

## Bible studies for August 2020

<b>Page 2</b>	<p><b>Feeding the 5000</b> In a dramatically political atmosphere, Jesus organises a meal for a multitude in the wilderness as a sign of compassion, and a lesson to the disciples that they need to look around them, see the need and meet it.</p> <p>2-8 August 2020 <b>Matthew 14.13-21</b></p>
<b>Page 4</b>	<p><b>Peter walks on water</b> Jesus reveals a little more of his identity in dramatic fashion by walking on the water to where the twelve are battling a storm. Peter thinks he can do it too; but he needs to be rescued and learns a crucial lesson in trust.</p> <p>9-15 August 2020 <b>Matthew 14.22-33</b></p>
<b>Page 6</b>	<p><b>Jesus meets a Pharisee and a Canaanite women</b> Jesus has two tricky encounters, first with the Pharisees, then with a Canaanite woman, that seemed to be linked by food. In fact, the link is deeper – faith and membership of God’s people – and the outcome of the encounters is something of a surprise.</p> <p>16-22 August 2020 <b>Matthew 15.10-28</b></p>
<b>Page 8</b>	<p><b>Jesus speaks to his disciples about who he is</b> Taking the twelve disciples a long way north, Jesus wants to know if they have understood who he is yet. In the shadow of empire, they declare him to be king, and he assures them that this confession will help them break the grip of that empire on them and others.</p> <p>23-29 August 2020 <b>Matthew 16.13-20</b></p>
<b>Page 10</b>	<p><b>Jesus invites us to share in his story</b> Having acknowledged the truth of Peter’s declaration, Jesus tells his friends what kind of king he will be: one that suffers. And he tells them that they too will suffer if they come after him; it is the only way to find the life they seek.</p> <p>30 August – 5 September 2020 <b>Matthew 16.21-28</b></p>

## Introduction for leaders

During August, even without this year’s coronavirus-related constraints, church often has a different routine and feel to it. This year many church buildings may not be in use, most people are not away on holiday, and ‘being church’ is much more family or household-based. With that in mind, we have used the published ROOTS resources to compile a Bible study for each week of August.

The studies are designed to be used by an individual or the members of a household at home, with their Bible and nothing more. Very little preparation, if any, and no input from anyone else is required.

Each study can be emailed or printed and delivered to those who would use it. But they can also be used in other ways – e.g. in an online Zoom group – and for that you may wish to adapt what is presented here.

Each week looks at a familiar story from Matthew’s Gospel (the one that might have been heard that week

in church), and is explored using resources hand-picked from across the range of ROOTS resources published for that week, adapted as necessary for home use. Two practical craft or active worship ideas are suggested for each week to offer choice – and a good balance between the active and the more passive elements such as reading and reflection.

In addition to these Bible studies, ROOTS has produced a [five-week ‘Summer Club’](#) for use at home with children and young people. Each week has five sections that could be used: one each day, Monday to Friday, or adapted to suit your needs.

Do also look at the article [‘Matthew’s messages of hope’](#) for more inspiration from Matthew’s Gospel. It has reflections and activities to do this summer for parents/carers and children, young people, church leaders and whole church communities.

2-8 August 2020: Matthew 14.13-21

## Feeding the 5000

*This study can be used by an individual, a small family/ household group, or by an online group. Suggestions in orange are specifically aimed at online groups.*

### Begin with an opening prayer

Mighty God of miracles, we come before you.  
We imagine what it might have been like  
being part of a crowd of 5,000.  
There may be far fewer of us here today,  
but we think about the people in other churches  
in our town, village, and country,  
also seeking to worship and serve you.  
We are all bound together by your great love,  
and we gather in spirit to meet with you. **Amen.**

### Read the passage

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.  
In an online group, you could share parts between those present, or use/adapt this suggestion:*

*In advance, rehearse reading the text and note exactly how long it takes. Share your screen and display an [online countdown timer](#). Set the timer to the measured time and start it as the reader begins. The clock counting down reflects the urgency of the situation.*

### Explore and respond to the text

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

#### Bible notes

Matthew's account of the feeding of 5,000 begins with Jesus withdrawing on the news of John's death. Is he seeking solace in the wilderness, taking stock of his movement now John has gone, or getting out of Herod's way? Whatever the reason, this story has a profoundly political location, beginning with the empire acting against Jesus' movement, and ending with the feeding of an army in the wilderness. In between these brackets we are treated to a story of compassion in action, of the lavish grace of a God who loves and provides for all.

The crowds followed Jesus, and his response was to meet their needs. The disciples – maybe keen to ensure that they could meet Jesus' need – want to send the crowds away. But Jesus challenges them to

meet the crowds' need for food (v.16). Rightly the disciples object that they have barely enough for their own needs (v.17). So, Jesus feeds the crowds so that the disciples will learn what compassion looks like, just as much as because they all need a meal.

Although the miracle is Jesus' doing, the disciples are invited to play their part by making the seating arrangements, distributing the food and clearing up afterwards. Amazingly, five loaves and two fish had become a banquet for 5,000 men and unnumbered women and children, with more left over for the disciples than they had started with. Two strong resonances in the story should not be missed. The first is the reminder of how God provided manna in the wilderness. Matthew does not labour this, but the fact that he describes the place as a wilderness suggests that he has the wanderings of the people under Moses in mind. And the fact that the crowds are looking to Jesus for leadership suggests that they see him as a new Moses.

The other resonance is the strong echo of the Eucharist in the language of verse 19b. Of course, no one in the crowds or the disciples would have got this, but we do – because we are reading this story after the Last Supper became the central celebratory meal of the Christian tradition. And with this, there is a strong echo of the messianic banquet of Isaiah chapter 25: here God's people feast in celebration of the coming of his kingdom and their place in it.

There is one other echo that is worth noting. The story immediately before this one was set in a lavish banquet presided over by a self-aggrandising empire builder (Herod). Here we have the opposite: another king, generously providing for all those who look to him for guidance and leadership in a kingdom of grace and welcome.

#### Reflection

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

Can we make a link between the need to feed the hungry and projects to feed schoolchildren during the school holidays, when school meals are not provided? Churches used to supply soup kitchens during the great depression of the 1930s. It is shameful to realise that such hunger can exist today, and that until recently society was unaware of the need. How should we respond?

### Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.

*In an online group, you could share your screen to display the image and questions.*



- Why is there a need to share?
- What are the best things about joining together with your church community?
- What would you share with them?

### Something to eat

You may wish to investigate hunger projects and how you can make a practical response. *In an online group, cover more ground by getting different people – or groups of people, using breakout rooms – to investigate different projects.*

Use your phone, tablet or computer to find out about projects that are tackling holiday hunger among children (e.g. [Feeding Britain](#); [End Hunger UK](#); [TLG](#); or read this article from [Premier Christian News](#)). Then decide if there is anything you can do about this. Or, if you are a church that is already engaged in this work, how you might communicate the importance of what you are doing to others who may not have heard about it.

### A simple worship activity

Spread out a large tablecloth on the floor. Offer everyone in your household an [‘Urgent’ note](#) and a pencil. Ask them to identify things for which ‘the hour is late’ – i.e. that need urgent attention – locally, nationally, internationally or personally – and to write or draw something on their note to represent it. Put the notes on the tablecloth. Gather round the cloth, observing what others have offered. End with the prayers that follow.

### Pray for others

*Sections of this prayer could be said by different people. Adapt it to your local context.*

Lord, we pray for people who have little or nothing: for those who feel trapped in their situation, and can’t see the bigger picture, or even any tiny glimmer of light.

We pray for people who are hungry: for parents who struggle to feed their children, and themselves.

We thank you for the work of food banks, and pray that they would have the resources to continue to meet so many needs.

We pray that you would give us an appreciation of our food: the work that goes into producing and distributing it.

Teach us not to be wasteful, but to preserve and pass on the goodness of your earth.

**Amen.**

### A prayer to end the Bible study

By the end of the day,  
the crowds must have been exhausted.  
They left with full stomachs and full hearts.  
They had met with Jesus.  
You have fed us today, Lord,  
and we go now to live the lives you call us to.  
May we be conscious of your perfect timing  
in our lives, as we reach out to the outsiders  
as well as to our own.

Bless us, Lord.

**Amen.**

### Live your faith

Write yourself a note to remind you either to give something away or share something with someone else. It doesn’t need to be a big or expensive gift, just generous!