

HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR CHRIST

John 6:1-14

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Everyone is created with the desire to make a difference. To live a significant life. To do something that matters. To make a dent. To make the world a better place. To be a part of something bigger than themselves. To not waste their life.
2. God made you that way because He wants you to make a difference with your life.
3. But many Christians don't live up to their potential. They don't make the big difference that God wants them to make. And today we're going to see why.

II. TEXT: John 6:1-14

1. Background:
 - i. This is the famous story of Jesus feeding the multitude – the five thousand.
 - ii. This is one of Christ's two creation miracles (along with turning water to wine) – revealing His divinity as creator of the universe.
 - iii. This is also the only miracle that is found in all four gospels. John's gospel was written after the synoptics, so he included miracles and other events that were not recorded by the synoptics. But this miracle is common to all.
 - iv. This miracle is the fourth sign in John's gospel. Remember that John only includes a few of Christ's miracles that are the most illuminating of Christ's identity, and he calls them signs. This is the fourth of eight signs.
 1. Turning the water into wine (2:1-12).
 2. Healing the royal official's son (4:46-54).
 3. Healing the lame man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-16).
 4. Feeding the five thousand (6:1-14).
 - v. This miracle is also the largest miracle in terms of the number of people affected – 5,000.
2. *1 After this, Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). 2 A huge crowd was following him because they saw the signs that he was performing by healing the sick. 3 Jesus went up a mountain and sat down there with his disciples.*
 - i. "After this"
 1. Between six months to one year have passed since the previous event.
 2. The synoptic gospels say that in that time Jesus had been ministering in the towns of Galilee, performing many miracles, and His fame spread.
 - ii. "Sea of Galilee"
 1. This miracle occurred near the Sea of Galilee, in a town called Bethsaida (Lk 9:10).

2. A large lake that was fed by the Jordan River in the north, and spilled into the Jordan river in the south.
 3. It was seven miles wide and thirteen miles long; 80-150 feet deep.
 4. Significant events on the Sea of Galilee:
 - a. He called His first disciples on the Sea of Galilee while they were fishing (Mk 1:16-20).
 - b. He walked on the water (Jn 6:16).
 - c. He calmed the storm (Mark 4:36-41).
 - d. His eighth and final sign occurred on the Sea of Galilee when He helped the disciples catch a miraculous number of fish (John 21:1-7).
 - e. The feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-14).
- iii. *"2 A huge crowd was following him because they saw the signs that he was performing by healing the sick."*
1. The synoptic gospels give more detail as to why Jesus was in this location. He and His disciples needed to get away from the crowds for a moment. They had just finished an exhausting ministry tour, and they had just received news of the execution of John the Baptist. So they got into a boat and crossed the Sea of Galilee (Mt 14:13; Mk 6:7-13, 30; Mk 6:31-32). But a very large crowd followed them on foot along the shore, and even more joined them from the surrounding cities (Mk 6:32).
 2. The huge crowd was following Him not out of love and service, but because they were thrill-seekers. They wanted to see a miracle.
3. *4 Now the Passover, a Jewish festival, was near. 5 So when Jesus looked up and noticed a huge crowd coming toward him, he asked Philip, "Where will we buy bread so that these people can eat?" 6 He asked this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.*
- i. The Synoptic gospels say that Jesus spent time with the crowd, healing their sick, and teaching them (Mt 14:14; Lk 9:11).
 - ii. Many of the people had traveled a long distance, so Jesus asked Philip where they were going to buy bread to feed them.
4. *7 Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii, worth of bread wouldn't be enough for each of them to have a little."*
- i. A denarius was a Roman coin worth one day's wage for a common laborer. 200 denarii was about eight month's wages.
5. *8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9 "There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish—but what are they for so many?"*
- i. Philip didn't even try, but Andrew did what he could. A little boy had donated his lunch to Jesus, and Andrew brought the little boy to Jesus, even though he couldn't see how it could help.

- ii. “Five barley loaves” The loaves were similar to pita bread. Barley was the bread of the poor; rich people preferred wheat bread. So this boy was from a poor family. The five loaves were enough for himself alone.
 - iii. “Two fish” These fish would have been dried out and salted, or possibly pickled, because pickled fish from Galilee were known all over the Roman Empire. They were no bigger than sardines.
6. *10 Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.”*
7. *There was plenty of grass in that place; so they sat down. The men numbered about five thousand. 11 Then Jesus took the loaves, and after giving thanks he distributed them to those who were seated—so also with the fish, as much as they wanted.*
- i. “The men numbers about five thousand” This puts the total number of people at around 20,000.
 - ii. “after giving thanks”
 - 1. Jesus first gave thanks. It’s a good habit for us to give thanks for the food before we eat.
 - 2. The Greek verb for “give thanks” is *eucharisteo*, which is where the Roman Catholics get the term Eucharist for the Lord’s Supper.
 - iii. The Synoptic gospels say that the disciples distributed the food, and everyone had as much as they wanted.
8. *12 When they were full, he told his disciples, “Collect the leftovers so that nothing is wasted.” 13 So they collected them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces from the five barley loaves that were left over by those who had eaten.*
- i. “When they were full” The Greek word means fed to repletion. It means that you’ll probably skip dessert.
9. *14 When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, “This truly is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” 15 Therefore, when Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*
- i. “The Prophet” referred to the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. **Deuteronomy 18:15** “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.”
 - ii. When the Israelites were in the wilderness after leaving Egypt, God rained down food from heaven (Ex 16). It was called manna. It tasted like wafers made with honey.
 - iii. By the first century, the Jewish rabbis expected that the Messiah would come and rain down food from heaven again.
 - iv. When the Jews experienced this miracle, they assumed Jesus was the Messiah. And they wanted Him to be their king. He would feed them, and deliver them from Romans just as Moses delivered them from the Egyptians.
 - v. But even though Jesus was the King, His kingdom was eternal, and it wasn’t advanced through military means.

III. LIES THAT ARE PREVENTING YOU FROM MAKING A DIFFERENCE

1. I'm not called.

- i. Many Christians think that serving God is only for those who are called into vocational ministry. Serving God is only for the professionals – pastors, missionaries, church staff, worship leaders, chaplains, etc.
- ii. This has been called the Holy Man Myth. It's the idea that church staff and pastors do the ministry, they serve God, and all the other believers just watch. Larry Osborne, in his book *Sticky Church*, wrote, "[This] is the idea that pastors and clergy somehow have a more direct line to God. It cripples a church because it overburdens pastors and underutilizes the gifts and anointing of everyone else. It mistakenly equates leadership gifts with superior spirituality (*Sticky Church*, 49)."
- iii. Former Roman Catholics are especially vulnerable to this myth. You were taught that priests are closer to God. They have special powers. Their prayers are more effective. And all the other Christians are just supposed to cheer them on. But this is not Biblical.
- iv. One of the primary teachings of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century was called the Priesthood of the Believer. It means that all Christians are called to be priests, and therefore all Christians are equal. All Christians have equal access to God. All Christians are called to serve God. All Christians are called to the ministry.
- v. **1 Peter 2:9** "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood,, a holy nation, a people for his possession,, so that you may proclaim the praises, of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."
- vi. You are a priest of almighty God.
- vii. **John 6:5** So when Jesus looked up and noticed a huge crowd coming toward him, he asked Philip, "Where will we buy bread so that these people can eat?"
- viii. Jesus called Phillip and the other disciples to join Him in feeding the people. Jesus didn't need to include them, but He chose to. God does His work through people. God also calls each and every one of us to serve Him.
- ix. You were saved to serve. You were made for ministry. You are called and commanded to contribute to God's work.
- x. God has given every Christian spiritual gift to use in His church.
 1. **1 Corinthians 12:7** "A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good."
 2. God has shaped every Christian for ministry. Your SHAPE is the unique combination of your spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, and experiences.
 3. The only way to know your spiritual gift is to begin serving. Look around. Find out what needs to be done, and do what you can do to

help out. Eventually you will find a way to contribute to the church and to God's kingdom in a very significant, satisfying way.

- xi. Every Christian has a special work to do in the church. **Ephesians 4:16 (NLT)** "He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."
- xii. Every Christian is commanded to serve the Lord. **Romans 12:11** "Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord." **Galatians 5:13** "serve one another through love."
- xiii. There are no cheerleaders in the church. There is no audience in the church. There are no retired Christians. There are no sit and soak Christians. We are all called to serve the Lord.
- xiv. You may see yourself as a Christian, but God wants you to see yourself as His servant.
 - 1. Before Christ, you are a spiritual seeker. After you come to faith in Christ you are to be reaching out to seekers.
 - 2. Before Christ, you are our mission (we are trying to reach you). After Christ, you are to live as a missionary in the church and in the world.
 - 3. Before Christ, you come to church to be served. After Christ, you are to come to church to serve Christ and others in His name.
 - 4. Before Christ you are a spectator and observer of Christianity. After Christ you are to be an active participator in the ministry of the church.

2. I'm not needed.

- i. The second lie that hinders you from serving God is that you aren't needed. God can do it without you.
- ii. There's a Star Trek movie in which Captain Kirk and his crew believe they have actually found God. But then "god" tells Captain Kirk to hand over control of their ship, the Starship Enterprise. And that's the first thing that tips Kirk off that this is not actually God. This is some dark, sinister force posing as God. Kirk asks, "Why does God need a spaceship?" That's the way that most people view serving God. God doesn't need me. God doesn't need my money. God doesn't need my talents. God doesn't need my resources. God has all the resources He needs. He can get it done without me.
- iii. But the truth is that while God can indeed get it done without you, He chooses to work through you in order to grow you.
- iv. Notice what the text says after Jesus asked Phillip how they were going to feed the people.
- v. **John 6:6** "He asked this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do."

- vi. Jesus knew the answer to His question, but He did this to test Philip.
- vii. What is a test? A test is a situation that reveals the strength or quality of someone by putting them under strain (Google).
- viii. If God knows everything, then why does He test us? He tests us so that we can better know ourselves. Self-knowledge is essential for growth, but it is often only accessible through tests. Once tested, a person can better see their strength, and then can have the opportunity for growth.
- ix. Through this experience Peter and the disciples would be able to see the weakness of their faith, as well as the power of Christ, and they would be able to grow.
- x. As we serve, God grows us in a number of ways, including tests as He leads us to face impossible odds, or very difficult challenges.
- xi. God involves in ministry because as we serve Him He is able to grow us.
- xii. Ministry leads to maturity.
- xiii. Serving God is not about your participation, but your transformation.
- xiv. God doesn't need your help. You need the benefit of ministry in order to grow.

3. I'm not qualified.

- i. Many people don't serve God because of the lie that they are unqualified. But notice who God used in this story. A little boy.
- ii. **John 6:9** "There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish...."
- iii. This little boy wasn't qualified to make a difference for God. He was too young. Yet God used a little boy to make a big difference. Why? Because he volunteered. Because he was willing.
- iv. Serving God isn't about your ability, but your availability.
- v. God doesn't need someone with a perfect past. He doesn't need someone with a perfect present. He doesn't need someone with lots of talent. He doesn't need someone who is handsome, or beautiful. He doesn't need someone who is highly educated. He doesn't need someone who is an adult, or someone who isn't too old. He needs someone who is willing. Someone who is available.
- vi. **Funny Quote** "You are never completely worthless. You can always serve as a bad example."
- vii. Moses wasn't qualified to lead Israel. He was a murderer, a fugitive, and he hated public speaking. Peter, Andrew, James and John weren't qualified to start a new religion; they were mere fishermen. Paul wasn't qualified to be a Christian missionary; he was a persecutor of Christians. David wasn't qualified to be king; he was the youngest son of a shepherd. Joseph wasn't qualified to be Pharaoh's number two; he was a slave prisoner, convicted of sexual assault. Yet God used these people to do great things.

- viii. In Isaiah 6, the prophet Isaiah had a vision of the Lord. And God asked, “Who will I send? Who will go for us?” Isaiah replied, “Here I am. Send me.” Then God responded, “Go!”
- ix. You can make a huge difference for God, if you will simply volunteer.
- x. It’s not about how qualified you are, it’s about offering yourself up for God’s service. It’s saying, “God, I’m not much, but what I am, and all that I am, I give to Your service.”
- xi. A few weeks ago I met a sweet lady named Frances St. Pierre. An 86-year old widow who loves Jesus, and she loves her church. She’s a member of FBC Youngsville. At her age, she can’t do much, but she can sew. She is a skilled seamstress. So she sews every day, all day long, to make things for people in need. She makes pillows and teddy bears for the hospitals. She makes dresses and purses and are sent to poor people around the globe. I told her how wonderful it was that she was still using her time and energy to serve God. All she could talk about was how much God had done for her, and as a result the least she could do was to serve Him.
- xii. It’s not about your ability, it’s about your availability. Will you use whatever gifts and talents and skills and energy that you have to serve the Lord?

4. I’m too poor.

- i. This lie may be the most common. I can’t serve God because I don’t have the money. I can’t help because I don’t have enough money.
- ii. That’s what Phillips said when Jesus called him to feed the people.
- iii. **John 6:7** Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii, worth of bread wouldn’t be enough for each of them to have a little.”
- iv. Yet God was able to feed around 20,000 people with just five barley loaves and two fish. With one little boy’s meal.
- v. Serving God is not about how much you have, but how much you give to God. It’s not about how much you have, it’s about giving all you do have to God.
- vi. The little boy in this story didn’t have much. In fact, he was poor. Barley bread was the food of poor people; rich people preferred wheat bread. But the little boy gave all that he had to Jesus, and Jesus was able to do amazing things through him.
- vii. Don’t ever let the size of bank account determine the size of your ministry.
- viii. Don’t let the size of your bank account determine what you try to achieve for God.
- ix. Remember that God owns it all. He will give you what you need to do what He calls you to do.
- x. The voice of God will not guide where the hand of God will not provide.
- xi. **Psalms 50:10** “for every animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.”

- xii. **Tony Evans** “God doesn't need a lot to do a lot. All David had was five stones. And all David used was one.”

5. I'm all alone.

- i. Many people don't step out to serve God because they are all alone. Maybe they attempted to get some support, and they were turned down. And so they quit. But how many people did it take to make a difference for Christ in this story? One. One little boy.
- ii. All it takes is one person to change the world for God. One person who is fully-devoted to Jesus Christ.
- iii. **Dwight Moody** was the Billy Graham of the nineteenth century. He traveled the world preaching the gospel. He started a church and a Bible college in Chicago that are still operating today. His most favorite quote is, “The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him.” But that quote did not originate with Moody. Those were words spoken to Moody by another preacher in Ireland when they were ministering together. That minister had no idea, but those words sunk down deep into Moody's soul and encouraged him to be all that he could be for God.
- iv. **2 Chronicles 16:9** “The eyes of Yahweh roam throughout the earth to show Himself strong for those whose hearts are completely His.”
- v. Making a difference is about who you are with, not who is with you. All you need to focus on is being fully dedicated to Jesus Christ, and He will do the rest.
- vi. You plus Jesus make a majority.
- vii. **David Jeremiah** “One person can make a difference. A huge difference. Consider what a solitary individual may accomplish: In 1645 one vote gave Oliver Cromwell control of England. In 1649 one vote cost Charles I of England his life, causing him to be executed. In 1776 one vote gave America the English language instead of the German language. In 1839 one vote elected Mark Morgan governor of Massachusetts. In 1845 one vote brought Texas into the Union. In 1868 one vote saved President Johnson from impeachment. In 1875 one vote changed France from a monarchy to a republic. In 1876 one vote gave Rutherford B. Hayes the United States presidency. In 1923 one vote gave Adolf Hitler control of the Nazi party. In 1941 one vote saved the Selective Service Agency just.”

6. I'm too weak.

- i. Many people are discouraged from making a difference because of the size of the problem. They compare their abilities to the size of the problem, and they melt in discouragement. They say, “I can't. It's impossible. It's no use. It's pointless.”
- ii. The boy in our story didn't let that stop him. There were 20,000 hungry people. All he had was five loaves and two fish. What good could he do?

But he didn't let his weakness stop him from serving. He did what he could do and he left the rest in God's hands.

- iii. Serving God is not about what you can do, but what God can do through you.
- iv. **Adrian Rogers** "You can be too big for God to use, but you can never be too small for God to use."
- v. It's not how strong you are, but how strong God is.
- vi. Don't look at the size of the problem, but the size of your God.
- vii. Don't focus on what you can't do, but what God can do.
- viii. The little boy did what he could do. He could offer up his meal. That was all he could do, but that's all it takes.
- ix. Do what you can do, and God will do what only He can do.
- x. All it takes to make a difference for God is faith in His ability to do big things through little people.
- xi. **JC Ryle** "The true secret of doing great things for God is to have great faith."

IV. CONCLUSION

1. It turns out that one of the biggest and most common obstacles to making a difference is insecurity.
 - i. God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, and He said, "I'm not a good speaker."
 - ii. When God called Gideon to lead the Israelite army, he said, "My family is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my family."
 - iii. God called Saul to be the first king of Israel, and he said, "I'm from the smallest tribe, and the least important family."
 - iv. God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, and he said, "I'm too young!"
2. God wants to use you. It doesn't matter who you are, or what you've done, or where you are in life. God wants to use you in a significant way to make a difference for His kingdom.
3. **2 Timothy 2:21 (ERV)** "The Lord wants to use you for special purposes...."
4. The little boy had five loaves and two fish, and he gave it all to Jesus. Will you give all of yourself to Him today?
5. **Moody** "The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him."