

## Making a Little a Lot      Mark 6:30 – 44

What do you need more of? What do you need God to change in your life? Some of us might say, I need more patience, a better teacher, a more understanding boss, more time, a more fulfilling job, or I need more love. Whatever you need more of is what we are going to look at today, of how God turns a little into a lot.

This may be the most famous miracle in the Bible. It's the only miracle that is recorded in all 4 gospels. The book of Mark tells us there were 5,000 men when Jesus fed this crowd with one boy's lunch. With 5,000 men, how many women and children were probably there?

Jesus never does a miracle just to show off. He does it to teach us. So, let's look at **four steps on how God turns a little into a lot**. When there is a need, sensed by a few, and individuals accept their responsibility to do what they can, with what they have, regardless of the odds, then God works a miracle.

The first thing we need to do if we are going to let God turn a little into a lot in our lives is **identify the problem**. The problem was obvious here. Sometimes the problem isn't obvious but here, a large crowd, a remote location, no pizza or hamburger restaurants around, and people are hungry. What were they going to do?

The point is this: every miracle begins with a problem. If we don't have a problem, we don't need a miracle. If we do not have a need, we do not need a miracle. The problem can be bad health, spiritual issues, material lacks, financial concerns, hurtful social dynamics, relationship tensions, a destructive habit, sin, incompetent or fraudulent government, and you name it. But it must be a legitimate problem for our Creator to work a miracle. The starting point is to recognize there is a problem, and name it.

The second step to a miracle in our lives is: **accept responsibility for the problem**. Often, God wants us to become concerned about the situation before He does anything about it. In

verses 35 & 36 we find the disciples became concerned. They said, "Look at all these hungry people. It's late. Food is far away. What are we going to do?" They accepted responsibility.

This is a very important point. So often we talk about concerns as if, the concern is not our responsibility. Here, who saw the need first? Jesus or the disciples? Obviously, Jesus knew long in advance they were going to have a problem with food before anyone recognized it. Even the 15,000 or so people did not think ahead in their excitement as they followed Jesus around the lake, since they didn't carry enough food with them. But Jesus did nothing about the problem until the disciples became concerned and accepted responsibility. Then Jesus acted.

So, our Creator sees problems long before we do, long before we even recognize or anticipate we will have a problem. But our Savior waits on us to get concerned about it & to see our responsibility. This is part of biblical maturing wisdom. The disciples saw the need and asked Jesus to do something about it. They trusted that Jesus had some idea of what to do. "There are hungry people in this remote place." Like many of today's refugees. Notice Jesus' response, "You give them something to eat."

What an impossible assignment! You probably think at least one of your problems is impossible and here Jesus says, "You solve it!" This is part of our accepting responsibility. Even if they had all the makings for a picnic, how were they going to organize & put the food together? The disciples quickly did some cost analysis. They said to Jesus, "Feeding these people would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" Verse 38. The implication was, "We can't afford this! And, where would we buy the food, way out here?" Their calculations were right, but their faith was wrong. That is because often God asks us to do something that is impossible. Why?

The Almighty asks us to do the impossible because it requires faith. If it was not impossible, we could just do it on our own. But doing the

impossible requires we exercise our faith and trust muscles. The Bible says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” (Hebrews 11:6) So our Creator intentionally stretches us by asking us to do the impossible.

There are *four common reactions people have toward problems*. These are the same responses the disciples took toward this impossible situation. First, we procrastinate. Notice verse 35. It was late in the day. They probably had begun worrying about this and had been putting it off. They were not proactively dealing with it. They were waiting for someone else to handle it. The disciples had all day to see the potential problem. But they waited until the end of the day. They did nothing and prepared nothing and kept quiet. But Jesus simply waited on them.

The question is: What difficult situation are you putting off? What difficult situation are we putting off? Procrastination seldom solves a problem. Usually, it only makes it worse. The disciples procrastinated until the evening.

The second common reaction people have towards problems is, we pass the buck, and / or blame. In verse 36 the disciples say, “Send the people away to take care of their own problem.” Out of sight, out of mind. Look the other way. Pretend the problem doesn’t exist. Argue that we are not responsible. Simply not care.

I can imagine the disciples were thinking if not saying, “It’s not our problem. We didn’t ask these people to come all the way out here to listen to Jesus. They came out on their own. We came here to rest. They have the problem and they have to solve it. It isn’t our responsibility. It is not our business. Since they are hungry, let them go find their own food.”

I know an elder who complained with some heat about the church to another elder and said, “You have to fix your churches problems!” The second elder caught the language the first elder used. He replied, “What do you mean, ‘your church?’ Isn’t this ‘our church’ and God’s church? What can you and we do about your concerns?”

A big cop out is the attitude, “It’s none of my business.” If you have a friend who is wasting their life away – it is your business. If you have a child in trouble – it is your business. If you know someone who is not following Jesus – it is your business. If you are part of an organization or group that is dysfunctional or has a negative history – it’s your business because you are part of that group. If you have a sense that someone is about to make a wrong decision – that is your business. If you sense some things are not right between people – it is your business. Simply put – love cares. Love gets involved. It is part of the commandment to love our neighbor. Like Jesus, we don’t procrastinate and pass the buck and third, blame others.

The 4th common reaction people have towards problems is, we worry about it. Verse 37. “How can we afford this? Where do we find food? How will we transport it? How will we distribute it fairly? Who is going to clean up? Who is going to underwrite the insurance? Do we have a health permit? Is doing this even legal?”

The questions, concerns and fears can become endless as well as become our own obstacles to action. Often, they are ways of procrastinating, avoiding responsibility and highlighting the barriers to something, instead of solving problems, accepting responsibility, and being creative in doing so. Sometimes this turns people into helpless victims, time and again.

Sound familiar? We procrastinate, pass the buck, blame, and overwhelm ourselves with worry. What is ironic about this story is Jesus, the solution to the food problem, was sitting, right there, relaxed and waiting. Jesus the man who can turn stones into bread, but the disciples are finding reasons and ways to get in the way of solutions. Worry is the opposite of faith. It never solves anything and usually makes the problems worse. It focuses our minds on fear, freezing us, which keeps us from creative solutions.

So, what do we do when we realize we need help? Maybe even a miracle? We name the problem. We accept responsibility for it. We

understand procrastinating, passing the buck, blame and worry does not help. In fact, they can even be considered temptations.

**Instead, the third step when we need help is: we focus on what we can do and go do it.**

We always can do what we can. God at times seems to wait to see what we are going to do with what we have, before he steps in. Verse 38. “Jesus asked, ‘How many loaves have you? Go and see.’” They found out they had only five loaves and two fishes, from that big crowd. Makes you wonder how many people were hiding food.

I love this story about Tony Campolo. He was at a day of prayer breakfast to offer the official prayer. But before he prayed, he said, “Let’s take an offering.” It was not in the organizers of the event thinking. The missionary who had just spoken shared the need to build another building in a hospital in Africa. But Tony insisted on it. Tony believed that if everyone emptied their wallets of cash, it would go a long way toward building the addition for the hospital. And it did – especially after passing the baskets – twice! Tony made the point, prayer is important. But so is doing what we can to help. Prayers and thoughts are nice, but we must do better.

It’s important to note, the hero of this story is a little boy. He is the only one who offered a sack lunch. I think we can say – he can be described as – the least of these – one of the least powerful in society. Yet in this true event, he is an example of a hero. He was willing to share his food and Jesus worked a miracle.

**The boy gave in three ways. First, the boy gave what he had.** He did not give what he did not have. He had barley loaves, which was cheap bread and probably were not very big. His two fish – they could have even been as small as sardines. It was just his lunch after all.

We must never underestimate what God can do through ordinary people and limited resources given to him in faith. God is looking for availability more than ability. The Bible says, “God has chosen to use the foolish things of this

world to confound the wise.” (I Cor. 1:27). Our Creator uses ordinary people. If you are open, God will wear you out. Talent is nice, but to be used by God we have to be available. If we want to see the power of God, just make ourselves available. The Almighty likes to do extraordinary things through ordinary people. Just study the ordinariness of most of the Bible’s personalities. They only become extraordinary after they are available for God. The little boy said, “Jesus, I’m going to give you what I have. Take and use it.”

**Secondly, the little boy gave God all he had.** He gave five loaves and two fish. He didn’t hold anything back from Jesus. If you want a miracle in your life, you cannot hold anything back from God. What are we holding back from God is a question we always must ask ourselves.

Too often, our attitudes and actions say, “God, I’ll give you anything except...my money, my children, my career, my status, my recreation, my time, my best effort and energy, my comfort, or whatever. You can have all of my life except in these areas.” Too often we give God the leftovers. We fit God in during our spare time.

Notice the little boy. He did not tithe his lunch to make sure he had some food. When Jesus asked for it, he gave it all. He gave all he had.

**The third thing we learn from this boy hero is, he gave it immediately when it was needed and asked for.** He did not hesitate. He didn’t wonder about it. He did not doubt. As soon as it was needed by Jesus, he gave it to him.

Why don’t we give like the boy when we need a solution to a problem? There are at least two reasons. *First*, we are worried that we might end up going hungry. If I give Jesus my lunch, what am I going to eat? I need every cent I’ve got to make it. If I give my all to Jesus, what will my family, friends and neighbors think?

Do we fully believe the Almighty will take care of our needs when we give sacrificially to Him? This isn’t about just money. It’s about freely

giving our time, talent, energy, creativity, and every part of ourselves.

*Second*, we don't give like the little boy when we need a miracle because we think, "What's the use?" How can my little bit help? It doesn't make sense. Here are 15,000 people and more, with seven small portions of food. Maybe just 14 to 21 bites. So I'll just make sure one of us isn't hungry. This is just a drop in the bucket so my little bit can't help.

This was Andrew's response in John 6, verse 9. He said, "How far will this go among so many?" Instead, the biblical math is, "When there is a need, sensed by a few, & each individual accepts their responsibility to do what they can with what they have, regardless of the odds, then God works a miracle." This is often seen in church history. "When there is a need, sensed by a few, & each individual accepts their responsibility to do what they can with what they have, regardless of the odds, then God works a miracle."

We are not to say, "My giving isn't going to help much." Instead, we are to say, "I'll give because it's what I've got." The fact is, a lot of little bits, add up to a lot. And even more, a lot of little bits, adds up to a lot more, when God sees what we have given. That's why giving is a test of faith and trust. And please remember, money and this little boy's lunch, is a metaphor, and an example for giving our whole selves. After all, God does not want our bits and pieces. He wants our whole selves – then he gets the bit & pieces.

I Corinthians 8:12 informs us, "For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one had – not according to what one does not have." A good theme for church people working together is, "Not equal gifts but equal sacrifice." This includes money, time, talent, learning to do new things, and most importantly, attitude. God cares about how much we give, but he cares more about our attitude toward giving and especially our whole selves. There is an old saying: God does not want our money. He wants us. Then he does have our wealth & much more.

So, to recap. When we recognize there is a problem; When we accept responsibility for the issue; When we do not procrastinate, pass the buck, blame or worry; When we gave our best, ***then we can expect a miracle***. I do not know how this miracle occurred. But evidently as Jesus broke the loaves and divided the fish, they kept multiplying. Jesus sent the disciples out to feed the people. God specializes in what in humanly impossible. If you ever use the word "impossible," listen for a laugh from heaven. The word impossible is not in God's vocabulary.

The prophet Jeremiah said, "Nothing is too hard for God." (32:7) Jesus said, "All things are possible to him who believes." (Mark 9:23) These are inclusive statements. No matter how big your problem is, God can handle it. But we must do our part. We do what we can with what we have and then we expect God to take it from there. God tends not to do, what we can do.

Expect God to help us in that problem at work, at home, at church and within yourself. Jesus told the blind men and us, "According to your faith it will be done to you." (Matthew 9:29) And their eyes were opened. In a sense, this means I get to choose what God does in my life. We get to choose how much God blesses us. "According to your faith, it will be done to you." **This event in the Bible is first, to encourage us and to be a model for us about how to have faith.**

**Second, even the least powerful around us can contribute to the Kingdom of God.** So don't count anyone's contribution or ideas out.

**Third, his event also teaches us, we cannot out give our Creator.** In verse 43 we find the disciples picked up 12 baskets of leftover food. The people ate their fill, and there was more food than when they started with. Do you think the little boy took some leftovers home with him? Any time we give sacrificially to God, we always end up getting more back. This is a constant theme in the Bible. God blesses us generously!

And, **fourth, the central lesson of this miracle is, God waits on us to work through us and**

**with us.** Yes, at times this world needs a miracle beyond our imaginations. But Jesus waited on the disciples and the boy to act. Why? God likes to do miracles through and with people. It grows our faith and trust, our joy and confidence, so we can ask for even more.

How does this apply to us as a congregation? The same principles apply. It's a continual process and not just a one-time emergency. And notice, what started this miracle? Verse 34. Jesus, the Shepherd Father, had compassion on the crowd. Then the disciples worried about the welfare of the crowd. They were given a way to help the crowd. It's not an accident we have the bread which ties in with the bread of life. And the fish tie in with witnessing to others. These are the focuses we need to keep in mind.

We must keep finding old, new, and effective ways of showing compassion as we connect people with Jesus, so the people of God here and worldwide grow and mature. We know the call to witness so we take responsibility, do what we can and expect miracles. With the Almighty, all things are possible! Our Creator has a habit of turning a little into a lot.