

From Little to Much

Lesson 11 in "More Like Jesus"

Lesson Aim: To call us to a commitment to do what we can with what we have, knowing that more will be given. To encourage us to accept the principle of moving from the simple to the difficult.

Key Verse: Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities. Luke 19:17 nas

Moving Up

Moving from the simple to the difficult is a general principle of learning. Its part of our educational system as well as learning skills later in life.

Consider the following examples:

- Two plus two comes before trigonometry
- A pilot flies a little two-seater, before a big passenger jet
- Doctors stitch cut fingers before doing heart transplants

We need men and women who can solve problems in the church as difficult as university calculus. And leaders who can guide us through the maze of confusion, false teaching and tensions of our world like the pilot of a passenger jet guiding us through stormy weather. And as the surgeon who does heart transplants, we need those who are deeply skilled in helping broken people receive a new heart from Jesus.

The church is given an awesome responsibility. We are surrounded by weak and sickly people, including church members. Life and death are in our hands. It is time for God's people to take seriously our call to service. We need to press on in diligence, developing the needed gifts and resources. We must grow in love, faith, discernment and wisdom, and in the operation of all of the spiritual gifts.

However, sometimes we do nothing because we can't do the big things. It doesn't seem important enough to do what we're able to do. Or we think others can do it so much better.

We forget the truth of God's Word, and the principle of life, that if we start where we're at, and use what we have, we'll be given more. In some cases it will be the further release of God's grace in our life. Other times it will simply be the development of gifts and skills through experience. Often we can't tell the difference but it doesn't matter!

Scriptures To Consider

Several scriptures speak of our receiving more when we are faithful in using what we already have.

Read Matthew 25:14-30 (esp. v21-23), the story of the faithful and unfaithful stewards. (5-2-1 talents). Note in v-15 that he gave to each one "according to his own ability."

There are people with one talent; some with two; others with five. God says it's not as important how many talents we have as what we do with them, but there are many one-talent people who don't want to do one-talent work. They just sit around waiting for God to give them more talents!

To the faithful stewards the master said "well done, you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things." Here faithfulness seems to be rewarded with a greater measure of the same kind of thing they were given in the first place.

But read Luke 19:11-27 (10 servants, one mina each). Note that the faithful servants were rewarded by being made ruler over the number of cities equal to the number of mina he had earned. His reward was in a greater form than the mina he started with! Being faithful with only money, he was made ruler over cities. What a promotion!

Read Luke 16:10-11. Two very important truths are presented here. First, if we are faithful with little, we will be faithful with much; and if we are not faithful with little, we can't be trusted with much! Secondly, and this is very important, if we cannot handle "unrighteous mammon" (earthly things) properly, we should not be entrusted with spiritual riches! Simply put, if we're not trustworthy with material things we're not trustworthy with spiritual leadership.

Because of pride, many Christians are unwilling to prove themselves by being faithful in little. They want to move right into the big, "important" things. But the Word is clear; God would have us be faithful in little, and He will give us more.

If God is stirring within you the gift of healing, you might want to pray for headaches or allergies, before cancer. Or walk with and help a struggling Christian, before taking on someone who is demon possessed.

If you are a young person who desires to become a leader, prove your faithfulness by helping with the children; volunteer to help with janitorial work; or do any one of countless other tasks. Offer to serve your leaders, even in humble ways. Prove

yourself worthy to be entrusted with spiritual ministry and leadership, and do it without needing recognition!

Remember also, that few of us will ever become big names in the church! But isn't the strength of the church built on the humble, willing service of many "one-talent people" anyway!? Isn't it true that most of the work of God's kingdom is done by the little people like us?

All of the gifts and ministries in the church need to be developed through teaching, experience, counsel and so forth. God doesn't usually drop a gift on us in Christ-like measure, and tell us to run with it. He gives us more when it's time for more.

One Reason Why

There are several reasons for that. For one, life doesn't work that way in general and growth in the spiritual realm is much like growth in the natural realm.

But there's another important reason. Our character needs to be formed to be more and more like Jesus, as the ministry gifts are developed in us. If our gifts get ahead of our character we become proud and useless. In fact we become a problem. We are a liability to the church instead of an asset.

Churches often make the mistake of placing more value on gifts than character. People who have some charisma; who make others feel good; and/or who seem to do something well, are often placed in positions in the church before their character is proven. This can lead to real problems!

Character traits like humility, faithfulness, servanthood, mercy, being teachable, and kindness, are essential. They are the foundation that ministry must be built upon. Wise church leaders will place great value upon the character of those they elevate in the body.

Gifts and skills can be built over time in the life of one who has the foundation of character, but trying to develop character in a highly gifted person who lacks it is almost futile.

Filled With The Holy Spirit

In some churches, being "filled with the Holy Spirit" is thought of as relating to the spiritual gifts; especially tongues or prophecy. But it means much more than that!

It implies our being cleansed and renewed, and formed into the image of Jesus. It is in "being." From that "being" comes the "doing" as we are shaped and empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform the works of God.

Getting gifts ahead of character too often leads to unreliable and even deceptive "ministry." Prophecy for example, can very easily come from the flesh instead of the Spirit. The very gifts that were intended to build up the church become destructive. Shame on us!

For the spiritual gifts to be life-giving, their expression must come out of humility, servanthood, a quiet spirit, being teachable, and so on. *That's* what it means to be "filled with the Spirit." And *that's* the position from which God can elevate us to greater service in the church!

A Spiraling Career

Read Acts 6. Observe how Stephen's career spiraled upward from a simple layman to a tremendous preacher whose face had the appearance of an angel. And of course he became the church's first martyr.

Note the qualifications for deacon that were given in verse 3; "seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom." Verses 5-6 say that Stephen was among those chosen and installed as a

deacon. He was to help see that no widow was overlooked in the daily serving of food. Hardly a glamorous task! Hardly one that would find many volunteers today!

But note what's happening in the church and in Stephen's life:

- V7 says that the Word of God was spreading
- V8 says that Stephen was now doing more than serving tables. It says, "Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people."
- V10 says he was a mighty man of God
- V15 tells us that his face was like the face of an angel

His refusal to defend himself against false accusations confirms the presence of Jesus in his life. Certainly he was, "filled with the Holy Spirit!"

Acts 7:54-60 tells us more about Stephen. They "gnashed their teeth" at him, but because he was full of the Holy Spirit, and kept his eyes on Jesus, he was able to be faithful to the end. His final words "Lord, do not charge them with this sin," were a final confirmation of his depth of character.

You can be sure that it was because of his faithfulness in serving tables that God chose him for the greater ministry.

Closing Thoughts

There's much more we could say about moving from little to much.

There's the matter of those who have a prophetic sense of God's calling in their life. The "doing" seems too urgent for them to waste time on the "being." Because of their strong sense of God's calling, it's easy for them to get ahead of His timing. Moses will be able to tell us a lot about that in heaven. So will Joseph. And many from this generation.

Sometimes God places a strong call in ones' heart, or it may come through one who has the ministry of a prophet. Either way, it is often more for the purpose of motivating one to preparation than a call to ministry at that time.

It is to inspire and encourage them through the preparation process, and then later as they actually move into that ministry. In I Tim. 1:18 Paul reminds Timothy of the prophecies previously spoken over him, "that by them you might wage the good warfare."

In spite of the urgency of needs around us, there's always time to wait for God's time!

Finally, humility and being teachable ought to be two of the most highly prized characteristics of those who want to press on in our Lord's service. And they should be in the forefront when the church identifies and calls gifted persons.

When we have to choose between character and gifting, let's choose character. And when God shows us those with character, and with a desire to serve, let's invest ourselves in them in a way that they become fruitful servants of His.

Prayer:

Jesus, I want to be more like you in character and in service. I want to be faithful in the little things; even work you set before me that others will never recognize.

I don't want to try to shortcut the advancement process. I covet the fruitful service that emerges from a faithful walk with you.

Please Jesus, work in my heart the humility, and the spirit of servanthood that are so foundational to a life of Christian service. Thank you, Jesus.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

- 1) How do you respond to the author's emphasis on proven character as an essential foundation for ministry? Is this how it is done in your church?
- 2) What character traits do you think are most essential for godly ministry?
- 3) How do you respond to the author's definition of being "filled with the Spirit."
- 4) What conclusions can we draw from the story of Stephen?
- 5) This lesson was first written in response to needs in the church in Kenya. Is it applicable to the church in America?