

Rejoice in the Lord Always

Philippians 4:4

The Apostle Paul's basis for his encouragement to "Rejoice in the Lord always" is that "The Lord is near." *The Feeding of the 5000* provides excellent guidance as to how we can use our knowledge of the Lord's nearness to minister with confidence and bring joy and nourishment to those we serve.

Read John 6:5-13

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹ "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

Explain the **challenge** the disciples faced that day after Jesus asked, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"

We can look at this a couple of ways. Certainly, the challenge of feeding thousands of hungry bellies with limited resources was real. But you could argue that meeting this challenge wasn't the responsibly of the disciples—until Jesus made it their responsibility. In that sense, there is a

connection with the current COVID situation. Just as Jesus allowed the disciples to be in a situation where solutions weren't immediately clear, so also he has allowed us to be in a similar type of situation. Jesus, of course, "already had in mind what he was going to do" that day, just as we have the right to believe he does today as well. The challenge for us disciples, then, is trusting him when we can't see the bigger picture like Jesus can.

According to the disciples, what were **the available resources** on hand to address this problem?

Not enough, simply put. Not enough food. Not enough money. Not enough in their hands to reasonably believe this was going to end well.

As a group, identify the unique **challenges** this current school year has presented for your ministry staff, for those whom you serve in ministry, and for your own families and/or personal life.

Ministry staff: *answers will vary*

Those we serve in ministry: *answers will vary*

Our families and/or personal life: *answers will vary*

On your own, finish the following sentence in a way that is true for you. Share your answer with others, as you feel comfortable.

One thing that would make this year more manageable would be . . . answers will vary

The task of providing food for this large crowd seemed impossible to the disciples. They looked at their available resources, and they did not see a solution. Yet there was one available resource they apparently had not considered—the man standing in front of them. Jesus was there, yet they did not ask him for help.

By this point in Jesus' ministry, his disciples had seen enough to know there was something quite remarkable about Jesus. Using the words in the box, fill in the blanks to identify what the disciples had already seen Jesus do in his public ministry:

wine	seeing	evil spirit	calm	12	raise
leprosy	invalid	Peter's	38	demon-possessed	paralytic

By this time in Jesus' ministry, his disciples had already seen him:

- Heal leprosy (Matthew 8:3)
- Heal the centurion's servant without ever seeing him (Matthew 8:13)
- Heal Peter's mother-in-law of her fever (Matthew 8:15)
- Calm a violent sea (Matthew 8:26)
- Heal a paralytic (Matthew 9:6-7)
- Heal a woman who had been sick for 12 years (Matthew 9:22)
- Raise a girl from the dead (Matthew 9:25)
- Drive out an evil spirit (Mark 1:25)
- Heal a demon-possessed man (Mark 5:15)
- Change water into wine (John 2:9)
- Heal a man who had been an invalid for 38 years (John 5:9)

Can you add to this list? Can you think of an example from your own life or ministry when the Lord provided something that at one time didn't seem possible? Share your answer with the group, as you feel comfortable.

If you were there with Jesus as one of his disciples, and if you had remembered all these miracles Jesus had performed, what might you have asked him to do?

Answers will vary. In general, it might be easy for us to imagine that we would ask Jesus to use his power to fix the problem.

In Philippians 4, after reminding his readers that “the Lord is near,” Paul gives this guidance as to how we can put that knowledge into practice:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God (Philippians 4:6).

Considering Jesus’ gracious promise to be with you always, recalling his great power, and also remembering Paul’s guidance to “in every situation . . . present your requests to God,” brainstorm with the group to 1) Identify as many specific situations regarding this school year about which it would be good to pray, and 2) Write down at least one specific request you would want to present to God about that situation.

SITUATION

SPECIFIC REQUEST(S) FOR THAT SITUATION

Try to be as comprehensive as you can, touching on the unique impact this year has had on students, their families, faculty members, their families, etc.

Optional activity: Have someone use your collective answers to set up a prayer schedule for the year. The schedule would establish a day on which the faculty/staff (together or individually) would be encouraged to present each of these specific situations/requests to God in prayer.

Though Jesus graciously and miraculously provided food for this large crowd, many from the crowd, including some who had previously identified themselves as Jesus' disciples, ended up turning away from Jesus and no longer following him. What application does this have for our ministry when we consider the following:

- 1) Most left Jesus the very next day after they themselves had witnessed the miracle.
 - *Earthly blessings (such as the food they had received the previous day), will only satisfy for a short time. All earthly blessings have a shelf-life/expiration date.*
 - *During this time when many temporal blessings have been restricted or taken away from our students, we should help them see that all earthly blessings will eventually come to an end and use that as an opportunity to teach about the everlasting blessings offered through Jesus.*

- 2) They left him after Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."
Jesus used the temporal blessing of food to teach about our more important eternal needs and how they are all uniquely met in him. The sinful hearts of our students do not naturally value the eternal over the temporal (neither do ours). We should anticipate inconsistency and struggle in our students' lives of faith.

Read the concluding verses of John chapter 6, which records an important dialogue between Jesus and his disciples:

⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

⁶⁷ "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

⁷⁰ Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" ⁷¹ (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

Explain, in your own words, why Simon Peter didn't leave when many of the other disciples did.
God had graciously opened Peter's eyes to the bigger picture of Jesus' ministry. He saw lasting and eternal value in the words Jesus spoke to them, and also in the unique role Jesus had in the world's salvation. Though Peter no doubt didn't fully understand everything about Jesus, his ministry, or the cost of our salvation, he didn't allow that to serve as a stumbling block to following Jesus.

Think of a time in your own life when Jesus' 'words of eternal life' were especially meaningful to you. Explain the situation and share the words that were meaningful, as you feel comfortable.
Answers will vary. The Bible study leader might consider beforehand an example from their own life they are ready to share. A hypothetical example: 'When my father died, I received a card in the mail many weeks later from an acquaintance who was unable to attend the funeral. The card itself shared the words of Paul's 'Jars of Clay' section in 2 Corinthians 4. The concluding thought of that section, "Therefore we do not lose heart," has given me great encouragement

and strength ever since. The fact that the card arrived many weeks after the funeral was encouraging as it was an indicator that someone was still thinking of me, long after many had returned to their everyday lives.

In Philippians 4, after urging his readers to “rejoice in the Lord always” (verse 5) and “in every situation . . . present your requests to God” (verse 6) Paul writes this: ⁷*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

What reason(s) might the following groups/individuals in John 6 have to feel peace:

The disciples that stayed

Jesus was there, ready to teach them eternal truths that would equip them for life on earth and prepare them for eternal life in heaven. Jesus was on his way to the cross, where he would offer his perfect life as a sacrifice for their sins. In addition, Jesus ended up feeding them even though they didn't ask him to do so (this was, of course, the case for everyone there). He was gracious in how he met their needs.

The disciples that left

Jesus fed them, even though he would have known they were going to leave. He also took the time to teach them, even though he would have known they would reject him and walk away. But had they changed their mind and returned, Jesus would have still been there for them. He would have welcomed them. Had they not returned, he would continue to search for them like the one lost sheep (Luke 15). Jesus never stopped thinking about them, loving them, or searching for them.

Simon Peter

Peter's answer is beautiful, but Jesus also knew the many ups and downs Peter would experience in his life of faith. Yet Jesus was patient with Peter, celebrating his faith when it shone brightly, and lovingly calling Peter to repentance when it didn't. Jesus was consistent in loving Peter even though Peter wasn't consistent in his life of faith.

Judas

Jesus here identifies the wretched nature of Judas' eventual betrayal. Yet Jesus not only welcomed him into the Twelve and entrusted him with responsibility, he also never stopped seeking Judas' heart, warning him multiple times on Maundy Thursday about the evil path he chose, and also calling him “friend” during the moment of betrayal.

We teach students who resemble the characteristics of these groups/individuals in some or many ways. What are some specific attitudes and/or actions we can practice that might help keep the peace of God in front our students' eyes during this unusual year?

Answers will vary, and specific actions will look different in each unique setting. In general, any attitude that best reflects the heart of Jesus serves our students well—patience, joyful passion for God’s Word, consistent love, forgiveness, etc.

One very important action each teacher can take is maintaining a strong personal devotion life. Regularly be filled with God’s loving promises in Christ so that you can then fill others with them.

WLSTC thanks Pastor Jeremy Mattek for sharing God’s Word with us through the video message and this Bible study!

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