers shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. (See Psalm 97:10; 1 Peter 1:5.)

In Charles Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist*, a starving Oliver brings his empty bowl to the master and pleads for more food. Instead of food, he receives a blow to the head and a prompt decision to sell him. That master viewed Oliver as a nuisance and not a person in need. Jesus not only compassionately fed thousands of hungry people, He reminded us that only faith in Him will satisfy our deepest needs.

(In PSG, p. 73) **What should a person expect from God?**

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## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### BIBLE SKILL

*Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words or phrases.*

Compare God's self-identification to Moses in Exodus 3:14 with Jesus's "I am" statement in John 6:35. Consider other instances of "I am" found in John's Gospel: John 8:12; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; and 15:1,5. How did the Jews' reaction (John 8:59) demonstrate that Jesus equated Himself with God? How could you use these statements to help a non-believer understand Jesus's divine nature and mission?

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### JOHN 6:1-71

Wanting to be with Jesus is not enough if our reasons are impure. The crowds originally came to Jesus because they heard about His miracles. When the masses gathered in John 6, Jesus knew they were hungry for more than teaching. His response was partially due to His compassion, but He also wanted to challenge His disciples to deeper faith (6:1-6).

His question about food produced a bewildered response. They didn't have enough money to buy bread for everyone. One small boy offered his five loaves and two small fish. When Jesus miraculously multiplied what was given, everyone was fed, and twelve baskets of food were left over.

During the evening, the disciples traveled by boat back toward Capernaum while Jesus remained to pray (6:15-21). That night, He walked on the water to join them. If they were astonished at the multiplication of loaves and fish, they were overwhelmed by His sudden appearance on the Sea of Galilee. Receiving Him into the boat, the disciples found themselves at their destination.

The next morning, some of the people followed Him to Capernaum and found Him in the synagogue (6:22ff). When they questioned why He left, Jesus challenged them to recognize they had not come for Him, but for what they could get from Him. He urged them to seek bread from heaven.

Although Jesus fed them through supernatural means, the people demanded more proof of His authority and tried to manipulate Him into doing what they wanted. When He claimed to be the Bread of Life, they mocked Him. Eventually, many abandoned Him (6:66).

At that point, Jesus questioned the Twelve about what they would do. Speaking for the group, Peter responded that they had no one else to follow. Jesus alone had the words of eternal life. Yet, despite this loyal affirmation, Jesus knew one of His own would betray Him (6:70-71).

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

**WANTS?** (JOHN 6:26-29)

## Verses 26-27

Some of the people whom Jesus had miraculously fed on the other side of the Sea of Galilee followed Him to •*Capernaum*. When they questioned why He had left them the previous night, He confronted their motives. The miracle of multiplying bread and fish was not enough for them. They **ate the loaves and were filled**. Now, instead of glorifying God, they wanted more free food.

Jesus understood they were not really **looking for** Him. They **saw the signs**, but they did not comprehend the significance. The term *signs* referred to miraculous tokens of supernatural power. It also involved the meaning behind the miracle. While the people experienced the phenomenon, they missed its purpose. They wanted someone who could provide their wants, but they did not understand their own deeper needs.

The people concentrated on temporal rather than eternal concerns. Jesus encouraged them to turn their attention to the more important issue of **eternal life**. His statement about **work** did not mean they could earn salvation but challenged their emphasis on **food that perishes**. Centuries before, Isaiah warned the people of his generation against laboring for things that could never truly satisfy them (Isa. 55:2).

Jesus offered a better deal than they had requested. Although they had eaten miraculous, yet material, bread the previous day, they were hungry again. What they wanted could not last. On the other hand, Jesus could give them **eternal life**. His use of **give** contrasted with their understanding of work. We cannot offer enough good works to gain eternal life; we can only receive it as a gift from God through Christ.

Jesus again referred to Himself as the Son of Man, which indicated a clear claim of being the Messiah. He could offer eternal life because **God the Father has set his seal of approval on him**. At Jesus's baptism, as the Holy Spirit descended on Him, the voice of the Father spoke from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased" (Matt. 3:17). The Father also attested to the validity of the Son through the miraculous works Jesus performed (John 14:11). What the people did not know yet was that Jesus's ultimate affirmation would eventually come through His death and His resurrection from the grave.

## Verses 28-29

The crowd still refused to accept Jesus's answer. The Jewish concept of a right relationship with God centered on religious and moral works, so they wanted to know how to **perform the works of God**. Not satisfied with doing works for God, they coveted the ability to do the works of God. If Jesus would not give them bread, they thought He should give them the ability to make food on their own. The selfishness of their motives was surpassed only by their lack of appreciation for Jesus's offer.

## VERSES 26-27

<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled."  
<sup>27</sup> Don't work for the food that perishes but for the food that lasts for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set his seal of approval on him."

## VERSES 28-29

<sup>28</sup> "What can we do to perform the works of God?" they asked.  
<sup>29</sup> Jesus replied, "This is the work of God — that you believe in the one he has sent."

Undeterred, Jesus returned to the central issue—faith in Him. The **work of God** was not in multiplying fish and bread. God’s concern went beyond physical nourishment to spiritual food that provided eternal life. But that meant they needed to **believe in the one He has sent**. The people had witnessed Jesus’s miracles, but they had not made the connection with Jesus as Messiah. God is not moved by our self-righteous works, but He honors our faith in Jesus.

People must examine their motives for following Jesus. Do we only seek temporal benefits, or do we want Him alone? We can trust God to take care of His children, but the only way to become His child is through faith in His Son, Jesus.

## VERSES 30-31

<sup>30</sup> “What sign, then, are you going to do so that we may see and believe you?” they asked. “What are you going to perform?” <sup>31</sup> Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, just as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”

## VERSES 32-33

<sup>32</sup> Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, Moses didn’t give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.” <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

(In PSG, p. 75) **How can a person’s wants be confused with needs? What are the dangers of failing to define the difference?**

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## MANNA (JOHN 6:30-34)

### Verses 30-31

The crowd wanted more. Asking for another **sign** in order to **see and believe** was an insult to the One who miraculously fed them. People who demand such evidence have ignored or deliberately rejected what God has already done. Faith rarely comes from what is seen; it trusts God with the unseen.

Following Jesus’s resurrection, Thomas believed once he saw His scars and side. Jesus replied that Thomas’s faith came only after he saw physical proof. He declared the truly blessed were those who had not seen, yet believed anyway (John 20:28-29). In this case, the people demanded that Jesus **perform** some new miracle. Their attitude showed their disdain for Jesus if He would not do what they wanted.

The people had a specific miracle in mind. They recalled how their **ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness**. This citation of God’s miraculous provision during the Exodus was not provoked by their faith but their greed. The people in Capernaum misused the Scripture to manipulate Jesus. Their quotation, **“He gave them bread from heaven to eat,”** was a loose translation of Exodus 16:15. God made a bread-like substance appear on the ground each morning as the Israelites wandered in the desert.

*Wilderness* described the area south of the promised land where the Hebrews meandered for forty years. Their journey was lengthened because of their lack of faith, and the crowd before Jesus had the same spiritual affliction. They wanted God’s gifts, but they did not believe in His Word.

### Verses 32-33

Jesus introduced His response with **truly**. The original word appears twice in the Greek and can also be rendered “Amen, Amen.” Repeating the term increased its importance. Jesus contrasted the people’s mismanaged

ideas with ***I tell you***. These people attributed the ***bread from heaven*** to Moses. Like the people of the Exodus, they had stopped seeking God and substituted a human they could understand.

Jesus's response included several important points. First, the source of miraculous provision was not Moses but God. Second, Jesus asserted that God was ***my Father***. Being God's Son was tantamount to equality with Him. Third, God not only provided ***bread from heaven*** for the Israelites in the desert, but He also provided the ***true bread from heaven*** in Jesus Christ. Fourth, this gift was not historical but current. The verb tense of ***gives*** emphasized that God was offering this gift at that very moment. Fifth, God's gift could not be earned; it could only be received. Sixth, God offered the ***true bread*** to these people—***you***. It was personal. In spite of their lack of faith, God still loved them and wanted to save them.

Jesus used their temporal need to point toward an eternal solution. He defined the ***bread of God*** with several important aspects in a simple sentence. This bread is *of God*. It comes from God and belongs to Him. In addition, God's bread is not something but Someone—the ***one who comes down from heaven***.

Further, Jesus gives ***life to the world***. The term *world* can be understood in several ways. In some Scriptures, it refers to the earth, the planet which God created and on which we live (Isa. 23:17). It can also describe the evil world system. Jesus did not come to save either of those, though creation will benefit from believers' redemption (Rom. 8:19-23; Rev. 21). Christ took on human flesh to atone for the sins of people—all people. Whoever repents and believes in Him can receive the *life* He came to give.

## Verse 34

Moments earlier, the crowd's tone was hostile and scornful. Now, believing they might get something, they addressed Jesus as ***Sir***. Although the Greek word can be translated "Lord" or "Master," here it is simply a respectful form of address. They were not ready to acknowledge Jesus as either Lord or Master.

Sensing Jesus was offering more than barley loaves and fish, the people asked Him to ***give us this bread always***. Since they were in the synagogue, numerous people were likely present in addition to the group that followed Jesus to Capernaum (John 6:59). The request for heavenly bread may have originated from some of these worshipers. Their presence in the synagogue suggests they could have had a higher degree of spiritual interest than the bread-seekers from across the sea.

They asked for *this bread*—something that offered life. Understanding Jesus as the source of the offer, they wanted Him to provide this sustenance always. They didn't desire bread for just a day or two. They asked Jesus to provide it continually.

Believers find their ultimate nourishment in the truth of the gospel. Having received salvation through Jesus, the true Bread from God, we can receive ongoing sustenance from His Word. Just as physical growth depends on food, spiritual growth comes from continually receiving spiritual nutrition from Him.

## VERSE 34

<sup>34</sup> Then they said, "Sir, give us this bread always."

## SATISFIED (JOHN 6:35-40)

### Verse 35

#### VERSE 35

<sup>35</sup> “I am the bread of life,” Jesus told them. “No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again.”

No longer using cryptic allusions, Jesus plainly declared Himself to be the **bread of life** sent from the Father. He employed a theological phrase found throughout His ministry: **I am**. God’s revelation of His name to Moses incorporated this idea of “I am that I am” (Ex. 3:14), the ever-existing One. Jesus employed this phrase to further His claim of equality with God. Usually, Jesus used “I am” with various characteristics of His nature and ministry. As the **bread of life**, He promised eternal satisfaction.

Jesus used two terms to describe how people receive Him. A genuine Christian **comes** to Him and **believes** in Him. Coming to Jesus means more than moving toward Him. It also requires moving away from ourselves and our way of doing things. Similarly, believing in Jesus goes beyond affirming His existence. Saving faith requires affirming that He is God’s Son and that God has raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9; 1 John 4:15).

Jesus also used two metaphors to illustrate the results of receiving the **bread of life**. Unlike physical food, no one who follows Jesus **will ever be hungry** or **be thirsty again**. In His conversation with the woman at Jacob’s Well, Jesus offered “living water” (John 4:5-26). Later, He offered living water to whomever believed in Him (John 7:37-39). In Christ, we continually have everything we need.

### Verses 36-37

#### VERSES 36-37

<sup>36</sup> But as I told you, you’ve seen me, and yet you do not believe.  
<sup>37</sup> Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never cast out.

Despite Jesus’s extraordinary offer, the people remained incredulous. They had **seen** Him, implying more than visual sight. The crowd that followed Him to Capernaum witnessed the amazing multiplication of loaves and fish. People who made up the congregation of this synagogue had observed His miracles and His manner of life. Yet, they did **not believe**. Jesus was not surprised. In fact, He knew others would **come**.

His reference to those persons **the Father gives me** has been misunderstood. The form of the pronoun *me* reads “to me.” To understand the phrase, one must consider the inclusive and exclusive nature of the statement. **Everyone** indicates that every type of individual may be included. But the second half of Jesus’s statement restricts *everyone* to **the one who comes to me**. Whoever believes and comes to Christ receives salvation as a gift from God, just as believers are gifts from the Father to the Son.

Another aspect of salvation involves the security it provides. Believers’ security rests with the Son. Jesus promises that He will **never cast out** anyone who follows Him, and He does not reject those who come to Him in repentance and faith. Receiving eternal life means that we will never perish (John 10:28).

## Verses 38-40

Jesus continued to emphasize the importance of the Father's involvement in the Son's activities. Jesus had **come down from heaven** – an extraordinary claim to make before this assembly. His purpose was not merely to assert His association with the Father, but to express His purpose. He didn't come to fulfill His own agenda, but to obey **the will of him who sent me**. Jesus also made this assertion on other occasions (Matt. 26:39; John 4:34; 5:30).

We begin to grasp this truth only as we understand His human and divine natures. As God the Son, Jesus was in every way at one with the Father. In His humanity, Jesus became obedient, even to His death on the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

The topic of the believer's security continued as Jesus explained *the will of him who sent Me*. The Father desired that Jesus would **lose none of those he has given me**. In a later scene, Jesus declared that no one could take His followers out of the Father's hand (John 10:29). Neither statement made Jesus lesser to the Father, for the two were one (John 10:30). As a result, Jesus promised to **raise** believers **on the last day**. The *last day* was a broad eschatological reference to the end of time. It would include things like the bodily resurrection of believers (John 11:24; Acts 17:22-34; 1 Thess. 4:13-17) and the final judgment (John 12:48).

In Jewish literature, repetition emphasized the importance of a matter. Jesus reiterated both the Father's will and His promise. God was the One who sent Jesus, but Jesus also claimed Him as **my Father**. This relationship serves as the basis for believers' hope and rests in the Father's will.

Again employing the term **everyone**, Jesus included people of every background. The only qualification is that one **sees the Son and believes in him**. The word *sees* involves recognizing Jesus for who He is—the Messiah, God the Son. Jesus promised that such a person **will have eternal life**. This life does not begin on the *last day*, but at the moment one trusts Christ as Savior. However, it continues past death into eternity.

A believer's security comes through faith in Jesus. Our religious and moral works do not earn us a place in God's family. We come to God only by believing in Jesus and receiving Him as Savior and Lord. He does the saving. By faith, we receive His gift of grace and are born again.

(In PSG, p. 80) **How does belief in Jesus satisfy a person's spiritual hunger?**

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## VERSES 38-40

<sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup> This is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me but should raise them up on the last day. <sup>40</sup> For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION

**BEGIN:** As the group arrives, invite them to share about a time they felt like a nuisance. Allow them to discuss how this impacted their relationship with the person or place that made them feel that way.

**RESPOND:** Direct the group to read silently the lesson introduction on page 73 of the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG). Call for responses to the question: **What should a person expect from God?** Emphasize that we are never a nuisance to Jesus and that He wants to satisfy our deepest needs.

**TRANSITION:** *How we view Jesus will determine what we expect from Him. The crowds that followed Jesus during His earthly ministry failed to fully recognize who He was. As a result, their expectations usually focused on temporary, physical wants instead of recognizing their eternal needs. As we walk through today's verses, take some time to consider where you make the same mistakes about Jesus and how you can avoid that in the future.*

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**INTRODUCE:** Draw attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of John*) and **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Seven Signs in John's Gospel*). Call on the group to scan these items and the headings in their Bibles under John 6 to gain an understanding of the events recorded in the first half of the chapter.

**OVERVIEW:** Use information from *Understand the Context* (PSG, p. 74) to summarize Jesus's feeding the multitude and walking on water. Explain that each of these events fit into John's desire to reveal Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah. Share that they also set the context for today's study passage.

**TRANSITION:** *As we study these verses, notice the difference between what the people were asking for and what Jesus was offering. Consider why the crowds continued to misunderstand Jesus and how we are also guilty of expecting the wrong things from Him at times.*

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**READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud John 6:26-29**, encouraging the group to listen for what Jesus revealed about Himself.

**ASK: Why were the people following Jesus? What indications do you see that the crowds did not understand Jesus's true identity?** Emphasize Jesus's description of the people's motives (v. 26). Note that the crowd was focused on physical satisfaction. Avoid the implication that Jesus did not care about physical needs. Rather, emphasize that Jesus offered something superior to physical satisfaction.

**STUDY:** Call on the group to underline the last two sentences under verse 26 in the PSG (p. 75). Guide the group in discovering what Jesus was revealing about Himself. Invite volunteers to share words or phrases from these verses that provide insight into who Jesus is. Facilitate a brief discussion about the meaning behind these words and phrases. Refer to the comments in the Leader Guide (pp. 85-86) and the PSG (pp. 75-76) for clarification, as needed.

**TRANSITION:** *Jesus had fed more than 5,000 people, yet the people still wanted more. They demanded a sign, but, even then, they were focused on their physical needs.*

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**READ: Direct someone to read John 6:30-34**, as the group listens for indications that the crowd still did not understand who Jesus was.

**REVIEW:** Call for the group to read silently the information in the PSG under verses 30-31 (pp. 76-77) to gain insight into the expectations of the crowd. Allow volunteers to share insights with the group. Briefly explain the “bread from heaven” as manna that God gave His people while they wandered in the wilderness.

**CONNECT:** Separate the group into teams of two to four and give each team one of these passages to review: Matthew 12:38-41; Mark 15:32; John 6:12-14; and John 20:30-31. Direct the teams to compare their verses with the words of the crowd in verse 30. Call the group back to share insights from their verses. Ask: **Why do people insist on a sign to validate their faith?** (PSG, p. 77) Discuss responses.

**SUMMARIZE:** *How would you describe Jesus’s response to the crowd’s demand?*

Point out that Jesus was not giving up on the crowd despite their stubbornness. Instead, He continued explaining the truth, guiding them to focus on Him and what He offered.

**TRANSITION:** *Unfortunately, the crowd’s response in verse 34 indicates that they were listening but still not understanding. In some ways, they were like the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. They were so fixated on the physical while Jesus was trying to shift their focus to the spiritual.*

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**READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud John 6:35-40.** Encourage the group to listen for how Jesus described the Father’s will.

**DISCUSS:** Direct a volunteer to read aloud the last paragraph under verse 35 in the PSG (p. 79). Allow time for the group to scan the PSG and cross-references in their Bibles. Call for volunteers to share any insights. **What did Jesus’s use of “I am” here reveal about Himself and God’s plan for salvation?**

**PROBE:** *What assurance did Jesus give those who follow Him? How do His words encourage and comfort you?* Affirm the security that believers have through their faith in Jesus. Point to the Key Doctrine (PSG, p. 80). Lead the group to read and reflect on the accompanying verses this week (Ps. 97:10; 1 Pet. 1:5).

**ASK:** *How does belief in Jesus satisfy a person’s spiritual hunger?* (PSG, p. 80) Encourage group members to think about people they know who need to experience the satisfaction only Jesus can provide. Give them a moment to silently pray for those individuals—and for their own opportunities to share Jesus with them.

## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

**REVIEW:** Call attention to this session’s summary statement: *Jesus provides spiritual food that always satisfies.* (PSG, p. 73) Guide the group to consider areas in their lives where they approach Jesus with misguided expectations. Allow volunteers to share.

**RESPOND:** Guide a discussion of the first question set under Apply the Text on page 81 of the PSG: **How does hearing how Christ impacts others encourage you? Why is it important for the group to share about ways each person is expressing faith in Jesus in their daily lives?** Lead the group to discuss how belief in Jesus produces spiritual nourishment or contentment. Record stories shared about how faith in Jesus brings satisfaction.

**PRAY:** Conclude the group time with prayer, thanking God for sending His Son to provide eternal satisfaction. Ask God to help the group avoid settling for temporary satisfaction rather than the deep satisfaction Jesus provides.

## OPTIONS

Use these options to supplement and enhance the group plans on the previous pages.

### MUSIC

Locate an abbreviated version of “To You,” as performed by Maverick City Music. As your group listens to this song, invite them to consider how physical desires can pull them away from the eternal satisfaction Jesus offers.

### CHART

*Gather paper, pens, and markers.*

Call attention to the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 79). Guide the group in completing the Bible Skill activity and creating a chart to display information on Jesus’s “I am” statements in John’s Gospel. Suggest the group include each statement, how the statement connects Jesus to God’s authority and power, and how each statement could be used to help a non-believer understand Jesus.

### DRAMATIC

Recruit a few volunteers to prepare a dramatic presentation of a dialogue or dramatic reading based on the crowd and Jesus. Invite the group to present this drama before your group begins the Explore the Text section.

### REFLECTIVE

*Gather paper and pens.*

Lead the group to make a list of the things they typically ask God for. Encourage them to consider how sometimes our requests become too focused on temporal things and how they might refocus these requests on a deeper eternal satisfaction. Allow for a time of silent prayer, asking God to help them maintain proper focus on what matters most.

### PHYSICAL

*Gather a basket and bread.*

Fill a basket with torn pieces of bread. Pass the basket around the room, inviting each person to take a piece of bread and look at it. Encourage them to consider its appearance, texture, and smell before eating it. As the bread is passed around, remind the group about Jesus feeding the multitude, as recorded at the beginning of John 6. Lead a discussion on the ways bread is a fitting metaphor for the spiritual gift Jesus offers people.

### PRESENTATION

Pre-enlist a volunteer to prepare a short presentation on Passover and the parallels between how God led Israel during the exodus and how Jesus led people during His earthly ministry. Encourage the presenter to emphasize the events of John 6. Direct him or her to the PSG for a brief outline of this information. Share that you will follow the presentation by asking these questions for the group to discuss: *How would celebrating Passover for generations have prepared the Jews to recognize Jesus and receive Him as Messiah? How might legalism and religiosity have hindered many Jewish people from recognizing and embracing Him?*