

3. The crowd wanted to see another miracle, like manna from heaven. They said that Moses gave them bread. In vv.32-33, Jesus gave them two correctives. What were they, and why are they vitally important today?

4. In God's relationship with us there is a continual dynamic of initiation and response (6:37, 44). When we consider verses 37 and 44, what is God's part in our salvation for which we will be eternally grateful? In what ways has God initiated something toward you this past week? What was your response?

5. What does a lack of response do to our relationship with God? What are the characteristics of a favorable response? What makes favorable responses difficult at times?

6. Are belief and obedience our primary means for developing our relationship with God? If so, what are some of the greatest barriers to belief and obedience? How do we develop a true trust in God? Is he always good?

7. What are the marks of a progressive, growing relationship with God?

8. Metaphorically, Jesus said "Eat my flesh, drink my blood." What does the metaphor mean?

9. In practical terms, describe the characteristics of an intimate relationship with God. Do you think that kind of relationship is possible? How does it come about? Are you willing to engage God at that level?

10. What confidence about the future do we gain from verses 37, 39, 40, 44, 51, 54, 58?

John 6:16-59

Lesson 11
For December 7, 2008

Dr. Jerry Nelson

LEADER'S GUIDE

For discussion following the sermon on December 7, 2008

Water and Bread

How do you ever define a relationship? How do you explain how someone has captured your heart, how you enjoy being with them and delight in their presence? How do express your deep appreciation for who they are, especially when your love for them has moved beyond what mere words can express? What words can describe the indescribable depth of understanding and appreciation that take place deep within the soul when two people experience profound connection, dare we say, communion? In this week's passage, we will discover:

Key Points

- Conditional relationships
- Progressive relationships
- Intimate relationships

Crowds of people had conditional relationships with Jesus. They believed in him because of what they saw and experienced in his ministry to them. They followed him all over the countryside. As long as Jesus healed their sick, fed their wives and children, offered religious freedom and met their needs, they would do what they felt was their part in their relationship to God. They would go to work and do what was required of them, for after all, their relationship with God had been reduced to that of works and obligation. Those types of conditional relationships don't really require the movement of the heart. Love is not required. Much like a boss/subordinate relationship, it is easy to sever ties when someone doesn't measure up or live up to his or her part of the bargain.

Progressive relationships are much different. Consider the relationship of Jesus to his disciples. They may have been the primary audience of today's passage. The topic was food (bread), but the metaphor was far deeper than they ever could have imagined. After seeing up to twenty thousand meals appear before their very eyes, the disciples were listening to Jesus as he confronted the crowd about their hunger. But Jesus wasn't talking about fish and bread, or even about manna from heaven; He was talking about a relationship with the transcendent—God himself! It truly is the deepest need of every human soul. But this relationship can't be bought or earned. It is a gift, one that is to be believed and received. In growing, progressive relationships, there is an increasing depth of belief, trust, and appreciation which results in love, an expression from the heart. And responsive action follows.

Intimacy describes yet another aspect of relationship. Overused in our culture, the word conveys an indescribable closeness, a detailed knowledge of another person and unlimited access to their presence. It comes about through the dynamic of initiation and response played out thousands of times over. Jesus told his disciples to believe not only what they saw, but to trust that he did come down from heaven. He is no mere man (remember the feeding of 5000 and walking on water). Jesus explained that they (and we) are to receive him into their very souls like bread is received into the body. He promises to permeate every cell of our being, nourishing us from the inside out. Jesus initiates everything. He says: "Come to me, believe what I say, trust in my grace, embrace me for who I am, and allow me to be an inseparable part of your very existence!" How will you respond?

Leader's Guide

Personal Preparation

Relationships develop from a never-ending cycle of initiation and response. As you think of your relationship with Jesus:

- How did he woo you to himself? How did you respond?
- How did he/does he forgive you? How do you respond?
- How did he/does he show you his mercy and grace? How do you respond?

- How does he continually challenge you? How do you respond?
- How has he/does he transform you? How do you respond?

Belief and obedience produce a deep sense of confidence in God, and a deep sense of gratitude. Worship God for who he is, and who you are becoming because of his work in you.

Group Preparation

- We think Jesus' primary audience in this passage is the disciples—believers. The secondary audience is the crowd—unbelievers. Your group may be no different. It is possible you have unbelievers in your group who think they are believers. They may have a "conditional" relationship with God, either still trying to earn their way, or "trusting" in Jesus until disappointment comes and he no longer "works" for them. Pray that God will grant you insight and wisdom, discernment, and courage to gently lead those to Christ who may yet not believe.

Discussion Questions

1. The crowds were following Jesus. Describe their belief. How was it conditional?
2. They asked Jesus (6:28): "What must we do to do the works that God requires?" Since they were "law"-abiding citizens, what do you think they had in mind? What answer did Jesus give them? How did they respond? How do we ask the same question today? What answer are we looking for? How do we often respond to the gift of grace?