

If this boy didn't share his five loaves and two fish, I don't believe this miracle of multiplication would have gone down. Am I suggesting Jesus could not have performed this miracle without the little boy's lunch? Yes and no. I suppose Jesus could have created a four-course meal out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), but generally speaking God doesn't do the supernatural if we don't pull our weight by doing the natural. The miracles of Jesus almost always have a human element. The lesson embedded in this miracle is simple: if you put what you have in your hands into God's hands, God can make a lot out of a little!

The total population of the Galilee region was approximately forty thousand at the time of Christ. So roughly half of them crossed the Sea of Galilee by boat or hiked around it by foot to get to the mountainside where Jesus had set up camp. When Scripture says Jesus "saw a great crowd coming toward him" (v. 2), it's no understatement.

Jesus turns to Philip and asks, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" (v. 5). It only makes sense that Jesus would ask Philip because Philip was from Bethsaida, nine miles away. If anyone knew where to get food, it would be Philip. But there was no Panera Bread around the corner! And even if there was, Philip knew they couldn't afford to feed everyone.

Philip's response borders on rebuke: "It would take more than a half year's wages to buy enough bread for each one of them to have a bite!" (v. 7). Translation: Bethsaida, we have a big problem!

According to the Convention Industry Council Manual, a seated banquet required 13.65 square feet per person. If you do the math, 13.5 square feet multiplied by 20,000 people totals 6.2 acres. The volume of food, number of waiters, and quantity of port-a-johns required to pull off this one meal is absolutely astronomical. And I'd hate to be the one stuck with dish duty!

Philip wasn't the keeper of the purse, but it didn't take a genius to figure out that this lunch would break the bank. Just hiring the wait staff would have set them back thousands. And even if everyone ordered off the dollar menu, the meal would have cost tens of thousands. Faced with those numbers, we can understand why Philip wanted to let the people fend for themselves.

It's so easy to let what we cannot do keep us from doing what we can. When the boy offered to share his lunch, Andrew's reaction was, "Thanks, but no thanks!" He didn't think it would

make a difference: "How far will they go among so many?" he asked. But Andrew was overanalyzing the situation, and he almost missed the miracle because of it.

I have no idea how the boy with the two fish scored on the math portion of the SAT, but I'm fairly certain he knew that  $2 + 2 = 4$ . He knew his two fish weren't enough to make a dent, let alone feed twenty thousand people. It was a drop in the bucket; but he didn't let what he *didn't have* keep him from giving what he *did have* to Jesus. And that is the precursor to many a miracle!

Like so many unsung heroes of the Bible, this little boy walks off the pages of Scripture never to be heard from again. But his fifteen minutes of fame have stretched into two thousand years! And I wouldn't be surprised if he's the one serving the fish entrée at the heavenly banquet.

So, what do you do when the will of God doesn't add up? What do you do when you run the numbers and it just won't work? In my experience, the will of God rarely adds up. By its very definition, God's dreams will always be beyond your resources and beyond your abilities. In other words, you cannot afford it and you cannot accomplish it. Not in your lifetime! But God can do more in *one day* than you can accomplish in a hundred lifetimes.

Your job is not to crunch the numbers and audit the will of God. After all, the will of God is not a zero sum game. When you add God to the question, God's output always exceeds your input. And your two fish can go a lot further than you imagine if you put them into God's hands.

The law of measures is as inviolable as the law of gravity! With the measure you use, it will be measured unto you. It doesn't matter whether it is two fish or two mites, you can take it to the bank. You cannot break the law of measures, and that's good news if you're willing to give your brown bag lunch to Jesus.

Few people have played the Giving Game better than John Wesley. He was a better giver than he was a preacher, which is saying something. He lived by the maxim: "Make all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can." During his lifetime, Wesley gave away approximately £30,000. Adjusted for inflation, Wesley gave away about \$1,764,705.88 in today's dollars.

Wesley’s goal was to give away all his excess income after the bills were paid. He never had more than £100 in his possession because he was afraid of storing up earthly treasure. Even when his income rose into the thousands of pounds, he didn’t interpret God’s blessing as permission to live large, he just had more to give away. John Wesley died with a few coins in his pocket, but he had an enormous bankroll in heaven.

Don’t be discouraged by how little you may have to give. It may seem like a drop in the bucket, but it can make as much difference as the little boy’s two fish. And the point of the Giving Game isn’t how much you give, it’s how much you keep. The one who has the least left at the end of their life wins! The most celebrated giver in the Gospels is the widow who gave next to nothing. She won the Giving Game with two mites; but she won because she gave everything and kept nothing for herself.

God cannot give back what you don’t give away. It’s as simple as that. And that’s why many of us never experience God’s miraculous multiplication. It’s one of the secrets to experiencing the miraculous: if you give beyond your ability, God will multiply it beyond your ability.

**Prayer:** Loving God, we give you thanks and praise that, through Jesus, you healed the sick and fed the hungry. With a few paltry fish and loaves of bread, you fed a crowd of famished people, and with grace to spare. We, too, long to be fed. We, too, clamor for your healing touch. We come to you in prayer now, pressing in on you from all sides, with our needs and desires — some trivial, some profound — and through it all, you love us. You are attentive to the deepest yearnings and the most hidden wounds of our hearts. Attend to us, once again, we pray. In Jesus's name, Amen.

*Heavily excerpted from Mark Batterson’s The Grave Robber, Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 2014.*

## Run the Numbers

Sunday, March 13, 2016

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN 56537

### *John 6:1-13*

Good food is one of God’s most gracious gifts. There’s nothing quite like a good meal to make your day perfect. One of my favorite restaurants is Amendola’s, a three-generation, family owned Italian bistro in my hometown. Using all original recipes brought over from Italy by Nana Amendola, there are few places that serve a better meal. The lasagna will feed your soul. The spaghetti – with the orthodox one giant meatball in the middle – is perfection in a dish. The ravioli (handmade of course) is a gastronomic delight. And the pizza? Second only to our own Union Pizza in Fergus Falls, MN.

The focal point of the fourth miracle in John’s Gospel is Jesus feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. Of course, whoever dubbed it the feeding of the five thousand shortchanged Jesus: it was five thousand *men*. The total head count was probably closer to twenty thousand men, women, and children. Jesus doesn’t just pull a rabbit out of a hat; he pulls out twenty thousand meals. But before we bite into the main entrée, we should take a look at a miracle that precedes it: an appetizer, if you will, served up by a small boy.

Let’s assume the disciples didn’t strong-arm this little boy or steal his brown bag lunch. This boy gave it willingly, making it as much an expression of love as me sharing my Coca-Cola with someone. Perhaps more! It was also the pre-miracle that set up the miracle.

If you have young children, you have a unique appreciation for what I’m about to say. Getting kids to share anything takes a minor miracle! A child’s favorite word is *mine*, and they say it about everything, including what’s yours. Getting them to share something they *love*, like their favorite food? That takes a major miracle.

This one act of sacrificial giving was the catalyst for one of Jesus’ most amazing miracles. And for the record, I don’t see it as *one* miracle. I consider it twenty thousand separate miracles: one miracle for every single person there that day!