



PART 4: PERSONAL MINISTRY

Introduction

If you have ever volunteered to do something for which you felt totally unqualified, then you already know what an experience like that can do for your faith. One of the primary ways God grows our faith is through personal ministry. In this lesson we will explore the relationship between our faith and our service to others.

Discussion Questions

Use one of these questions, or a combination of these questions to introduce this week's lesson. The goal is to surface the tension we feel when God is urging us to serve in a setting for which we feel ill-equipped or inadequate.

1. Have you ever been asked individually or in a group setting to serve in a church or ministry- related context?
2. What has your initial response been to those kinds of requests?
3. Have you ever sensed that God was urging you to do something, yet you refused to do it because you felt inadequate or unprepared? If so, what was it? Why did you refuse?
4. When have you ever said yes to something God was urging you to do for which you felt unprepared? What was the impact of that experience on your faith?

In today's passage, we find Jesus asking his disciples to do something that was actually impossible for them to do and learn about the disciples' response.

5. *Read Matthew 14:13-17.* The disciples used the size of the crowd and their lack of food as excuses to not do what Jesus asked. What excuses have you used?
6. As you consider the disciples' excuses, what were they forgetting to factor into the equation?

The disciples gave Jesus what they had to work with, he blessed it, and then gave it back to them to distribute to the people. No one standing there that day would have considered the fish and loaves as things Jesus might use in a miraculous way. But he did.

7. Read Matthew 14:18-21. What talent, skill, experience, expertise, or ability do you have that, like the loaves and fish, don't appear to be things God could use in a significant way?

8. The disciples did what they knew how to do. They passed out the broken pieces of bread and fish. And God blessed their efforts and allowed them to accomplish far more than they could have in their own strength. What is the lesson for us?

We do what we can do and trust God to do what only he can do.

At the end of the message, Rich made the following statement: "Aren't you glad somebody took a chance, ignored his fear, stepped through the door of his own insecurity in order to serve you?"

9. Who has chosen to serve you in spite of the fact that she was busy, ill-equipped, and unsure of how things would turn out?
10. For parents: Is there someone who has set aside time to invest in your children?
11. What opportunities do you sense God opening for you to practice an act of personal ministry?

Moving Forward

Personal ministry enables us to experience God's power in our weakness. We may feel ill-equipped and unprepared, but these opportunities are incredibly rich experiences through which God grows our faith. At first, you may perform an act of personal ministry or service in order to benefit someone else. In hindsight, though, most people feel like they are the ones that have benefited the most.

Identify a skill, talent, or experience (your fish and loaves) to exercise this week as a measure of personal ministry. Have each group member pray a sentence prayer making this skill, talent, or experience available to God to use as he sees fit. Or have group members simply express their availability to God to be used in his service.

CHANGING YOUR MIND

Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Matthew 14:19-21