

Building Faith - Changing Lives - Sharing Christ

Week #5

Overview

The loaves and fishes story shows that the miracle was the child's generosity, not the actual multiplying of material goods. The feeding of the 5,000, found in all four Gospels, shows Jesus as the supplier of human need, and sets the stage for his testimony that he is the *bread of life* (v 35). The people thought only of the Moses through whom God had provided food and water for the people in the desert. They expected the Prophet to do no more than this and failed to understand that the Son of Man *gives food for eternal life*. The boy gave his five small barley loaves and two small fish whereas Jesus was offering the people all he was, a soul filled with the wisdom and goodness of the Father.

God has made us in his image, hoping we will share in a spirit much like the widow who put in two very small copper coins; indeed, it was a mite, but it was all she had to live on.

In Acts 4:32, the believers were of one heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had, not only material goods but also the gifts of the spirit which they were striving for as they followed Christ.

2 Corinthians 9:13 describes how effectively they were sharing the good news of the gospel because of their obedient and generous spirits.

We, too, are asked to share with others: the good news of the gospel and all that we have (our time, talents, and the good qualities that God has placed deep within our hearts, such as; compassion, patience and kindness.) If we focus on Christ single-mindedly on our daily journey, we will have more to share with others than they are actually apt to desire as they see the benefits we are gaining and who we are becoming because of our obedience and humility.

Worship Theme

Just as the Cross of Christ points in both vertical and horizontal directions, our lives can do the same. We reach upwards toward God so we can learn and grow spiritually and then, move out horizontally to share with others. Up-reach and outreach repeat the themes of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

Moving into the vertical direction spiritually requires us to go inward and upward in reverent solitude and silence. Prayer with adulation, confession, thanksgiving and supplication help us to prepare our hearts for the wisdom of the Father, Son and Spirit. Keeping a journal, recording prayer requests and answers over time, reading scripture and studying books about Christianity are just a few of the ways we can strengthen and deepen our faith.

Being involved in a Christian community that encourages growth can broaden our spiritual horizons. Serving in community organizations and on neighborhood projects



provide valuable opportunities to serve. Strangers become our friends while those who appear different to us become comfortably familiar when we share. We are changed into better people.

Jesus often took risks when he entered unfamiliar territory. He wasn't afraid to confront hypocrisy and meaningless tradition. Worldly values like power, comfort, prestige, materialism, security, autonomy were not important to him. Sacrifice was. So was humility.

When people are more attracted to the worldly values than the spiritual ones, their fists and hearts will be more closed to others. Sharing can take greater effort than they want to expend.

Small Group Discussion

1. In your small group read the following scriptures, and then answer the following questions in light of what you have just read.
 - a. Luke 21:2-4
 - b. Acts 4:32-35
 - c. 2 Corinthians 9:12-15
 - d. Philippians 3:10
2. Make a list of new and different ways you could grow vertically toward the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? (e.g. Praying for world wide needs as you read the newspaper, memorizing verses from scripture, reflecting on a sermon throughout the week, keeping track of a prayer list over time, confessing your weaknesses more diligently, or looking back over your life to remember and share moments of God with your grown children and grandchildren, etc.)
3. Consider a variety of unique and untried ways you could begin to share horizontally with others? (e.g. Sharing your "growing edge in faith" with a trusted friend, listening attentively to someone you do not know well, checking in with someone who is hurting or in need, volunteering in a new arena.)
4. In what ways can people be "poor" besides materially? (They can be poor in health, education, energy, socio-economic status, etc.) In what ways might we be able to share with them from our abundance? In what ways might they have a wealth to share with us?
5. Can you recall stepping out of your comfort zone and taking a risk in order to serve Christ?
6. In what ways has sharing made a difference in your life?
7. Can you recall suffering on behalf of someone else, and thus sharing in the suffering of Christ?
8. What is one tangible way that you can put into practice what you have learned about sharing today? What is one way your group can practice sharing?

Time for Sharing...

Use Psalm 40: 1-10 as part of your small group's closing prayer.

