

to the disciples 'you give them something to eat' was a deliberate test because Jesus knew all along what He would do (John 6:6). Jesus wanted them to appreciate the weight of the task, and to sense that it was impossible, before He made it possible.

The key to mustard-seed faith is believing that the impossible can be made possible. It is knowing that 'nothing is impossible with God' (Luke 1:37, Matthew 19:26, Mark 10:27) and all things are possible to Him who believes (Matthew 17:20, Mark 9:23).

The resurrection is the greatest New Testament example of the impossible being made possible. In the Old Testament the conception of Isaac was an illustration of Abrahamic faith bringing the 'impossible' into reality. Other examples in the Bible include the parting of the Red Sea, the collapse of the walls of Jericho, the defeat of Goliath, the stilling of the storm on Lake Galilee and the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus constantly worked to increase the faith of His disciples and His sharpest rebuke was 'O ye of little faith' (Matthew 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8). Jesus' main method of teaching faith was via experience. Jesus would ask the disciples to do the impossible or put them into situations that were frightening, dangerous or increasingly difficult – such as encountering demon-possessed people who were so wild they could break chains. As they saw God's miraculous power demonstrated they grew in faith and eventually learned to walk in faith themselves.

In the miracle of the loaves and the fishes Jesus is asking the disciples to stick their necks out socially. The disciples get everyone into fifties, expecting to be fed, before there is any sign of food appearing. It would have been like having a family of six sit down for dinner, with plates and cutlery all out on the table, when all the food you have is one small potato chip. It would have felt incredibly risky, ridiculous and potentially embarrassing. It would have produced a situation of 'trust in the midst of tension'.

Trust in the midst of tension is an operational definition of how God grows us 'from faith to faith'. Mustard-seed ministries operate under constant tension over issues such as finances, security, spiritual attacks, workload, the need for volunteers etc. We have to trust God as we face problems that we are simply too small to solve on our own. The blessing of Jesus is the solution to our overwhelming sense of embarrassment and inadequacy when we are faced with the needs and demands of God's work.

It was as Jesus blessed and broke the bread that the miracle occurred. The blessing of Jesus on the loaves and fishes mirrors God's original blessing on Creation:

Genesis 1:22 ESV *And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."*

Notice the commands – *"be fruitful and multiply and fill..."* Blessing produces fruitfulness, multiplication and the potential to fill the designated area of operation (in this case the earth). With the loaves and fishes the area of operation was a crowd of 5000 people *And they ate and were all filled*. A blessed ministry – such as a church will 'fill' the people with the bread of life in the area of operation that God has assigned to it. We are not to be content with occupying a small patch of land when God has called us to fill a city or a region with the gospel!

Acts 5:28 MKJV (The High Priest) *saying, Did we not strictly command you that you not teach in this name? And behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your*

doctrine and intend to bring this man's blood on us.

The out-poured revival blessing of Pentecost resulted in the first assigned territory (Jerusalem) being filled with the gospel and thousands coming to faith. Twelve consecrated men of God were enough to do the job.

So what does the story of the loaves and fishes teach us are the steps and stages to such blessing, to such multiplication and to the filling of our assigned territory?

1. Recognize the vast need
2. Recognize your own inadequacy to meet the need
3. Seek the solution from Jesus Christ
4. Do what He tells you even if it seems crazy, believe for the impossible to occur
5. Be part of the solution – consecrate yourself to distributing the loaves and fishes
6. Receive the blessing
7. Move outward to the people, confident in the blessing
8. See the miracle
9. Make sure everyone is filled
10. Measure the miracle (5000 men) and pick up the pieces (the 12 baskets)

Small ministries can have big impacts if they see the supernatural blessing of God on their 'loaves and fishes' - with all their heart.

Blessings,

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