

Feeding the Five Thousand

by Jeff Lindeman, 2003 Fellows Class

As an attorney in private practice, I am responsible for bringing in work to support, not just myself, but also those who work with me. There are times when we have more work than we can handle. More often, times are leaner with no sight of needed new work appearing on the horizon. Since attorneys are paid for their time and expertise, being productive means having “billable hours.”



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When your plate is not full, worry, uncertainty, and discouragement can set in. In spite of your best marketing and networking, the needed and hoped-for work may not appear. You sometimes simply do not know where else to look. It was during one of those lean times that I read the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand in Mark 6. It is a familiar story. I was keenly aware of my need to depend on God, but now the story gave me renewed hope and confidence in God's provision.

Jesus and his disciples were trying to get away for some rest and time to be alone. The crowd, however, had followed them. Out of compassion Jesus took time and taught the crowd many things—“they were like sheep without a shepherd.” When it was late, the disciples came to Jesus with a problem: the crowd needed to eat. The disciples suggested the crowd be sent away so they could buy food for themselves. No one expected Jesus' answer, “You give them something to eat.” The disciples could not imagine doing that. It was late in the day. They and the crowd were in a desolate place. There was nothing there. Even if it were possible, it would take much more money than they had.

Everyone has heard that recognizing the problem is the first step to solving it...but not this time. “You give them something to eat” was Jesus' surprising solution. When our law firm seemed to lack the sustaining work that we needed, it was not hard to state the problem or even to pray about it. Yet, Jesus' answer: “You give them something to eat” (in our case: “You give them the work they need”), is hardly helpful or encouraging. Of course, I wanted to do that, but how? Sometimes you simply lack the resources. It is late. The place is desolate. You cannot make new work simply appear. You've tried. Trying makes you weary. Discouragement and thoughts of failure can fill your mind.

“You give them something to eat.” Mark tells us what went through the disciples' minds. “That's impossible.” “It would take more than eight months wages—200 denarii.” Jesus, however, was not done with the disciples, “How many loaves do you have? Go look!” They did not know what they had. They had to go find out. The answer was, perhaps, more deflating than the problem—five loaves and two fish, next to nothing when attempting to feed five thousand. What could be done now?

Now that the disciples had recognized the problem and knew their resources (their limited resources), Jesus acted. He first brought order to the situation—at His command, the people sat down in groups of hundred and fifties. He took what little the disciples had to offer—five loaves and two fish. Looking up to heaven, Jesus gave thanks and began distributing the food. He looked to God, gave thanks, and acted. All five thousand were fed. And, there was food left over.

To me, new incoming work is God's provision to do what He called me to do in my vocation. There have been times when the work on hand looked as meager as the five loaves and two small fish. In those times when work seemed to be lacking, I have tried to apply six action steps I learned from Jesus' feeding of the five thousand: 1) Recognize the problem, 2) Take stock of what you have, 3) Look to God for His provision, 4) Bring order to the situation, 5) Lift what you have to the Lord, and 6) Begin doing what needs to be done.

Lean times can distract me from staying focused on Jesus. Taking action on these steps may not bring work, but it always brings me to the Lord. Bringing every request to God in prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, moves us from self-centered anxiety to peace—peace in our hearts and peace in our minds, peace guarded in Christ Jesus.

Jeff Lindeman is a partner in the law firm Nixon Peabody, LLP where he practices patent law. In addition to his law degree, Jeff has a Ph.D. in chemistry. Jeff recently completed the Year One and Year Two Fellows Program at the C.S. Lewis Institute. He continues in the Fellows Program this year serving as a mentor to first year fellows. Jeff and his wife of 21 years, Mona, have a four year old son Matthew. They live in McLean, Virginia and attend The Falls Church.

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