

On your marks

The miracle of the feeding of the 5000 occurs in all four gospels, so it must be important; it certainly shows what an impact it had on the first disciples. The following outline is full of ideas to explore this story actively and was first used with large numbers of children at a special holiday club event that was using Junior Heroes by John Hardwick, session 2 of which focuses on the child who gave up his bread and fish lunch.

Get set

This is an active session with minimum props, nothing to write down or draw... and not even a craft idea! It suits a group who like to keep on the move and who learn by doing.

However, some intriguing visual aids to introduce the story could be useful (see the suggestions below). I produced these from a storage box that looks like a Bible such as those you can buy in Hobbycraft.

In preparation you may also like to read about the two drama exercises, choice circus and [hot seating](#), which are suggested in this outline.

There are other ideas for this story on our site:

[Feeding the 5,000 - a reflective story](#)

[Feeding the 5000 - a dramatic activity](#)

Go!

1. Welcome and introductions

Hands up if you like... games... drama... and stories?

Our stories come from my box Bible.

Take out various items... including rubbish bags, tablecloth, toy fish, serviettes and some bread.

2. An active warm-up

We need to warm up for games, drama and stories.

Lead the group in a simple individual warm-up and then set them off walking and then freezing...

... into groups of two, three, four or five or more, depending on your numbers, and ask them to complete various challenges, for example:

each carrying another

all standing and leaning on each other

all sitting back to back

each holding on to someone else's right knee

each holding on to someone else's left shoulder

all hands piled as a tower on top of each other

everyone is in a huddle to create a tent with arms around each other's shoulders

all at a imaginary table eating

everyone together in the shape of a boat.

With younger children, try:

Lying on their backs with legs in the air - the upside down bicycle

Lying on their fronts with their hands swimming

Standing up with their elbows flapping - flying

Feet together hopping

Knees on the ground walking

Toes on the ground dancing

3. Invite the group to sit down. Introduce the story:

This is a massive story with a cast of thousands.

This is a big story involving all age groups.

This is an important story that is told four times in the Bible.

This is a special story that can only have happened because one primary school child said 'yes' to Jesus.

This story is:

Linked to fish - encourage fish movements and appropriate facial expressions

Linked to bread - become dough that is rolled, stretched, squashed, spread and then from smaller lumps slowly becomes larger (rises)

Linked to boats - *rowing actions*

Link to sounds - *encourage sounds of being out of breath, crying, groaning with stomach pains, eating, drinking, after-meal satisfied sounds... and snoozing*

Linked to feelings - *act out being tired, shocked, sad, puzzled, hungry and then very happy*

Linked to somewhere quiet and lonely - *go very still!*

4. I wonder if we have people here who have experienced the right things in order to be part of the acting out of this story? Stand up if you have ever:

... been on a long walk

... been in a rowing boat

... eaten too much

... listened to someone telling stories

... felt very hungry

... picked up litter

... had a big surprise

... eaten freshly caught fish

... made some bread

... given away something very precious

... found it hard to do the right thing

If you have done some of these things, then this story is for you!

5. This story has some very strange number work: something was **added** together and then **divided** and then it was '**multiplied**', so that more was **taken away** at the end than was there at the beginning!

6. Move the group into a circle with a central performance area and mark off four quadrants - A B C D - for a [story circle](#) activity.

Invite the different sections into the centre to mime the story you tell.

A.

Jesus and his friends had been working hard telling the good news about God's love.

It was time for a rest.

They rowed over to a lonely place.

Jesus was also sad about his friend John.

They found a quiet place to be.

B.

But the people of the town loved Jesus' stories.

They wanted to hear more.

You may remember some of the stories he told (suggest some but get the titles slightly wrong, inviting them to correct you), for example:

the lost goat

the runaway daughter

the story of the farmer who dug up seeds

the story of the man who found a precious diamond

the story of building a house on tarmac

the story of throwing a big birthday party

the story of the hungry caterpillar

the story of the ten talons

So the crowd got up and ran all around the shore,
looking for Jesus.

Suddenly they found him in the quiet lonely place.

C.

Jesus saw them coming

The disciples said, 'Oh no!'

Jesus said, 'It's OK. They need to hear more stories about God's love.'

He told more stories.

They got so lost in the stories that it went past lunch time and they were getting hungry.

Jesus asked Philip to feed them all.

'How many hamburgers? How many packets of chips? How many chicken pieces? How much will it cost?'

Then Andrew brought a child who had a pack lunch - five rolls and two fish.

The disciples laughed.

But Jesus said, 'It's enough' and he asked the child for his lunch.

*Pause the story at this point and explore the young child's decision to give up his food, using a choice circus exercise: should he give it or not? Invite someone to be the child in the middle, while the others suggest reasons why s/he should or shouldn't hand over the bread and fish to Jesus.

D.

Jesus prayed; he took the bread; he broke it and gave it to his friends to pass amongst the crowd.

More and more kept appearing.

The disciples picked up the pieces.

More and more and more kept being found.

Everyone was amazed.

I wonder what everyone thought.

*Interview the crowd; ask Jesus' friends; talk to the boy. For this you could use the drama exercise known as **hot seating**.

7. End with a quieter time of reflection and discussion about the story, which you could then turn into prayer.

So, what does this amazing story mean? Why do you think the disciples made sure it was told again and again... and also written down for us today? What do you think they learned from it all? What do you think the story is saying to us... about God... about Jesus... about you and me? I wonder why that child gave up his bread and fish? Would you?