

The Power of One

John 6:5-14

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Hermann and Pauline practiced an old Jewish custom of taking in a needy religious scholar to share the Sabbath meal. So each Thursday, 21-year-old Max Talmud enjoyed a meal with this couple. In doing so, Max befriended their ten-year-old son Albert.

(<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1607298,00.html>)

Talmud brought Albert science books, which Albert consumed with the same hunger as he did the Sabbath meal. Soon he'd devoured the 21-volume work by Aaron Berstein, which stressed the interrelations between biology and physics. (Ibid)

Max also gave Albert a textbook on geometry and before long, Albert's abilities in math had exceeded that of his 21-year-old friend. (Ibid)

None of this would have happened if Albert's parents had not extended kindness to just one needy religious scholar.

Perhaps the world would never have heard of Albert Einstein? Would he have established the theory of General Relativity, or the mass-energy equivalence formula $E = mc^2$, or become the Nobel Prize winner in Physics in 1921?

We don't know, but we do know that one person changed his life, and it only takes one. Max Talmud was a catalyst in his educational development.

I like the word, "Catalyst."

In a chemical reaction, a catalyst plays an important part in the making of the finished material. The catalyst speeds up the chemical change, like yeast does when added to the mixture of dough. It's that little bit that's added that makes a big difference.

Once a little boy left home with a few fish and a few loaves of bread, a fitting lunch for a lad to enjoy down by the lake.

It does not always take a lot, just a little to make things change. If you are willing to offer what you have, you can make a difference.

Andrew, one of Jesus' disciples, found the boy in the midst of the large crowd that had come to hear Jesus preach.

Although Andrew questioned what good a few fish and a few loaves of bread were among so many people, he still brought the boy and the food to Jesus because they were charged with finding food to feed all those people, over 5000 of them.

After that day, Andrew understood the power of one! After Jesus took one boy's lunch and fed a multitude, Andrew knew the power Jesus had to turn one meal into a meal for a multitude.

We are like Andrew when we question what little we have and what good it can do. How many times have we held back our gifts because we thought, "It's not enough. It will not make any difference"? Instead, we should have the faith of a child and offer what we have and leave the results to God.

A couple of weeks ago my wife went to Headland, Alabama to attend the wedding of her second cousin, Beth.

Beth's father, Eric, died from cancer when she was seven. He left behind a wife and three young children.

When Beth was 11, she sent us a letter asking us to donate money to the American Cancer Society. Her mother was the chairperson that year for the Henry County Relay for Life for another year.

Beth wrote, "We love helping her with this event. It is a way that we can keep Daddy's memory alive and hopefully help other families as well. The American Cancer Society works very hard to find new treatments for cancer patients. They are also working every day on finding cures for the many different types of cancer.

Since Daddy died in 2003, there have been 3,014 fewer deaths each year from cancer. We would have loved for Daddy to have been part of this statistic. We do not understand why he had to leave us early but we leave that in God's hands. We know we will see Daddy again one day. Until then, we want to do everything we can to help in the fight against cancer."

Beth, at an early age, was learning the power of one. One child, with one voice, was learning that she could make a difference in someone else's life with a single letter.

Every day, each one of us has some opportunity to make a difference in this world. Too often, we believe a lie that we can't make a difference, that we have no power, that our voice does not count, that there is not anything we can do to help others or make this world a better place to live.

When people have lost so much hope that evil has begun to permeate every aspect of their souls, the idea of the power of one can become a tool of the enemy.

People will listen to the voice of evil: "Look how much destruction one person can do with a gun, a bomb, one plane, a rumor, a computer hacking, some gossip, some lies, or even a hateful text"?

When evil spreads around us, it's easy for us to feel defeated. It's easy for us to feel small.

I'm here this morning to remind you that the world is held together by people who have learned that there is a greater power in this world than evil and it is love. If it were not for the power of love this world would have already gone to hell.

You may be tempted to hold back on your contribution of love, thinking that it is too small or too insignificant to matter. Do not ever think that.

No expression of love, no matter how small, is insignificant.

Never underestimate what Christ can do with one word, one gesture, one smile, one act of kindness, one gift, or one action of unconditional love.

Never think what you have to give is inconsequential. Don't hide your light. Don't put it under a bowl. You are the salt of the earth.

Sometime this week, God will give you an opportunity to make a difference in someone's life. You might be tempted to pass up that opportunity. If the actions are appropriate, don't allow that to happen. Your actions, your words, your interest might make a major difference in that person's life, a life-changing difference.

I saw members of our run-club take an incredible amount of time a couple of weeks ago to research housing options for a homeless family after they lost their housing. The only option they found for the homeless was in Gainesville. They helped house this family locally until they were able to find them a homeless shelter.

I am amazed at the love given by the women who sew thousands of dresses for children they will never see, by the time you give to feed the hungry and the time you invest to teach our children about Jesus.

Being salt and light isn't always easy. Nor is it always fun. But it is rewarding when you know you have made a difference in the life of another person.

Sometimes you never know the difference you have made in someone else's life. We are called to be Christ to others but we don't always know the impact we have on someone else's life.

Take Shulmit Lurie, for example. She worked as a cook and cleaner for wealthier families in Jerusalem. Because she was very poor, she often visited an open-air produce market after all the hawkers had gone home. Aided by the light from the street lamps, she searched for discarded cucumbers that she could take home, wash, soak in vinegar and salt and turn in to flimsy pickles. Sometimes one of these pickles and an apple was all her son Ariel and his three siblings had to eat for an entire day.

(http://www.aish.com/jewishissues/israeldiary/The_Power_of_One.asp)

Despite not having enough for themselves, Shulmit taught her children that what one gives to others is more important than what one receives. On Shabbat, the only day during the week when Ariel and his brothers and sister could look forward to a warm meal, one of the Lurie

children was elected to take the first bowl of soup over to neighbors who were even hungrier than they were. (Ibid)

Ariel remembers “walking over the cobblestones of their courtyard in the Bucharian Quarter of Jerusalem trying not to spill the bowl of soup, just smelling it.” (Ibid)

His mother taught him that one person can make a difference. She taught him the value of unselfishness. Knowing what it was like to be hungry himself, he grew up not wanting others to feel that same pain so he gladly shared what he had. (Ibid)

The benevolent spirit became a part of this young boy’s personality. “When his mother was able to pack him a sandwich for lunch, children without sandwiches received half of what was almost all the food Ariel would have for the entire day. Later, when Ariel began making pocket money doing neighborhood odd-jobs in high school, most of the money went to his family, his friends, and needy neighbors. By the time Ariel had graduated high school and had begun earning a salary as a chef’s assistant in one of Jerusalem’s hotels, his reputation for generosity had poor families from all over Jerusalem calling him for help.” (Ibid)

Ariel Lurie began distributing food, clothing, basic household supplies, and more from over twenty branches and soup kitchens throughout Israel, which amounted to roughly 40 tons of food each week to the needy. (Ibid)

What about you? Do you ever pass up the opportunity to be the yeast added to the lives of other people? Do you ever say, “My little bit doesn’t count. No one will miss it. It won’t matter”?

Do we teach that to our children by giving them everything they ask for and by demanding nothing from them? Do we instill in them the importance of being generous people? If we do not model it for them, how should we expect them to be generous as adults?

Do you need the faith of a child? Do you have something you can give this world that you are holding back because you don’t think that your little bit matters? You must realize that there is power in just one word, one prayer, one gesture, and one gift.

Are you teaching your children, your grandchildren, and others that they have within them something to give and they should share it, despite how small and inconsequential it may seem? When Jesus challenged the disciples to feed the multitude of people, they complained that it would take eight months wages to buy enough food to feed them all.

Andrew recognized a boy in the crowd who had five small barley loaves and two small fish, “but how far will that go among so many?” Andrew asked.

My guess is that Andrew had good math skills. He was a fisherman. He may have been prone to exaggeration but he knew how to count and what this boy brought didn’t add up.

Here's something to remember about math in God's kingdom. Whatever you have to offer God doesn't add up too much by itself. Compared to the riches of God, the most gifted of us are paupers.

But there is great power in the one God we worship. That God can take the one thing we have to offer and multiply it.

We must understand that when God gets hold of what we offer, there's great power, wonder-working power, in just one word, one effort, one hug, one card, one visit, one act of service, one luncheon, one phone call, one minute of undivided attention, one smile, one invitation, one monetary gift, one day of your time, one hour spent in prayer, one day set aside for rest and worship.

If you want some examples of the power of one to do evil, just turn on the evening news. If you are tired of that, then I challenge you to believe that you can change the world through the power of the Holy Spirit and the gifts God gives you to offer each day.

About twenty of us gathered at Jefferson Elementary School a week ago to spread the mulch on the playground. Jim Smith arrived several days earlier with his front-end loader and spread the big piles, which made it possible for us to spread the rest with our shovels, rakes, and wheelbarrows.

As we were posing for a picture, a man drove up and approached us. I think the Gooch family knew him. However, the only reason the man stopped was to give us a word of praise for what we were doing. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a wad of \$100 bills and gave Justin two of them and told Justin to do whatever he wanted to do with the money for the group because he was impressed with our group's benevolent spirit.

That's the power of one – one group to bless a school, one man to bless a group, to encourage, to thank, and to inspire.

Sometime this week, God will give you an opportunity to make a difference in someone's life. You might be tempted to pass up the opportunity because the action might seem small and inconsequential. Don't allow that to happen. There's great power in the One living within us, the Holy Spirit of God, who can take the smallest of our expressions of love and turn them into great moments of joy.

During this hymn of response, I encourage you to think of one small thing you can do this week to share God's love with others. If you cannot think of anything now, then make an agreement with God that when His Spirit presents you with an opportunity this week to give what you have, then you will follow through, in the name of Jesus, and for the sake of His Kingdom.