

# 1

# Give Thanks

MATTHEW 14:13–21



## GOAL

Children give thanks for God's good gifts and reflect on communion as Eucharist, a meal of thanksgiving that extends to their family tables.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



## PRAYER

Gracious God, I confess that too often I perceive that there is “not enough.” Where I see scarcity, help me to trust your abundance and live a life of thanksgiving. Amen.

## THIS SESSION

Jesus takes bread, gives thanks, breaks it, and gives it to his followers. It is a scene that is repeated throughout the New Testament and one that Christians reenact when they share the communion meal. Sometimes known as the *Eucharist*, from the Greek word for *thanksgiving*, communion is the church's meal of thanksgiving. In the words of the prayers and the taste of the bread and wine, we give thanks for God's great love, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ. Family meals are an extension of the Eucharist. Every meal, whether at the Lord's Table or the family table, is an occasion to give thanks.

## THE BIBLE STORY

Aside from the resurrection, the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels and is told in a way that foreshadows the Last Supper. According to Matthew, Jesus wants to feed a hungry multitude, but the disciples complain that they have only five loaves of bread and two fish. Where the disciples see scarcity, Jesus sees God's provision and a reason to give thanks. Jesus takes the bread, gives thanks, breaks it, and gives it to the disciples to feed the crowd. After the 5,000 men—plus women and children—eat their fill, the disciples collect twelve baskets of leftovers.

## CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Children are taught to say “thank you” when they receive gifts. In this session, they will consider the many gifts God has given to them and will follow Jesus' example by saying “thank you” to God. They will explore communion as a meal of thanksgiving and consider ways to give thanks for the meals they share at home.

## SESSION PREPARATION

- “Breaking Bread” (p. 8): Obtain a loaf of unsliced bread. Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.
- “Taste and See” (p. 8): Review the American Sign Language signs so that you may lead the children in their response to the litany. Go to [www.signingsavvy.com](http://www.signingsavvy.com) and enter the key words, *taste*, *see*, *God*, and *good*, in the search bar to watch a video of each sign.
- “Gratitude Game” (p. 9): Cut strips of red, green, yellow, and blue paper, making at least one set of every color per child. Place strips in a paper bag.
- “Closing Litany” (p. 12): On a sheet of newsprint, write the words (not the instructions in parentheses for motions) to the closing litany with your lines in black and the children's responses (indicated in bold) in a color.



# GETTING STARTED

☐ Unsliced loaf of bread



Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.

## BREAKING BREAD

C F X

Greet the children as they arrive. Engage them in conversation about their week and particularly any favorite meals they had and friends with whom they had a meal. Encourage the children to ask each other questions about these meals.

Once everyone has arrived, show the children the loaf of bread and tell them that you want to share some bread with them, but you do not have a knife to cut the bread into pieces. Ask if they know how you can share the bread without using a knife. Demonstrate how you break bread and explain that sometimes the phrase “breaking bread” is used to describe eating together. Invite the children to pray with you by shouting, “We give you thanks,” when you raise your hands. Pray the following prayer:

Loving God, for all good gifts you give, (*raise hands*) **We give you thanks!**

for your loving care, (*raise hands*) **We give you thanks!**  
and bread to share, (*raise hands*) **We give you thanks!**  
we give you thanks! Amen.

Break the bread into pieces, offering it to the children to share and eat together.

## TASTE AND SEE

QC

Invite the children to join you in the litany below with their response: “Taste and see that God is good.” Teach the American Sign Language signs below for the children to use for each of the key words in the response. Practice the response so that it flows with the signs.

- Taste: *touch the tip of middle finger to lips*
- See: *“V”-hand moving pointer and middle finger from eyes outward*
- God: *move right palm facing left from slightly above head down toward chin*
- Good: *touch fingers of right hand to mouth, then move back of right hand to palm of left hand*

Receive God’s good gifts.

**Taste and see that God is good.**

Give thanks for all things.

**Taste and see that God is good.**

Be fed by the bread of life.

**Taste and see that God is good.**

Share God’s love with all.

**Taste and see that God is good.**



## INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

### GRATITUDE GAME



Invite the children to take turns pulling one paper strip at a time from the bag until the bag is empty. Offer the children the opportunity to exchange colors with other children if they like. They may have any combination of colors or all one color as they choose, but each child should have at least four strips of paper.

Tell the children that each color represents a different type of gift that God gives us. Display Resource Page 1 and read aloud what the four colors represent. Invite the children to take turns choosing one of their paper strips and naming something in the corresponding category for which they are thankful before returning the strip of paper to the bag. Encourage the children not to repeat what someone else has said. Have them continue taking turns until all paper strips are returned to the bag. Tell the children that our gratitude, or thankfulness, is our response to the good gifts God provides in our lives.

- Prepared paper bag with strips of red, green, yellow, and blue paper, at least one set per child
- Resource Page 1



## FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

### ACTING OUT THE STORY



Set the scene for the Bible story by telling the children that large crowds often followed Jesus as he went around the countryside. They knew he loved them, taught them about God's love, and cared for them in many ways. Explain that today's story is about a time Jesus did something simple—gave thanks for God's good gifts and fed people who were hungry—that was quite miraculous.

Invite the children to be involved in a dramatic presentation of the Bible story. Ask for volunteers to read the parts of a narrator, Jesus, and four disciples. Children who are not reading may be the crowd and follow the instructions given to them by the narrator. Provide copies of Resource Page 2 to the readers. Explain to the readers that they will pantomime the actions described in the parentheses for their parts.

After the reading, discuss the following questions together:

- ➔ How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus told them to give the people food?
- ➔ What did Jesus do with the five loaves of bread and two fish?
- ➔ Is it easier to give thanks when you only have a little or when you have plenty? Why?
- ➔ What does Jesus blessing the bread and fish, breaking the bread, and giving it to others remind you of?
- ➔ How do you think the disciples felt when they were giving the food to the crowd?
- ➔ How do you think the disciples felt when they were gathering the leftovers?

- Copies of Resource Page 2



With a smaller group, have two disciples; with a larger group, have eight disciples.



The other Gospel versions of this story can be found in Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–13.



# FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

- Newsprint, marker
- Copies of Resource Page 3
- Pencils, crayons

## GIVING THANKS AT COMMUNION



Ask the children if they know what names are used for the part of the worship service when bread and juice (or wine per your congregation's practice) occur. Write their suggestions on a sheet of newsprint. Provide the following names if not mentioned: communion, the Lord's Supper, the Last Supper, and Eucharist. Wonder what each of these different names means for this ritual. Explain and write notes by each name, as necessary:

- Communion: From Latin, it means "mutual participation," like the words *community* and *common*. It is something we do together. *Common* also suggests something done often and ordinary, and everyday elements are used.
- Lord's Supper: Jesus, also called Lord, shared this meal with his disciples and is the host of the meal he invites us to share.
- Last Supper: It was the last meal Jesus had with his disciples before he died.
- Eucharist: From Greek, it means *thanksgiving*. We are giving thanks for all that our loving God has done for us.

Tell the children that the communion liturgy of many Christian churches includes a prayer of thanksgiving, often called the Great Thanksgiving. Provide copies of Resource Page 3 and explain that it contains a portion of the Great Thanksgiving from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Have them circle the words *thanks* and *praise* each time they occur. Encourage children to work together, particularly pairing any children who may need assistance reading with those who are strong readers. When they are finished, ask them to underline reasons for giving thanks and praise.

After completing the exercise, ask the following:

- ✦ How many times did you find the word *thanks*?
- ✦ How many times did you find the word *praise*?
- ✦ What does the prayer name as reasons for giving thanks and praise?

Tell the children that together they will be writing a prayer of thanksgiving. Recall the Gratitude Game (p. 9) and give the children about thirty seconds of silence to think about the people, elements in the natural world, places, and things for which they are grateful. Invite the group to create a prayer by asking the questions below and recording them on a sheet of newsprint. Then lead the children in saying their eucharistic prayer, or thanksgiving prayer, together.

- ✦ How shall we start our prayer? Who are we praying to? Do we want to describe the one we are praying to?
- ✦ Who are the people we are thankful for?
- ✦ How will we say our thanks? Is there a phrase we want to repeat throughout the prayer?
- ✦ What in nature are we thankful for?
- ✦ What places are we thankful for?
- ✦ What things are we thankful for?
- ✦ How do we want to end our prayer?



In the words of our prayers and in the very act of eating and drinking, we give thanks to the God who was, who is, and who is to come.

## SINGING OUR THANKS



Tell the children that there are many ways to express thanks. In addition to speaking or writing words of thanks, we can sing and dance our thanks to God. Many of the psalms in the Bible and songs in our hymnal are songs of thanksgiving. Distribute hymnals and invite the children to find songs of thanksgiving. Suggest that many hymnals have a topical index and have hymns grouped together by topic.

Tell the children that there is a church song titled “Give Thanks” (text and music by Henry Smith, TUNE: GIVE THANKS; *Glory to God*, #647). If you have hymnals with this song, invite the children to familiarize themselves with the words by repeating them after you; otherwise, move to the video. Show the YouTube video “Give Thanks HD” ([bit.ly/FMGiveThanks](https://bit.ly/FMGiveThanks), 2:25), inviting the children to sing along and follow the motions of the children in the video. Point out that American Sign Language is used in the “Give thanks” portion of the song. You may want to repeat and pause in this section so the children can learn the signs.

- Hymnals with the song “Give Thanks” (optional)
- Internet-connected device



## PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

## SAYING GRACE AT HOME



Remind the children that Jesus gave thanks for the bread and fish before giving the food to the crowd. Suggest that we follow Jesus when we say grace before meals. Tell the children that they will be making table grace cubes to help them say prayers of thanksgiving before the meals that they eat at home. Give each child a copy of Resource Page 4. Invite the children to decorate the squares of the cube. Ask them to cut along the solid outside line, fold along the dotted lines, and put glue on the flaps to form a cube. As the children are working, ask them what table grace songs they might know. Invite them to teach them to the group.

Ask them to use their cubes to find the grace that begins, “We gather to ask for your blessing.” Invite them to sing this grace to the tune of “My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean” (the first verse). If you need accompaniment for the tune, play the YouTube video “My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean—Piano” ([bit.ly/FMBonnie](https://bit.ly/FMBonnie), 1:42, stopping at 0:29).

Encourage the children to put the cubes on their tables at home and roll them or turn them to find a table grace to share with their families.

- Card-stock copies of Resource Page 4
- Scissors
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils
- Glue sticks
- Internet-connected device (optional)



The prayers of thanks we say around our family tables at home are reflections of the prayers we say at the Lord’s Table. We give thanks for what God has done for us, for the gift of food before us, and for God’s continuing care for us and for the world.

## MAKING THANK-YOU CARDS



Comment that some of God’s gifts come to us through other people. Suggest that one way that we can give thanks is by giving thank-you cards to those who share God’s gifts with us. Wonder together who those people might be, commenting that sometimes we overlook them. Ask the children the questions below and write the names suggested on a sheet of newsprint. It is all right if they, or you, do not know the names of these people. It will reinforce the point that sometimes we overlook the gifts people provide by the service they do.

- ➡ Who prepares the communion meal?
- ➡ Who cleans after the meal?

- Newsprint, marker
- Paper and/or light-colored construction paper
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils

- ✿ Who provides music for the church service?
- ✿ Who cleans the building?

Encourage the children to find out who does these gifts of service to the church if there were names unknown.

Tell the children that they are going to make two thank-you cards. Explain that one card will be given to someone whose gift helps the church family celebrate communion. Ask each child to select a person, or the service they provide in the church, that they would like to thank. Tell them that the second card will be taken home to give to someone who helps bring food to the family table. Invite the children to brainstorm all who play roles in providing a family meal. Include the farmers, truck drivers, delivery persons, store clerks, cooks, and those who earn money to purchase food. Help the children identify who they want to thank and why.

Provide card-making supplies. If the children know the names of the people they are making their cards for, have them put the name on the front of the card. Encourage the children to be specific in their thanks, saying what it is they are thankful for on the card, such as “thank you for baking or buying the bread for communion,” “thank you for washing all the cups used during communion,” “thank you for stocking the grocery store so we can buy food,” or “thank you for working hard so we have money to have food in our home.” Assist with writing as necessary.

Gather the cards that will be distributed to those people in your church family who provide gifts of service. Give them to the pastor or someone on the worship committee and ask that they be given to those identified on the cards. Encourage the children to deliver their second cards to the appropriate people. These may be people in their home or they may need to give cards of thanks for farmers, truck drivers, delivery people, and so forth to a manager at your local grocery store.



Every meal at our own table is an extension of the eucharistic meal.



## FOLLOWING JESUS

- ☐ Prepared newsprint with closing litany



Keep closing litany newsprint for sessions 2, 3, and 4.

### CLOSING LITANY



The closing ritual is a responsive litany that is used in each session. Display the prepared newsprint and invite the children to read their response, written in a color, and follow your motions as you lead them. The motions help children learn their responses.

Go from this place knowing that God gives abundantly.

**We take what we need and are satisfied.** (*stretch both arms out to the sides, palms facing up, then bring them back toward your body*)

God is a generous God.

**Let us give thanks for God’s good gifts.** (*raise both arms to the sky*)

The food that we eat.

**The bread that we break.** (*pretend to break bread*)

There is enough for all.

**May we give until all are fed.** (*place palms up in front of you, moving them forward and apart from one another, stretching out to the sides*)



**Name a person you are thankful for.**



**Name something in nature that you are thankful for.**



**Name a place you are thankful for.**

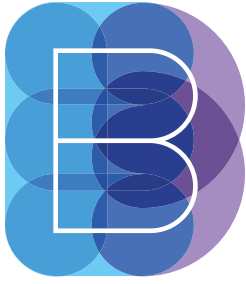


**Name a thing you are thankful for.**









BASED ON MATTHEW 14:13–21

## HOW TO FEED A CROWD

**Narrator:** A large crowd of people were moving around Jesus and his disciples.

**Disciple 1:** It's been a long day, Jesus. You healed so many people, but it's getting late.

**Narrator:** The people in the crowd were murmuring. They were getting hungry.

**Disciple 2:** Yes, send the crowd away so that they can go into the villages to get something to eat.

**Narrator:** The crowd starts to spread out, but then stops when they hear Jesus speak.

**Jesus:** They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat.

**Disciple 3:** Us? But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish.

**Disciple 4:** And we certainly don't have enough money to buy food for all these people.

**Disciple 1:** That's for sure! There are about 5,000 men here, and that's not counting all the women and children!

**Jesus:** Bring me the five loaves of bread and two fish.

*(The disciples give Jesus the bread and fish. As they walk away from him, they shrug their shoulders, shake their heads, and show their confusion.)*

**Jesus:** Everyone, please sit down on the grass.

**Narrator:** Everyone except the disciples sits down.

**Jesus (looking up):** Thank you, God, for this food that you have provided for us. *(Jesus motions breaking the bread and handing it to the disciples.)*

**Jesus (to the disciples):** Give this bread to all who are gathered here.

*(The disciples pass the food to all who are seated.)*

**Narrator:** Everyone eats and is satisfied.

**Jesus (to disciples):** Go and pick up all the pieces that are left over.

**Disciple 2:** Left over? Sure! This won't take long.

**Narrator:** The people in the crowd give all that they have left to the disciples.

*(The disciples look amazed and confused as they pick up food from those who are seated.)*

**Disciple 3:** Can you believe it? There are twelve baskets full of leftovers!

**Disciple 4:** But how? That's more than when we began!

# Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**  
Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**  
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Praise to you, O God, for all your works.  
You created the world and called it good  
and made us in your image to live together in  
love.

You made a covenant with us,  
and even when we turned from you,  
you remained ever faithful.

Therefore with all creation we sing your praise:  
**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and  
might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the  
Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

Thank you, O God, for sending us your Son.  
He lived among us and told your story.  
He healed the sick and welcomed sinners.  
He shared our pain and died our death,  
then rose to new life that we might live,  
and all creation be restored.

We give you thanks that the Lord Jesus,  
on the night before he died, took bread,  
and after giving thanks to you, he broke it,  
and gave it to his disciples, saying:  
Take, eat. This is my body, given for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way Jesus took the cup, saying:  
This cup is the new covenant sealed in my  
blood,  
shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.  
Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance  
of me.

Remembering your boundless love  
revealed to us in Jesus Christ,  
we break bread and share the cup,  
giving ourselves to you  
to live for him in joy and praise.

Great is the mystery of faith:  
**Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will  
come again.**  
Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon  
us  
and upon these your gifts of bread and wine  
that they may be for us the body and blood of  
Christ  
and that we may be his body for the world.

By your Spirit unite us with Christ and one  
another  
until we feast with him and with all your saints  
in your eternal realm of justice and peace.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
all glory and honor are yours, almighty God,  
now and forever. **Amen.**

—*Book of Common Worship* (Westminster  
John Knox Press, 2018), 26–28

