

Lesson 4

When We're Entrusted to Serve

*But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."
They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish."
And he said, "Bring them here to me." Matthew 14:16-18*

At one time or another, you and I face seasons in life when seemingly overwhelming problems render us ineffective. No matter how we view our situation, we cannot see any practical or financial way to solve the problem.

In those situations, for the most part, we tend to react in three different ways:

- (1) View all available options, choose one, and move forward;
- (2) Ask for help; or
- (3) Give up.

In this Lesson's passage, the disciples combine reactions #1 and #3 in their own way: *they viewed their options and chose to give up*. In a feeble attempt at a solution, they ask a boy for his sack lunch. But never even ask Jesus how He would solve the problem.

Perhaps they don't want to admit to their leader that they can't complete an assigned task. If you work in corporate America, you can relate. Maybe after such a long day, they are simply too exhausted and hungry themselves to muster the energy for problem-solving. If you are a stay-at-home parent, you can relate.

So instead of asking Jesus for help, they offer an unsolicited alternative. Let's pick up our study from there.

Take a moment to write out our memory verse Matthew 14:14 once more:



In this fourth lesson, we turn to Matthew 14:16-18, which states, *But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me."*

Feed Them

We enter our lesson in the middle of a very important conversation between Jesus and the disciples. The disciples have taken it upon themselves to offer Jesus a suggestion: since the massive crowd is growing hungry and the day wanes, send the people away to fend for themselves.

As they watch maybe upwards of 20,000 people milling around the area, they await Jesus' response. Instead of agreeing with the disciples' suggestion, He offers a shocking mandate:

You give them something to eat (Matthew 14:16).

Unexpectedly and almost forcefully, Jesus challenged the disciples to provide food for the vast crowd. It's almost comical to picture the disciples' reaction to Jesus' short, pointed sentence. The Greek language here emphasizes the word ***you***. There is no mistaking Jesus' command.

How would you react in a similar situation?

I would suggest that Jesus' stunning suggestion rendered them speechless. Their minds froze. They could only stare at Jesus like deer in the headlights. *Blink. Blink. Blink.*

There they stand in front of the hungry thousands with no financial or other means to feed the multitude. It was a gargantuan, impossible task in human terms. But Jesus answers those situations with divine solutions. Although the disciples did not have the resources to fulfill His request, they had overlooked the ultimate *Source*.

Are you facing what may seem like an impossible situation?

Regardless of your circumstances, Jesus gently reminds you to look up to see the Source. He alone holds all the answers.

Jesus takes the opportunity to use the disciples' stunned silence as a teachable moment regarding trust.

Jesus excels at waiting for teachable moments.

The disciples had crunched the numbers and even commandeered a boy's sack lunch, but they still did not understand how Jesus expected them to solve the problem.

They were looking for a real solution.

Jesus was looking for real faith.

Challenges tend to throw us off kilter. How do you respond to unexpected challenges?

Some people respond with an openness to new possibilities. They push beyond their comfort zone to accomplish much. Other people would rather have their fingernails removed by the roots than embrace a challenge or change. Which camp do you find yourself in?

Does it depend on the situation?

There is another person in this lesson who plays an important role. As the disciples ponder how to meet the people's need for food, Andrew eventually locates one young boy amongst the thousands who was willing to help. The boy has only a small sack lunch, yet willingly offers it to help the people. Perhaps with childlike innocence and faith, the young boy feels compassion on the people and offers all he has to help others.

How refreshing this boy's attitude appears compared to the disciples! For that matter, I would suspect that some of our own contribution motives tend to be questionable at times.

What do the disciples ask Jesus in John 6:9? _____

Keep in mind from our last lesson that Jesus asked Philip how they would feed the multitude. Now as evening approaches, Andrew asks Jesus the same question almost as if the problem only just then manifested.

Do we find Andrew's lack of faith surprising? After all, the disciples had just returned from their first missionary tour.

What has Philip been doing according to Mark 6:13? _____

After forcing out demons and healing the sick, we would expect Philip to be more optimistic. A bit of faith would be appropriate. After all, he's just seen the impossible happen.

Philip can cite the stats to Jesus (John 6:7), but he cannot see how to help. He can crunch numbers, but can't construct an answer. And although the answer to prayer is standing next to him, Philip doesn't even pray.

Equally disturbing is the silence of the other disciples. Are they optimistic? Read their words and see for yourself in Mark 6:35-36: _____

It doesn't seem to even occur to the disciples to turn the problem over to Jesus.

Only Andrew came close. He offers Jesus five loaves and two fish, but it doesn't come with much faith. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to find much faith among the disciples on the hill that day.

Philip was cynical. Andrew was doubtful. The other disciples were negative. But in the midst of it all, the people were still hungry.

Does that ring a modern day bell? How many times have we observed disciples of Jesus arguing about a solution to the problem while the problem steadily grows worse?

Would such arguing motivate you to act or leave?

The feeding of those thousands did not happen by mere chance. It was brought about purposefully to manifest the power of God. We see this principle throughout the book of Job. The same is true for your situation.

Our weakness reveals how great our God is.

I find it interesting that the disciples who had seen Jesus perform countless miracles were the first to throw in the towel and doubt when things heated up. But in our times of weakness and need, God still cares for us, still loves us and saves us – even from ourselves.

Write out these wonderful examples:

Psalm 116:6 _____

Psalm 18:16-19 _____

We are constantly reminded of our weaknesses and limitations. We see them in our body, finances, church, neighborhood, workplace, culture, and more.

What are your greatest weaknesses or limitations?

Do you have difficulty admitting them? Why or why not?

Do you perceive them as hindrances or enhancements in your relationship with God?

Even when we can only see our limitations or limited provisions, God faithfully provides what we need. Oftentimes, His provision far exceeds our expectations. We see this truth vividly in another instance where a multitude is miraculously fed.

Write out the words of Numbers 11:31-32 _____

God demonstrates His power with great might, yet also uses His children to display His power. We are weak instruments through whom God accomplishes great results. Scripture overflows with examples of God's faithful provision. When we trust Him to provide, He accomplishes powerful results through us. Through whom did God show His power in these verses?

Exodus 4:1-5 _____

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 _____

You and I are no Moses or Paul. Like them we are unique and God uses our individual gifts, talents and passions to show His faithfulness greatly, as well.

The disciples' concern for the needs of the crowd was noble, but basically Jesus tells them to do something about it. *Feed them.* Jesus conveys in that moment that all-encompassing ministry is centered on feeding people, both physical food, which is a part of compassion and care, and also the spiritual food, the Bread of Life.

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, reiterates to the disciples on that Galilean countryside that they are to feed His flock as His appointed shepherds. This mandate appears throughout Scripture into the Church today. What does God say about shepherds in the following verses?

Jeremiah 3:15 _____

Jeremiah 23:4 _____

John 21:17 _____

Acts 20:28 _____

1 Peter 5:2 _____

I particularly love the wording of 1 Peter 5:2. Christ's appointed shepherds are to serve because they are *willing*, not because it is a *requirement*.

Perhaps due to the disciples' own hunger and exhaustion, feeding the multitude that day became a requirement that they were not willing to fulfill. They looked to their own abilities and meager provisions instead of God's overflowing abundance.

Loaves and Fish

In this miracle, Jesus uses loaves and fishes to display God's divine power and provision. The Israelites customarily used flour mixed with water and baked their bread in either oblong or round cakes, approximately the thickness of a thumb. They were usually as large as a plate or platter and were to be broken apart, never cut.

However, the loaves that this boy carried were slightly different. John's Gospel clarifies that they were barley loaves (John 6:9). They were the lowest quality of bread, only carried by the poor. The lad doesn't have five big loaves of Wonder Bread and two large salmon. The barley loaves were small cakes - almost like small pita bread or crackers, made out of barley.

And the fish were just enough to give the barley loaves some flavor - almost like sardines or smoked herring. Meager provisions.

The disciples knew that what they received from the boy and offered to Jesus would not be enough.

Do you sometimes feel that your contribution to Jesus is meager?

Why or why not?

What you and I offer God may seem woefully inadequate, but in His hands it becomes more than enough. God uses and multiplies whatever we offer to Him, whether it is talent, time, or treasure. With this promise we can therefore offer all we have, just as the boy did with his lunch, and see what God can and will do.

How do you see that truth in the following verses?

Exodus 4:1-3 _____

Exodus 14:16 _____

2 Kings 4:1-7 _____

When we access what God has given us and offer it to Him, He abundantly fills our needs and, where He desires, the needs of others.

A Pentecostal minister once confronted an associate who had a growth on his nose but refused to see a doctor. "God will heal me," the man insisted. "If you needed a miracle, God would give you one," the minister retorted, "but right now He's given you a doctor and medical insurance. You need to use what He's given you."

What resources has God given you that you may be overlooking?

Here's a familiar one: "I need to lose weight but can't afford joining a gym." Perhaps He's given you sidewalks in your neighborhood. You need to use what He's given you.

God is not intimidated by the magnitude of our problem. The disciples saw the size of the need and the littleness of the human resources available.

Jesus saw the size of the need and the greatness of God's available resources.

Often God calls us to do tasks for Him that may be technically impossible so that we rely on Him and His provision.

But We Have "Only"

When Jesus uttered the shocking command, *You give them something to eat* (Matthew 14:16), the disciples immediately looked to their own available resources. They did not figure Jesus into the solution. We may find it easy to criticize the disciples, but I would suggest that we tend to do the same. The only difference? The disciples could actually see and touch Jesus. Today, God's power resides in us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, using God's Word and sacraments.

The disciples responded to Jesus that they ONLY had five loaves and two fish. Notice the word ONLY. That single word reveals the disciples' lack of faith.

But they aren't alone. Perhaps you have we heard people say: "It's ONLY water." But connected to the Word of God it means salvation. Or "the Bible is ONLY words on a page." No, it is the inerrant Word of life that grows our faith and provides a glimpse into God's character. "Communion is ONLY bread and wine." But in receiving Jesus' body and blood of the sacrifice He made for us, we receive forgiveness, life and salvation.

Many people considered to be pillars of faith in Scripture experienced moments of doubt.

God promises to be with us, gives us faith, and calls us to exercise that faith. Even when the situation seems impossible. Even when the resources seem sparse.

Jesus knew exactly what the disciples had. Yet the disciples didn't understand what – or Who – they had.

In spite of the disciples' doubt and lack of faith, Jesus simply says, *Bring them here to me* (Matthew 14:18).

What a comfort! What a blessing! The disciples overemphasized the problem and underemphasized Jesus.

Five loaves.

Two fish.

Seven total.

Disciples should always count to eight.

There's another important lesson that we need not overlook. Some may ask why Jesus did not supernaturally make use of means *not* at hand instead of using natural and inadequate means already present. Despite what non-believers may suppose, Christ uses *created* things to do redemptive things.

He gives us tangible things – like water for Baptism, bread, and wine – as a vivid reminder of that amazing truth.

How do you see this truth in what Jesus did in John 9:1-6? _____

In Matthew, the disciples are examples of all disciples of all time faced with overwhelming need and underwhelming resources. Yet Jesus demonstrates that to help the needy world, He uses what we have in our hands, offered to Him, for the service of the world.

While the miracle is supernatural, the means Jesus used are natural.

Up until that point, Jesus taught the people, healed people and raised people from the dead, while the disciples were pretty much along for the ride. But not for this miracle. It was test time to see just how much they had learned.

Did you notice that the Teacher is always silent during a test? People can get so frustrated that they don't have all the answers up front for challenges they face. The right answer is simply give Jesus what we have. If God wants seven and all you can give Him is three, He'll add four. If you give Him two, He'll add five.

No matter what you give Him, God is capable of adding or subtracting whatever He needs, to give whatever He desires.

Let's review our Bible memory verse for our study. Write out Matthew 14:14 once more:



Closing

The boy had only his sack lunch. *But he gave his all.*

The disciples didn't even try, because they saw the impossibility before them.

I want to be that kid. I want to put forth my best effort. I want to give God my all.

But at the end of the day, I want to remember that my all will never be enough.

Only Jesus can accomplish what is truly enough.

So if or when God chooses to multiply the work of my hands, I won't ever question Who deserves the credit.

Close with prayer:

✠*Father, there are so many ways that I can relate to the disciples. When opportunities arise to serve You, I tend to look at my own resources instead of to You, my ultimate Source. Father, I ask that You enable me to respond to Your leading and guidance with real faith instead of like a deer in the headlights. In Jesus' name, Amen.* ✠

Notes

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DVD Listening Guide

Lesson 4

The disciples were looking for a real _____, but Jesus was looking for some real _____.

Our _____ reveals how great our _____ is.

The disciples had overemphasized the _____ and underemphasized _____.

Disciples should always count to _____.