

The Life of Christ, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: The Bread of Life: Hard Words, True Words

John 6:25–69

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson follows the great Bread of Life discourse and the crisis it provoked. The doctrinal center is Christ Himself as the true food of the soul: “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). Jesus redirects the crowd from physical bread to Himself, teaching that the deepest hunger of the human heart is for God, and that He alone satisfies it. He also points forward to the cross, giving His flesh for the life of the world (v. 51). The chapter presses the question of whether we seek Christ for His gifts or for Himself.

Two passages call for careful doctrinal handling. The first is the hard saying about eating His flesh and drinking His blood (vv. 53–58). Help the class understand this rightly. Jesus is not speaking of physical eating, and this passage should not be read to teach that the bread and cup literally become His body and blood. Jesus Himself interprets the language in verse 63: the flesh is no help at all; the words I have spoken are spirit and life. To eat His flesh and drink His blood is to receive Him and His sacrificial death by faith, to feed on Christ spiritually, appropriating the life that His death secures. Keep the focus on coming to Him and believing in Him, which the whole discourse repeatedly equates with this feeding.

The second is the interplay of God's drawing and human response (vv. 44, 45, 65), which comes to a head at Question 9. Jesus says no one can come unless the Father draws and grants it; yet He also says everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes (v. 45), and He freely invites all to come and believe. Hold these together as Scripture does. God takes the gracious initiative, drawing sinners through His word and truth; and the call is real and universal, and people are genuinely able to respond. Guard against two errors: the idea that we save ourselves by our own unaided will, and the Calvinistic idea of unconditional election and irresistible grace, in which God arbitrarily chooses only some and leaves the rest unable to respond. The gospel call is sincere and offered to all, the drawing comes through the hearing of God's word, and human beings can either receive or reject it, as this very chapter shows when many turn away. Formationally, the lesson calls us to seek Christ above His gifts, to bring our real hunger to Him, to receive His hard words as true words, and, like Peter, to stay with Him when following is costly.

Question 1

Student Question:

In John 6:26–35, the crowd seeks Jesus for more bread, but He redirects them to “the food that endures to eternal life” and declares, “I am the bread of life” (v. 35). What is Jesus teaching about Himself and about the deepest hunger of the human heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with Jesus’ diagnosis of the crowd. They have come looking for Him, but for the wrong reason: they ate their fill of the loaves the day before and want more. Jesus does not flatter their interest; He names it. They are working for food that perishes. This sets up the contrast that drives the whole discourse, between bread that fills the stomach for a day and food that endures to eternal life.

Unfold the claim, “I am the bread of life.” Jesus is teaching that He Himself is what the human soul most deeply needs. Bread sustains physical life; Jesus sustains eternal life. And He offers not merely something He gives, but Himself. The deepest hunger of the human heart is not for any created thing but for God, and Jesus declares that He is the One who satisfies it.

Draw out the truth about human hunger. Every person is hungry for something they cannot name, and we spend our lives trying to feed that hunger with things that cannot finally fill it. Jesus exposes this restless seeking and offers its true end. As one ancient believer prayed, our hearts are restless until they rest in God. Jesus says that rest is found in Him.

Lead toward coming and believing. Notice how Jesus frames the response: whoever comes to me, whoever believes in me. To eat this bread is to come to Christ in faith. This will become important when we reach the hard saying. For now, establish that Christ Himself is the food of the soul, received by coming to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ Himself as the bread of life, the food of the soul
- The deepest hunger of the human heart as a hunger for God
- The contrast between perishable bread and food that endures to eternal life
- Coming to Christ and believing in Him as the way we feed on Him

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus refuse to flatter the crowd’s interest in Him?
- What does it mean that Jesus offers not just a gift but Himself?
- How does this passage diagnose the restless hunger of the human heart?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus exposed that the crowd wanted His gifts more than they wanted Him. What perishable “bread,” whether comfort, success, pleasure, or approval, do you most often work for, and how does it leave you still hungry?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns the crowd’s misdirected hunger into a mirror. We are all, by nature, like the crowd: drawn to the gifts, slower to want the Giver. Help the class identify the perishable bread they most often work for.

Name the common forms. For some it is comfort or security, for others success and achievement, for others pleasure, possessions, or the approval of people. None of these is necessarily evil in itself, but when we look to them to satisfy the soul’s hunger, they fail. They are bread that perishes; they fill us for a moment and leave us empty again.

Help the class feel the futility honestly. The very fact that we keep returning to these things, never finally satisfied, is evidence that they cannot fill the deepest hunger. Invite each person to name the perishable bread they most often reach for and to notice how it leaves them still hungry. This honesty prepares the heart to turn to Christ, who alone satisfies, which the lesson presses in later questions.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Wanting Christ’s gifts more than Christ Himself
- Perishable bread: comfort, success, pleasure, approval
- The futility of feeding the soul’s hunger with created things
- Honest self-examination as preparation to turn to Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What perishable bread do you most often work for?
- How does it leave you still hungry once you have it?
- What does that lingering hunger reveal about what you truly need?

Question 3

Student Question:

When the crowd asked what they must do to be doing the works of God, Jesus answered, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (v. 29). What does this teach us about the nature of saving faith and about coming to Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice the crowd's question and Jesus' answer. They ask what works they must do, thinking in terms of a list of religious tasks. Jesus reframes the whole matter: the work of God is to believe in the One He has sent. Before any other work, God calls us to entrust ourselves to His Son.

Clarify what this does and does not mean. It does not mean that faith is a mere passive feeling or that nothing is required of us; throughout this study we have seen that genuine faith comes to Christ, repents, confesses, and obeys. But it does mean that the foundational response God seeks is faith in Christ, a coming to Him and resting on Him. All true obedience flows from this; without it, our works are not the works of God at all.

Connect faith with the bread imagery. To believe in Christ is, in the language of this chapter, to come to Him and feed on Him. Faith is not bare intellectual agreement but a coming, a receiving, a personal taking hold of Christ as the bread of life. The whole discourse equates believing with coming and feeding.

Apply it to the class. Some may be tempted to reduce Christianity to a set of religious activities while neglecting the personal coming to Christ that is its heart. Others may need to see that real faith is more than a one-time decision; it is an ongoing coming to Christ to be fed. Either way, point them to Christ as the One in whom faith rests.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith in Christ as the foundational work God seeks
- Faith as coming to and resting on Christ, not bare agreement
- Believing equated with coming to Christ and feeding on Him
- True obedience flowing from faith in the One God has sent

Discussion Prompts

- How does Jesus reframe the crowd's question about works?
- What does it mean that the work of God is to believe in His Son?
- How does the bread imagery deepen our understanding of what faith is?

Question 4

Student Question:

It is possible to follow Jesus mainly for what He provides rather than for who He is. Honestly, do you come to Jesus more for His blessings or for Himself? How would your walk with Him change if He, and not His gifts, were your true desire?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses the central tension of the chapter into the heart. The crowd followed Jesus for bread. We can follow Him for our own version of bread: answered

prayers, comfort, a sense of peace, help in trouble. These are real blessings, but if they are our true aim, we want the Giver only for His gifts.

Help the class examine their motives honestly and without false guilt. It is not wrong to come to Jesus in need or to receive His blessings gladly. The question is whether He Himself is our deepest desire, or merely the means to things we want more than Him. A useful test is how we respond when the blessings are delayed or withdrawn, as they were for the crowd when the bread gave way to hard words.

Cast a vision for wanting Christ Himself. Paul counted everything as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ (Philippians 3:7-8). A walk with Jesus that desires Him above His gifts is steadier in trial, freer from disappointment, and richer in joy, because its treasure is the one thing that cannot be taken away. Invite each person to consider how their walk would change if Christ Himself were their true desire.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Following Christ for His gifts versus for Himself
- Examining our motives without false guilt
- How we respond to delayed or withdrawn blessings as a test of our desire
- Desiring Christ above His gifts as the path to steady joy (Philippians 3:7-8)

Discussion Prompts

- Do you come to Jesus more for His blessings or for Himself?
- How do you respond when His blessings seem delayed or withdrawn?
- How would your walk with Him change if He were your true desire?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus said, "Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (v. 35), and that He would give His flesh for the life of the world (v. 51). How does Christ alone satisfy the deepest needs of the soul, and what does it cost Him to give us that life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hold together the two halves of this question, satisfaction and cost, for they belong together. Jesus promises that those who come to Him will not hunger and those who believe will not thirst. He claims to be the final answer to the soul's deepest needs, the One in whom the restless heart finds rest.

Explain how Christ satisfies. He does not merely give us things; He gives us Himself, and in Him we have reconciliation with God, forgiveness, purpose, belonging, and eternal life. The hungers that no created thing can fill, for meaning, for love that will not fail, for life beyond death, are

met in Him. This is not a promise that we will feel constantly full, but that in Christ the soul's true need is truly and finally provided for.

Now turn to the cost, which verse 51 makes explicit. The bread that Jesus gives for the life of the world is His flesh, a clear pointing forward to the cross. Our satisfaction is purchased at His expense. The bread of life becomes the bread of life by being broken. He satisfies our hunger by being given up to death for us. Let the class feel the weight of this: the life He offers cost Him His own.

Lead to gratitude and trust. Because Christ has paid so dearly to be our bread, we can come to Him with full confidence that He will satisfy. The One who gave His flesh for the world will not turn away the hungry soul that comes to Him. This prepares the personal question that follows.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ alone satisfying the soul's deepest needs
- Satisfaction found in Christ Himself, not merely His gifts
- The cross as the cost of the life Christ gives (v. 51)
- The bread of life given by being broken for us

Discussion Prompts

- What deep needs of the soul does Christ alone satisfy?
- What does verse 51 reveal about the cost of the life He gives?
- How should the cost of our bread shape the way we come to Him?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where are you spiritually hungry or empty right now, in a way you may have tried to ignore or to fill with lesser things? What would it mean to bring that real hunger to Christ and let Him satisfy it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question invites honesty about present hunger. Many people carry a spiritual emptiness they have learned to ignore, to numb, or to fill with lesser things, busyness, entertainment, food, screens, achievement. The promise of Christ as the bread of life is good news precisely to the hungry.

Help the class name their hunger without shame. Spiritual emptiness is not a sign of failure; it is part of being human in a world that cannot satisfy us. Even mature believers pass through seasons of dryness and longing. The point is not to deny the hunger but to bring it to the One who can fill it.

Move toward coming to Christ. To bring our hunger to Him might mean returning to prayer and the word with honesty, confessing where we have tried to feed ourselves elsewhere, and asking Him to satisfy us. Invite each person to name their present hunger and one concrete way they will bring it to Christ this week rather than to the lesser things that have failed them before.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honesty about present spiritual hunger and emptiness
- Numbing or filling our hunger with lesser things
- Spiritual dryness as part of the human condition, not merely failure
- Bringing our real hunger to Christ to be satisfied

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you spiritually hungry or empty right now?
- How have you tried to fill that hunger with lesser things?
- What would it look like to bring that real hunger to Christ this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

In verses 53–58, Jesus speaks of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and many were offended, yet He explains in verse 63 that “the flesh is no help at all; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” What did Jesus mean by this hard saying, how does it point to receiving Him and His sacrificial death by faith rather than to anything physical, and why is it important not to misread it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Approach this carefully, because it is one of the most misunderstood passages in the Gospels. Set the language in the flow of the discourse. Throughout the chapter Jesus has spoken of coming to Him and believing in Him as the way to have life. Now He intensifies the imagery: to have life, one must eat His flesh and drink His blood. The crowd takes Him to mean something physical and is rightly horrified.

Let Jesus interpret His own words. In verse 63 He tells the offended disciples plainly, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” Jesus Himself says the meaning is not physical or fleshly. To eat His flesh and drink His blood is to receive Him and His sacrificial death by faith, to feed on Him spiritually, taking the life that His broken body and shed blood secure. The eating is believing; the chapter has said so repeatedly (vv. 35, 40, 47).

Name and set aside the misreadings. This passage should not be read to mean that the bread and cup literally become the physical body and blood of Christ, nor that salvation comes through

a physical eating. Such readings collide with Jesus' own explanation in verse 63 and with the whole thrust of the discourse, which is about coming to Christ and believing. The Lord's Supper is a precious memorial that the church keeps, but this passage is teaching the deeper reality of feeding on Christ by faith, of which we are reminded whenever we eat the supper.

Bring it to application. To feed on Christ is to make Him the constant sustenance of our souls, depending daily on Him and on the life His death secured, just as we depend on bread for the body. This is not a one-time act but a continual feeding by faith. Help the class see the hard saying as a profound invitation: take Christ Himself, crucified for you, as the life of your soul.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Eating His flesh and drinking His blood as receiving Christ and His death by faith
- Jesus' own interpretation: the flesh is no help; His words are spirit and life (v. 63)
- Believing equated with feeding throughout the discourse (vv. 35, 40, 47)
- Why the passage does not teach a literal, physical eating or transubstantiation
- Feeding on Christ as continual dependence on Him and His sacrifice

Discussion Prompts

- How does verse 63 guide us in understanding the hard saying?
- How has the whole chapter already defined what it means to feed on Christ?
- Why is it important not to read this passage as a physical or literal eating?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus did not soften His teaching to keep the crowd, even when it was hard to hear. What teaching of Jesus do you find hardest to accept, and are you willing to receive His hard words as true words, trusting that He speaks them for your life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question draws out the lesson's theme of hard words. Jesus refused to trim His teaching to keep the crowd comfortable. He let hard sayings stand, even when they thinned the ranks of His followers, because His words were true and life-giving. This confronts our preference for a Jesus who only ever affirms us.

Invite honest naming. Different people stumble at different teachings. For some it is Jesus' words on money and possessions; for others, His call to deny self and take up the cross; for others, His teachings on forgiveness, on sexual purity, on the exclusivity of the way to the Father, or on the cost of discipleship. Ask the class to identify the teaching they personally find hardest to accept.

Call them to receive hard words as true words. The issue is one of trust: do we believe that Jesus, who gave His flesh for us, speaks even His hard words for our good? A disciple is someone who submits to the Teacher's words precisely where they are difficult, trusting His wisdom and love above our own preferences. Invite each person to bring their hardest teaching honestly to Christ and to ask for the willingness to receive it as true.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus' refusal to soften His teaching to keep the crowd
- Our preference for a Jesus who only affirms us
- Identifying the specific teaching we find hardest
- Receiving hard words as true words, trusting Christ's wisdom and love

Discussion Prompts

- What teaching of Jesus do you find hardest to accept?
- What makes it hard, and how do you usually respond to it?
- Are you willing to receive His hard words as true words spoken for your good?

Question 9

Student Question:

In verse 66 many disciples turned back, and Jesus said no one can come to Him unless the Father draws and grants it (vv. 44, 65), yet He also said everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes (v. 45) and freely invited all who would to come and believe. How do we hold together God's gracious initiative in drawing sinners and the genuine, universal call that people are truly able to answer, without concluding either that we save ourselves or that God arbitrarily chooses only some and leaves the rest unable to respond?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it deserves patient, balanced handling. Lay out both sides of what Jesus says. On one hand, He insists on God's gracious initiative: no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him (v. 44), and no one can come unless it is granted by the Father (v. 65). Salvation begins with God, not with us. On the other hand, He issues a genuine, open invitation throughout the chapter, whoever comes, whoever believes, and He holds the crowd responsible for refusing to come (v. 36). Both are true and must be held together.

Show how Scripture itself joins them in verse 45. Jesus quotes the prophets: they will all be taught by God, and then says, everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. This is the key. The Father draws people through His word and truth, by teaching them, and everyone who genuinely hears and learns from Him comes to Christ. The drawing is real and

necessary, and it works through the hearing of God's word, not by an irresistible force that bypasses the will. This is why faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).

Now address the two errors directly and kindly. Against the idea that we save ourselves by our own unaided will: no one comes apart from the Father's gracious drawing; the initiative and the enabling are God's gift. We have nothing to boast of. But against the Calvinistic teaching of unconditional election and irresistible grace: this chapter does not teach that God arbitrarily selects only some to save and leaves the rest unable to respond. The call is universal and sincere; God draws through His word, which goes out to all; and people genuinely can and do respond, or refuse. The very fact that many turned away (v. 66), and that Jesus held them accountable for unbelief, shows that the drawing of God can be resisted and that human beings are truly able to answer the call.

Land the balance. The God-honoring view holds both truths without sacrificing either. Salvation is by grace, initiated and enabled by God, who draws sinners through the hearing of His word; and the gospel call is real and universal, addressed to people who are genuinely able to respond in faith. We do not save ourselves, and God does not save us against the grain of a will He created free. Help the class rest in grace, take responsibility to respond, and freely call all people to come to the bread of life, for the invitation is for everyone who will.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's gracious initiative in drawing and enabling sinners to come (vv. 44, 65)
- The Father drawing through His word and teaching (v. 45; Romans 10:17)
- The genuine, universal, sincere call of the gospel to all
- Human responsibility and real ability to respond, shown as many turn away (vv. 36, 66)
- Rejecting the error that we save ourselves by our own unaided will
- Rejecting the error of unconditional election and irresistible grace

Discussion Prompts

- How does verse 45 help us see how the Father draws people to Christ?
- How does the chapter show that God's drawing can be resisted and the call truly answered?
- How do we affirm grace's initiative without concluding that God leaves most people unable to respond?

Question 10

Student Question:

When others turned away, Peter confessed, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (v. 68). Looking back over this lesson, where is following Jesus costly or hard for you right now, and what is one specific way you will choose to stay with Him because He alone has the words of eternal life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the lesson into Peter's great confession. When the hard words had thinned the crowd and Jesus asked the Twelve if they too would leave, Peter answered for every honest disciple who has counted the cost: there is nowhere else to go, for Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. Let this be the note the lesson ends on.

Help the class locate where following Jesus is costly for them now. For some it is a hard teaching they must obey; for some, a trial that tempts them to doubt His care; for some, the pull of the perishable bread they have leaned on; for some, the cost of standing with Christ when others turn away. Naming the specific place of difficulty makes Peter's confession personal.

Invite a definite choice to stay. Peter's confession was not that following was easy, but that leaving was unthinkable, because Christ alone has what no one else can give. Ask each person to name one specific way they will choose to stay with Jesus this week in their place of difficulty, holding onto Him because He has the words of eternal life. Close by reminding the class that the same Christ who let the crowd go did not let go of the Twelve, and He will not let go of those who come to Him as the bread of life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Peter's confession as the model response when following is hard
- Counting the cost yet finding there is nowhere else to go
- Identifying the specific place where following Jesus is costly now
- Choosing to stay with Christ because He alone has the words of eternal life

Discussion Prompts

- Where is following Jesus costly or hard for you right now?
- What makes Peter's confession ring true even when following is difficult?
- What is one specific way you will choose to stay with Christ this week?