

The Gospel of John  
Lesson 10 – John 6  
**Body and Spirit**

This chapter is incredibly complex and, in many ways, disjointed. There is no smooth flow of conversation or thought. What I would offer though is that this chapter encompasses two parallel ideas, both centered on bread. These are 1) the physical self focuses on physical needs (bread) which will be eaten, pass through the body, and can only temporarily prevent death and 2) the spiritual self that focuses on spiritual bread (Jesus) which can be eaten, which abides, and which produces eternal life.

**Feeding of the five thousand:** The chapter opens with the feeding of the five thousand. This is the only miracle that is in all four Gospels. The people are fed and see the physical “sign” of a miraculous meal. This “sign” however pales in comparison with the “sign” that is the one who is feeding them; Jesus who is the spiritual bread.

**Walking on Water:** This is a way of Jesus encouraging his disciples to not be afraid...which will reoccur at the end of the chapter when some disciples become afraid and leave Jesus. And it sets up a conversation about physical vs. spiritual on the other side of the lake.

**Bread that comes down from heaven vs. bread that comes up from earth:** According to Jesus, the people followed him because they received physical bread, because he fed them on the hillside. While this kind of bread sustains a physical body, the physical body will ultimately die. This is the intent of Jesus’ comments about manna which, though coming from heaven, could not keep the Israelites in the wilderness from dying.

This conversation on bread then gives Jesus the opportunity to reflect on himself and his mission. His mission is to give life to those whom God has given him. To do this, Jesus plays with two metaphors, up and down and bread. He says, “*I am the bread of life*” (vs.48) and “*I am the living bread from heaven.*” (vs.51). His “bread” he insists gives not physical life but eternal life. He says, “*This is the bread come down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever*” (vs. 51) and “*unless you eat the flesh...you have no life in you*” (vs. 53), and “*But the one who eats this bread will live forever*” (vs. 58).

This “bread” can give eternal life because it does not pass through the body but remains doing the work of salvation. Again, Jesus says, “*And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should lose nothing (no one) of all that God has given me, but raise them up on the last day*” (vs.39), “*I will raise them (those who eat the bread) up on the last day*” (vs. 54), and “*Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I abide in them*” (vs. 56). Thus, Jesus has come down as bread, to feed those whom God has given him, so that they might be raised up on the last day. We can also hear sacramental/communion language in these words.

**Those whom God has given me:** The Gospel of John is clear that only those whom God calls will understand Jesus’ metaphor and want to eat the bread/body and drink the wine/blood. Jesus says, “*You have seen and yet you do not believe*” (vs.36) and “*Everything that the Father gives me will come to me...*” (vs. 37).

**Because of this many of his disciples turned back:** The Gospel of John is very open about this metaphor and what it implies, that Jesus, rather than Torah, is the source of eternal life and the cannibalistic imagery of eating and drinking flesh and blood, was too much for many of his followers. So, they left. However, Peter reflects the desired outcome of Jesus’ teaching, when Peter says, “*We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*”

**Questions:**

1. How does the image of Jesus as the bread of life help you understand his place in your life?
2. What do you make of the conflict between a call for all to believe but only those who are called can believe?
3. What is your source of life?