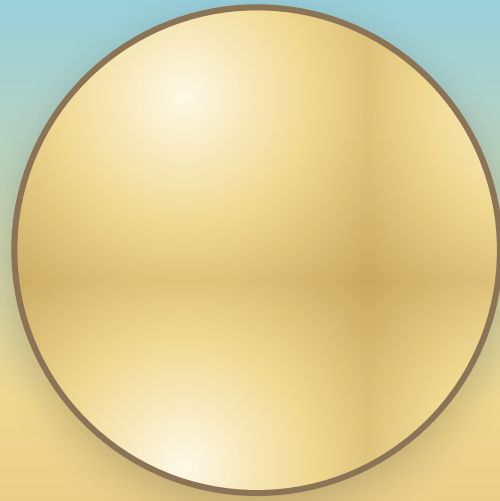




The Boy With the Barley Bread

A Story of Sharing and Abundance

A Bedtime Story from the Hills of Galilee



The golden hills of Galilee at sunrise

Once, a long time ago, in a land where the sun paints the hills in colors of gold and dusty brown, there lived a little boy named **Eli**.

Eli was a boy who noticed things. He noticed how the tiny ants marched in straight lines through the sand. He noticed how the wind made the olive trees whisper to one another. And he noticed when his mother, Hannah, baked bread early in the morning.





Mother Hannah baking bread in the morning light

One bright morning, the air smelled sweet and warm.

"Eli," his mother said, wiping flour from her hands. "Today, the Good Teacher is coming to the grassy hill by the lake. Would you like to go and listen?"

Eli nodded his head yes. He had heard about the Teacher. He heard that the Teacher spoke words that made people's hearts feel light, like a feather floating on the breeze.





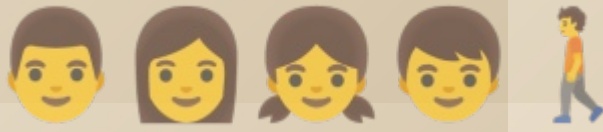
Five barley loaves and two small fish

"You will need a lunch," his mother said. "It is a long walk, and your legs are small."

She took a small woven basket. Inside, she placed five small loaves of barley bread. They were warm and rough to the touch, smelling of earth and fire. Then, she added two small fish, salted and wrapped in a large green leaf to keep them cool.

"This is a good lunch," Eli thought. **"My very own lunch."**





Families walking together to the hillside

He walked out into the sunshine. The world was busy! He saw families walking, fathers carrying babies on their shoulders, and grandmothers leaning on walking sticks. They were all going to the same place—the green hill beside the sparkling blue water.

When Eli arrived, he sat down in the tall, soft grass. It tickled his ankles. He watched the water lap against the shore—**swish, swish, swish**.





The Teacher speaking gentle words to the crowd

The Teacher stood at the bottom of the hill. He didn't look like a king with a gold crown. He looked kind. His voice was strong but gentle, like a father reading a bedtime story. He talked about how we should love our neighbors, and how we should share what we have, even if it is small.

Eli listened closely. He watched a butterfly land on a yellow flower. He watched the clouds drift slowly across the sky.





The midday sun and hungry faces

But soon, the sun climbed high up, right to the very top of the sky. It was midday. The time when shadows are short and eyelids get heavy.

Grumble. Rumble.

Eli looked down. Was that thunder? No, it was his tummy! He was hungry.

He looked around. The baby next to him was crying. The grandmother looked tired. A man nearby sighed, "We have been here so long, and there is no food. We are all so hungry."





Eli feels a brave tug in his heart

Eli felt the weight of his basket. He could smell the salty fish and the warm barley bread. He wanted to eat it all by himself. It was his lunch, after all.

But then he remembered the Teacher's words. **Love your neighbor.**

Eli looked at his basket. Then he looked at the hungry people. He felt a little tug in his heart. It was a **brave** feeling.





Little Eli offers his small lunch

He stood up on his sturdy legs and walked over to one of the Teacher's helpers.

"Excuse me," Eli whispered.

The helper looked down. "Hello there, little one."

"I have this," Eli said. He held up his basket. "It is five barley loaves and two small fish. It is not very much... but the Teacher can have it."





The Teacher gives thanks and breaks the bread

The helper smiled, a smile that crinkled the corners of his eyes. He took Eli to the Teacher.

The Teacher looked at Eli. He didn't look at the small basket; He looked right into Eli's eyes. He saw that Eli was sharing his very best thing. The Teacher smiled, and Eli felt warm from the top of his head to the tips of his toes—warmer than the sun could ever make him feel.

The Teacher took the bread. He looked up to the blue sky and said a prayer of thanks. **Thank you for this bread. Thank you for this boy.**





The bread multiplies miraculously!

Then, something **wonderful** happened. The Teacher started to break the bread. He gave some to his helpers to pass out. And then he broke more. And more. And more.

Eli watched with wide eyes. **The basket never went empty!**

Every time the Teacher reached in, there was more warm bread. There was more fish.





Everyone eating together, full of joy

*P*ass, pass, pass went the baskets.

Munch, munch, munch went the people.

The crying baby stopped crying and chewed on soft bread. The tired grandmother ate until she was full. The man who sighed was now laughing with his friends.

Everyone ate. **Thousands of people!** And Eli ate too. The bread tasted sweeter and better than any bread he had ever eaten because he had shared it.





Eli falls asleep, peaceful and content

Soon, all the tummies were full. The wind blew softly through the grass
—hush, hush, hush.

The excitement was over. The waves lapped quietly on the shore. The people began to rest on the warm, soft hillside.

Eli's tummy was full. His heart was full. His eyes felt heavy, like sleepy little curtains closing. He laid his head down on his mother's lap.





He learned a big secret that day:

*When you keep things for yourself,
your hands are full.*

*But when you give things away,
your heart is full.*



The sun was warm. The grass was soft.
And Eli, the boy who noticed everything,
closed his eyes and drifted off to a sweet, sweet sleep.

A Prayer Before Sleep

Dear God,
Help me to share like Eli did,
even when it feels hard.
Fill my heart with love,
and help me trust that
when I give, there is always enough.
Amen.



*"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves
and two fish—but what are they among so many?"*

— John 6:9

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