



# THE HEIGHTS

## CHURCH

LIFE GROUP TEACHING PLANS  
THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD  
LESSON 7

# THE SIMPLEST WAY TO CHANGE THE WORLD

FROM STRANGER TO ACQUAINTANCE

LESSON 7

TEACHING PLAN

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## PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying John 6:1-14. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- > **Series Theme Aim:** Loving our neighbors means choosing to engage rather than unplug, open rather than close, and initiate rather than sit idly.
- > **Biblical Emphasis:** With God's power, our little effort has the potential to change everything.
- > **Teaching Aim:** When we begin to love our neighbors, we move from being strangers to being acquaintances.
- > **Memorize:** 1 Corinthians 1:27

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**INTRODUCTION**

*As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.*

- 1 In follow-up from last week, were you able to do any of the following this week:
- Fill out your block map.
  - Identify your calendar or comfort barriers that stand between you and loving your neighbor.
  - Chose a few neighbors you could develop a better relationship with.
  - Attempted to move a conversation with a neighbor to the next step.
- 2 Share a time when someone did something small or seemingly insignificant that had a tremendous impact on you. What were the circumstances, and how did it make you feel?
- 3 What was the last small act of obedience you felt God directing you to take? What were the results?
- 4 Have you ever felt compelled to act without knowing what the results would be? If so, explain.

*Notes:*

Small steps of obedience can be both the easiest to take and the easiest to dismiss. They are easy because there is little risk involved. On the other hand, sometimes we don't follow these leadings of the Spirit because of a perceived insignificance. In the context of our study on neighboring, for instance, we might perceive this week's exhortation to move from stranger to acquaintance as inconsequential. However, no obedience rendered to Jesus is wasted. He is able to take the smallest and seemingly most insignificant acts of obedience and multiply them beyond what we could ever imagine. The feeding of the 5,000 is a miracle that came from a small offering from a little boy in a crowd. In Jesus' hands, this was enough to feed a multitude.

- 5 Name a deep relationship you have that began from something that seemed insignificant at the time.

## UNDERSTANDING

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

Notes:

> Ask a volunteer to read John 6:1-5.

- Why were the crowds following Jesus at this point? How did the crowds following Jesus set the stage for the miracle that was about to take place?
- What was Jesus trying to teach Philip with his question in verse 5?
- Why is it important as believers to grow and increase in gospel responsibility? How do we see that being done in this passage? What would that look like for you now in loving your actual neighbors?

Jesus looked up and saw the crowd pressing in on His disciples on the mountain and decided to do something about it. Philip was from this region, so Jesus likely asked him because he was a local, but Jesus had a greater purpose and lesson in His question. The disciples had no way of feeding the crowd, and understanding that was important. It is for us, too, as we think about loving our neighbors in the ways God is calling us. We don't have what it takes to meet the needs of our neighbors. We don't have enough time, patience, or love. And, already knowing what He will do to draw people to Himself, Jesus asks you and me, *How will we "feed" these neighbors?*

> Ask a volunteer to read John 6:6-9.

- Why is it significant that Jesus knew what He would do in verse 6? What can we learn from Jesus' intentionality?

- How did Philip respond to Jesus' request (v. 7)?

Notes:

- How did Andrew respond to the small amount the young boy had to give (v. 9)? What do you think made Andrew come out from "behind the fence," so to speak?

Philip's response revealed that Jesus' question to him was overwhelming. Andrew—Philip's brother—was stumped, too, but he found a boy with five loaves of bread and two fish. They might have wondered, "What good will this do?" but they had something—it was more than nothing.

Jesus had all of the resources needed to provide for the people. Philip did not see the situation from Jesus' point of view. He missed what Jesus was able to see clearly, and often, so do we. Many people stop short of moving from stranger to acquaintance in relationships because they are afraid that they are not enough or they won't make a difference. Yet, Jesus understood all that was going on. What we give to people does not matter as much as the practice and desire of willingly giving to the work of the Lord. When you give what you have, Jesus multiplies it.

- How might God be calling you to step out and act in faith with your neighbors who are, at this point, virtual strangers? How will you respond?

It isn't our job to multiply. It isn't our job to provide for the crowds. Our responsibility is to act as the little boy in this story: We bring what we have to Jesus. We don't do nothing; we do something, and we don't give up. We may only possess the equivalent of a few loaves of bread and some fish. Maybe you feel like you don't have the skills or talents that other people have. Maybe you feel the church doesn't need what you have to offer. And the truth is, God doesn't need any of

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it. He doesn't need our abilities. But He calls us to offer them, and He chooses to use us as His people. In offering what we have, however small, we act in faith knowing that He will use it tenfold. He uses it. He multiplies it—by His power, not ours.

Notes:

> Ask a volunteer to read John 6:10-14.

Jesus' response to the disciples should be noted. They saw so little in front of them and had no idea how everyone would be fed. They had seen the miracles. They had seen Jesus do the unfathomable. He could have rebuked them for their lack of faith or understanding. He could have reminded them of His great power to do anything the Father instructed Him to do. But He didn't. He simply fed the people. They were hungry, and He fed them—abundantly. This wasn't a show or a spectacle. The bread and fish miraculously multiplied.

- This story reminds us that Jesus has unlimited resources and knows the outcome of every situation. How should these truths impact your efforts to build relationships in your neighborhood?
- Why is it so hard for us to believe Jesus can use what little we can offer?
- Why is it important that there was bread and fish left over?
- What does this remind us about God's character and the nature of His gospel?

When Jesus provides, He does so in abundance. This isn't a promise of fortune or wealth, but it is a promise that He will always be enough. His provision may rarely come in the form

we expect, but it will be more than we could ask or think (Eph. 3:20). There were twelve baskets left over that day, one for each disciple. With Jesus, what we are able to give is enough. We all start somewhere and progress toward Jesus. As this happens, we take on more and more initiative to love our neighbors and model the way our Savior leads us.

Notes:

## NEXT STEPS

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.*

### DO NOT SKIP THESE

- 1 The account of Jesus' feeding the 5,000 reminds us that loving our neighbors happens when we decide to do something, give what we have, and don't give up. With that in mind, what are some practical steps we can take to turn strangers into acquaintances this week?
- 2 Look at your block map and identify someone who is a stranger to you. Encourage members to commit to take an intentional step that moves that neighbor from stranger to acquaintance.
- 3 How can this group pray for you this week as you seek to do something, even something small, to move from being a stranger to being acquainted?

## PRAY

Thank God that He is able to supply your needs and the needs of your neighbors beyond what you can imagine. Thank Him for Jesus who is your final provision that satisfies you completely. Ask Him to help you do something this week to move from stranger

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to acquaintance with a neighbor and commit to trust Him to do something great with your effort.

Notes:

#### FOR NEXT WEEK

- > **REMINDE**: Before you dismiss, remind group members to read Luke 5:27-32.
- > **EMAIL**: Midway through the week, send a reminder email with the following information:
  - Read Luke 5:27-32.
  - Think through these questions before we get together again: 1) Have you identified a neighbor with whom you will do something to move from stranger to acquaintance? 2) Have you done something to move from stranger to acquaintance with the neighbor you have chosen?

## JOHN 6:1-14

6:1. “After this” again indicates the passing of an indefinite period of time (5:1). Half a year may have passed since the previous event. Sea of Tiberias was an alternate name for the Sea of Galilee. Herod Antipas founded Tiberias, the largest city on the Sea of Galilee, in honor of his patron, the Roman emperor Tiberius (a.d. 14-37). The name gained currency toward the end of the first century.

Notes:

6:3. Mountain may not refer to a specific mountain. It could designate the hill country east of the lake, known today as the Golan Heights (Mt 14:23; Mk 6:46). Like other rabbis, Jesus sat down to teach (Mt 5:1; Mk 4:1; 9:35; Lk 4:20), although teaching is not mentioned here.

6:4. This is the second of three Passovers mentioned by John, and the only one Jesus spent in Galilee.

6:5. The huge crowd apparently walked several miles around the north side of the lake and caught up with Jesus and the disciples. Remember that Jesus had been doing more miracles than the three John has recorded for us so far. Many people followed him because of their interest in his power and his teaching. This crowd would have been greatly enlarged because of the number of visitors to Palestine for the Passover. Jesus had led his disciples out to this solitary place to have some private teaching time with them, but the crowds followed. Mark tells us in his account that Jesus had compassion on them and taught them late into the day—and he also saw their need for food.

6:6-8. From a picture of people in need we move to a picture of the disciples in confusion. Philip’s reply is so typical of what we might say. He looked strictly at the human dilemma, considering only his own resources, and pronounced that the situation was hopeless. Two hundred denarii was roughly eight months’ wages, since one denarius was about one day’s pay for a common laborer (12:5; Mt 20:2). This whole inquiry was instigated by Jesus’ question: Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? It is typical of John to remind his readers that Jesus

already knew what would happen next (v. 6). At first we wonder why Philip was singled out, but then we remember he was a native of Bethsaida, possibly the closest town. If a local convenience store had been open at that hour, Philip would have known about it. Nevertheless, Philip did a quick assessment of what it would cost for each one to have a bite! Philip would be the natural choice for Jesus' question since he, like Andrew (v. 8) and Peter, was a native of nearby Bethsaida. Jesus' question echoes Moses' query in the wilderness: "Where can I get meat to give all these people?" (Num 11:13). Other parallels between Jn 6 and Num 11 are the people's grumbling (Num 11:1; Jn 6:41,43); the description of the manna (Num 11:7-9; Jn 6:31); the reference to the eating of meat/Jesus' "flesh" (Num 11:13; Jn 6:51); and the overabundance of the provision (Num 11:22; Jn 6:7-9).

Notes:

6:9. Boy may refer to a kid, a teenager, or even someone in his early twenties. The same word is used to refer to young Joseph in Gen 37:30 and Daniel and his friends in Dan 1. Barley was common food for the poor (the well-to-do preferred wheat bread); the fish were probably dried or preserved, perhaps pickled. In a similar account, Elisha fed 100 men with 20 barley loaves (2Ki 4:42-44).

6:10. The men numbered about 5,000, plus women and children (Mt 14:21), totaling perhaps as many as 15,000 people. Plenty of grass may allude to the messianic age (10:9-10; Ps 23:2). Mark (Mk 6:39-40) mentioned that the grass was green, which points to springtime. Like Moses' ancient rod, Samson's donkey jawbone, and David's sling, this simple lunch shows again that seemingly useless things can become important in Jesus' hands. He alone is all-sufficient. Everyone was satisfied, and each disciple had his own personal basket of leftovers as a reminder of the Master's power. The identification of the number of men appears in all four Gospels. We can only guess what the total number of people might have been. Some estimates reach as high as twenty thousand people. What a wonderful picture John paints of Jesus holding those five small barley loaves in his hands as he gave thanks.

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6:11. A common Jewish thanksgiving prayer was, “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.”

Notes:

6:12. Jesus’ words echo Ruth 2:14: “She ate and was satisfied and had some left over.” Jesus took the same care in providing for those whom the Father gave Him (Jn 10:28-29; 17:11-12,15).

6:13. The number of baskets may allude to Jesus’ symbolic restoration of the 12 tribes of Israel.

6:14-15. The reference to the Prophet who was to come into the world alludes to Dt 18:15,18. No one could deny the miracle, especially those who had enjoyed lunch. Many people were drawn back again to questions posed to John the Baptist in 1:21, particularly the reference to “that prophet” promised by Moses. But Jesus would have none of their political pressure brought on by full stomachs. He slipped again into the hills for rest and worship. Mark told us that he “dismissed the crowd” (Mark 6:45), and John told us that he withdrew again to a mountain by himself. He would be no political messiah hustled into battle with the Romans to regain Palestine for Israel.