

Structure with Leadership

We're continuing our series on leadership and I want you to be prepared to be really challenged today. This isn't a Sunday when you can sit back and just take it in - this is speaking directly to you. Don't figure it's for anyone else; don't worry about what anyone else should or will do about it. If you're here, if you're listening to a recording at a later time, if you're reading it on line or from a paper copy, it's for **YOU**.

We're talking about being the kind of leader God wants and intends for you to be. Remember last week we said we're all leaders. Leadership can be summed up in one word: *influence*. Every time you interact with anyone you influence them. Anytime you influence anyone you're a leader. The question isn't whether you're a leader; the questions are, how are you leading and how well are you leading? Are you a good leader or a lousy one; effective or ineffective; positive or negative; a godly leader or a poor one? If you're a believer, God expects you to lead others for good and for God's glory.

Jesus is our ultimate model for all of life so we want to learn to lead like Jesus. Leadership is key to helping us become all God wants us to be. It's key to effectiveness, growth, accomplishment - Everything rises or falls on it.

Jesus spent three years in public ministry with twelve guys he chose to train. He knew that they were going to lead the church and that they would lead a cultural, social, ideological and theological revolution that would change the world. So as he teaches them about faith, grace, hope, love, salvation he also teaches them about leadership. He shows them how to lead by serving as he ministers to people.

One day, he chose to teach them by feeding a huge crowd of people. Watch him do it in one of his most impressive acts of service: John 6:5-6 says, "*Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, 'Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?' He was testing Philip, [notice he was 'testing Philip' this is a teaching technique] for he already knew what he was going to do.*" It's clear that Jesus is using this to teach.

There were 5000 men there. The word used is the word for free men, so it doesn't include women, children, indentured servants or slaves. If there were 5000 free men there, it's likely there were 12 to 17 thousand people present. Jesus has been teaching and he finally managed to get away from the crowd for a little bit, but then here are the people coming to find him again! They've been following him all day and must be getting more and more hungry. The disciples are likely starting to worry, thinking "he's not paying attention to the logistics of the situation." They're probably thinking, "Who's got the guts to go and tell Jesus it's time to stop talking!" Then, Jesus just turns to Philip and says, "Philip! Where are we going to find enough bread to feed all these people?"

The disciples didn't know it, but they were about to experience something that changes the way we look at what's considered practical as believers. That's what we're talking about this morning: three changes in our perspective that are basic to being a believer and a leader. So let's get right to it:

Transformation 1: A Change of Scale - When God's involved, don't evaluate a problem or challenge according to your own vision, experience or abilities. The world has a lot of problems and challenges that are too big for us – bigger than any of us or all of us together could manage. But God still expects us to take them on and take action. And God's going to expect us to be the ones who leap in and take the initiative.

At first Philip evaluated the situation by their current circumstances and resources. John 6:7 says, "*Philip replied, 'Even if we worked for months, we wouldn't have enough money to feed them!'*" He's saying, "This is an impossible situation." He looks around and there's not a McDonald's in sight! But even cheap food would cost a small fortune for that many people. Philip immediately knows that it's impossible.

Why does God allow these impossible situations to happen? There are a number of reasons especially including free will – most impossible situations are things people have brought on themselves – but one reason God sometimes allows them is that impossible situations provide for perfect testing circumstances. Jesus wanted to test the disciples. He allowed his disciples to struggle with the circumstances before he worked a miracle. God allows us to see how impossible the situation is before resolving it, in order to teach us.

Now, when God tests us it's not to grade us, it's to grow us. God knows our hearts already so he doesn't need to test us to grade us. God tests us because when we come out on the other side, we've learned something and we've grown.

God does this to stretch and developed our faith and to strengthen our hope. We learn that we can deal with more than we ordinarily would because we have extraordinary resources available. We have hope that's not easily defeated.

I was reading about a group of engineering students who were given the problem, How long should a three pound beef roast stay in a 325 degree oven for the center to reach a temperature of 150 degrees? One student did a series of experiments with materials of varying density. Another went and got a roast, an oven, a thermometer and a watch. Another worked up a spreadsheet and did mathematical calculations based on the recorded conductivity of meat and figured it out. But the one who got the best and quickest answer was the student who took out his phone, called his mom and asked: "How do you cook a roast?"

The answers to most questions are best discovered relationally. Our heavenly Father is available. Impossible circumstances remind us that there are some things we'll never answer ourselves – we need God and God is there.

Transformation 2: A Change in Capacity - Our resources are always limited. You can throw in everything you've got – like the five loaves and two fish – and it won't be enough no matter what you do. You can't balance the need with the supply. What do you do when you throw in everything you've got and it just isn't enough?

Here's the answer Jesus' disciples experienced: Small quantities, given to Jesus become much more. You might feel like you have very little to give, but if you put it in the hands of Jesus, it means much more. After Phillip gave his opinion it says, *"Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. "There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?"*

It's always been interesting to me that Andrew knew this. I always wonder if he wasn't keeping track of what might be available for when the disciples got hungry! Andrew should have stopped with his list of resources, but he goes on and asks, "But what good is that?"

What I don't like is that his response reminds me of myself, most believers and most of our churches. Like Andrew, I've seen God do incredible things and I should be at the point where I just say, "God can do anything if God wants to. It doesn't matter if it seems the resources aren't enough." But I don't do that and you don't do that and churches don't.

Philip had said "It's impossible. It'll take too much." Andrew says, "It's impossible. We have too little." They were looking only at themselves and their resources. Their thinking simply didn't go beyond "normal" expectations.

I want to challenge you with two questions based on this:

Question 1. What have you decided is too big for God to accomplish? What have you crossed off your list because you don't have enough or because the need is too great? Why don't you let God decide what can be done? I'm not saying to do every big thing that comes to mind. What I'm saying is there are some situations God wants us to be part of that we've already crossed off our list. We can't see what God wants because we're focused on our own expectations.

Question 2. Where have you decided you have too little to make enough of a difference? I believe that over the next few years we're going to be a church that has a major impact on this community and on people around the world – we're going to make a difference both on a local and a global stage. Some people may be thinking, "That's great some churches, but not here. That's great for some people, but not me. I don't have enough and we don't have enough to make that kind of impact." Where have you decided that you have too little to make a difference?

Too often we look at life and say, "There's not enough!" Not enough money, or time, or energy. We've play this little game where we say, "When I get more _____ then I'm going to _____." When I get more time then I'm going to do ministry. When I get more energy then I'm going to spend time helping. When I get more money then I'm going to give like I'd really like to. When I get more confidence and more experience then I'm going to lead.

Let me tell you a secret: You'll never have enough! We can never get enough for all the things God wants us to do in life. Needs are too great and our resources are too small. Our resources and abilities are nothing compared to what God wants us to do with our lives and with our church. So how can that work? How can we accomplish what God wants? The answer is God is more than able to make up for any lack of ability or resources that you might have.

Look at what He did with five loaves and two fish. *"Tell everyone to sit down,' Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted."*

How do you think the disciples felt during Jesus' prayer of thanks? Here's Jesus with five loaves, two fish. Then here's the disciples with ten, fifteen, twenty thousand people. He's praying, I'm sure they were thinking, "This isn't going to work... There's going to be a riot..." Then Jesus distributes the food and everyone eats until they're full.

The miracle isn't flashy or convoluted. It's not like the manna falling from heaven, there are no impressive lightning flashes or transformations. Jesus just uses what's been given and it meets the need. What we need to do is simple: We take what we have, we give it to Jesus. That's the simple lesson in this for every one of us as believers and leaders.

You see this again and again and again in the Bible:

A guy named Gideon had an army of about 15,000 people facing a much larger army. God said, 15,000 is too many - I'm going to cut it down to three hundred. Now go and defeat the enemy. And they did. God took what was too little and did incredible things with it.

Another guy named David – just a boy at the time – came to the battlefield and found the whole army standing in fear of a larger force and everyone afraid to stand up to one individual fighter in personal combat. But then David all by himself with just a sling and five smooth stones went out and defeated a huge soldier named Goliath and won the battle.

Again and again God has taken people through these kinds of experiences to help them learn to trust God in difficult circumstances for more than they could have imagined. You see this pattern again and again. If we're going to lead in the way that God wants and accomplish what God wants in our lives and in this world, we have to understand and accept this. If you don't, you'll never understand what God is trying to do.

Let me take you through the way it often looks when you go through these experiences with God: We begin with limited resources, and sometimes God will even reduce our resources even further. If God wants to do something great, why would God begin with us having limited resources? That seems counterintuitive, doesn't it? Wouldn't you expect that the first thing God would do is fill our bank accounts to overflowing; fill us more energy than we could ever need and give us more than enough strength to take on the world?

But that's not what God does. He reduced Gideon's army to three hundred. He reduced the Israelite army to one kid with a sling. He gives the disciples five loaves and two fish.

Have you ever asked, why doesn't God make our lives easier? Why doesn't God just give us all the time we need and all the money we need and all the people we need? Why doesn't God just give us all the resources we can possibly need? I think you probably know the answer. I know it for myself at least. If I had all the time, all the money, all the resources I needed in this world I would never have look to God and trust God. I'd just trust in what I already had and never realize how very much I need God.

If we accept this challenge, there comes a moment of incredible opportunity where we have the opportunity to learn to trust God with what little we have. It's an incredible moment. Whether it's a David who trusts God with only some stones or Gideon trusting God with only an army of three hundred, or people trusting Jesus with five loaves and two fish, or you and I trusting God with the ministry and mission of a church in a town in Pennsylvania.

Most times it seems like it would be a lot easier to just wait for someone to come along who has enough resources to meet the great needs of our time; someone who will lead in a great way. The need is so great. But God isn't waiting for someone to come along with all the resources. What God always does is do something grand using those who are willing to trust despite the fact that the need is too great and their resources are too small. God can take us and do more than we can ever imagine. It all starts with us trusting God.

God uses what we give to God and does something greater with it. Jesus took the loaves and the fish and used what the boy gave him to meet everybody's need. That's what God does. God uses what we give to meet the needs.

So, where do you need to trust him? Where could God use you so that you can show God's greatness? Don't tell me that you're too weak or too old or too young or too small or too poor or don't have enough resources. That just means that God is MORE likely to want to use you and it's more likely that you could accomplish great things. The more you think you can't do, the more impossible it is, the more God wants to do.

We're talking about leading and living like Jesus. Here's where you start: Begin where you are with what you have and whatever you can do. You start where you are and you watch what God does. Little in the hands of Jesus becomes much.

The third takeaway from the feeding of the 5000 is **Transformation 3: A Change in Expectation** - With Christ, problems can actually create positive outcomes beyond the scope of what was possible before the problem. With Christ a loss can actually create a gain; sacrifice can lead to an increase; in fact, a small sacrifice can create abundance.

There were thousands of people who needed to be fed and only five loaves and two fish given by one young boy. But with Christ everyone was fed until they were full. But something happened beyond that. It says, *“After everyone was full, Jesus told His disciples, ‘Now gather the leftovers so that nothing is wasted.’ So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with the scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves.”*

Think about it. There are twelve disciples and there are twelve baskets left over. Anyone think that's a coincidence? There was a basket for every one of those disciples who had wondered how in the world they were going to feed all those people. Not only did he meet everyone's need but there was a blessing beyond need.

Luke 6:38 says, *“Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full - pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.”* That's the increase we're talking about. We'll have more than we could possibly have expected.

That increase comes when Jesus gets involved. If Jesus hadn't been involved that day they would have had five loaves and two fish. But when Jesus Christ got involved everyone's need was met and beyond.

I'm excited because I know that over the next few months and years you're going to see that kind of increase in this church and have the opportunity to see the same sort of increase in your heart, in your faith and in your ministry. During the next few months we're going to begin the next phase in the life of this church and there's an incredible opportunity there for this church to do so much more through Jesus. In the fall we're going to have a spiritual growth campaign called "Transformed." That will be an opportunity for you to grow spiritually beyond any expectations you may have and it will be an opportunity for you to help others in our community to grow in spirit far more than you imagine right now. But all of this won't happen if you just look at yourself and your resources and needs. It won't happen if we just consider our church and our resources and needs. You only get an increase beyond expectations when you step up and trust God and move ahead. If you're not seeing that, the most likely reason is that you're not stepping out in faith.

Over the next few years we're going to move toward becoming a global force for Christ. Don't try to tell God that we're too small a church – God has bigger fish to fry than our small ideas! I know for some of us that's a real faith challenge, a growth challenge. Ask God “What do you want to do in my life?” And take steps of faith that you haven't taken before. As you do that there will be an increase that happens in your life.

Sometimes God gives the increase through deeper relationships; Sometimes through increased faith; Sometimes by new perspective on life - you see things like you never have before. Sometimes God gives the increase by peace of heart. You're not worried or anxious like you were. There are many ways God gives an increase. But God always does.

Do you want to be the kind of believer and leader God wants you to be? The disciples changed the world! But the Bible is a very blunt: They didn't learn right off. They stumbled again and again. They didn't get it right, right away. Think any leaders always get it right? None of them do. The disciples certainly didn't get it right away. I'll admit I seldom get it right away. None of us do. They're examples to us that leaders keep on going and growing until they finally begin to get it.

In every teaching and miracle of Jesus there are two things to make sure to learn. You learn about how God works and you learn about who Jesus is. God's ways are not our ways and we have to learn that and learn who Jesus is. Because if you don't know and trust who he is, you're not going to know and trust how he works. And if you don't trust, you're not going to see the increase!

Leadership starts with trust. If you're going to lead like Jesus, it starts by saying to Jesus Christ, “I need you and I trust you as the leader of my life.” God means for there to be a major increase in this place in our time. That increase will include a Change of Scale - that we won't evaluate problems and challenges according to our own vision, experience or abilities, but according to what God is able to do in Christ. It will include a Change in Capacity - God is more than able to make up for any lack of ability or resources that we might have and, if we are each willing, God will use what we give and do something greater with it. It will include a Change in Expectation - that the sacrifices we make in Christ will create abundance - not only for us, but for all people around us. This is the way leadership is structured for believers. create abundance - not only for us, but for all people around us. This is the way life is structured for believers when we are willing to be faithful to Christ. The increase will begin as we trust in Christ for it.

As we close I want to give you an opportunity to commit or recommit yourself to trusting in him. _____, will you come forward and lead us in prayer?