

Discipleship: listening to, leaning on and living out Jesus

Introduction

Good morning everyone! I hope you are all surviving this summer heat!

We are now in **Week 2** of our “Jesus in John” series where we are covering topics concerning discipleship and service. One of the reasons is the KBF Ministry Fair in September is approaching and it is important to spend time in prayer asking the Lord how He would like you to serve at KBF in the coming year. A slide on the different ministries that will be shown at the end of the service during **Announcements.**

When I was a child, one of my favourite books was filled with optical illusions. An optical illusion is a single picture where two images exist in one. People tend to see both images in the end but they often see only one of the two different images in the beginning. Take for example this famous optical illusion published in 1915 by the cartoonist W.E. Hill. It is called “My Wife and My Mother-in-Law.” When you look at it, which image do you see first, the younger lady looking away or the older lady looking down?



Source: [HowStuffWorks](#)

The point is that people often see the same picture differently and in our text today, **John 6:1-15**, we find that Jesus and the disciples see the same situation very differently and so they react in different ways. Jesus sees a large approaching crowd through eyes of compassion, whilst the disciples see a problem that needs to be sent away. This is a reminder of how important it is for Christians to be Christ centered, to see what Jesus sees. As disciples of Christ we should imbue His spirit (Luke 14:27) and imitate His example (John 6:69). This is very hard to do if we see the world and our circumstances as problems to be sent away rather than as opportunities for compassion.

Though there are so many lessons to learn from **John 6:1-15**, the theme of discipleship is very strong and this is what I would like to share with you this morning. Specifically a life of discipleship focused on:

- Listening to Jesus (John 6:1-4)
- Leaning on Jesus; (John 6:5-9)
- Living out Jesus (John 6:10-15)
- Highlight: Verb sequence in John 6:11: Took, Gave Thanks and Distributed

But before we start let us pray: *“Through the written word and the spoken word, may we hear the Living Word, our Saviour Jesus Christ”*. Amen

Please open your Bibles to John 6:1 if you have not done so already.

Listening to Jesus (John 6:1-4)

Reading: **John 6:1-4** Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Ti-be-ri-as), 2 and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. 4 The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

With discipleship in mind, the phrase I am drawn to in these passages is *“sat down with his disciples.”* In Jewish culture, these words would immediately bring to mind a powerful image of a rabbi sitting down to teach his disciples. There are other mentions of this relationship in the Bible such as in **Luke 10:38** when Jesus enters Martha’s house we read in the next **verse 39** *“She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he said.”* Or in **Acts 22:3 (NRSV)**, we read that Paul was, *“brought up... at the feet of Ga-ma-li-el”* [a very famous Rabbi]. To *“sit at the feet”* of a rabbi meant that you were a disciple of that Rabbi. Here John

defines what a disciple is. Disciples are those who sit at Jesus' feet and listen to Him.

We experience such a setting in our own lives as God has given us plenty of ways to sit at Jesus' feet. On Sunday we gather at church reading scripture, singing His praises, listening to a message and sharing communion. Or imagine a Bible study, fellowship or prayer group with each of you "sitting at Jesus' feet" listening intently. As you can imagine this is quite an intimate setting or gathering. The sort of quality time spent where you really get to know someone, not just what is on the surface but what is on their hearts, their deeper thoughts and desires.

So we too, as disciples of Christ, must prioritize the time to sit at His feet. By learning more about Jesus, by really coming to know His love and goodness, we begin to embrace how Jesus sees this world which inspires us to trust or lean on Him more.

Leaning on Jesus (John 6:5-9)

Read: [John 6:5-8](#) 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?"

In Mark's version of the story, found in [Mark 6:30-44](#), this conversation takes place between Jesus and the disciples and the contrast is between Jesus who had compassion on the crowd and the disciples who said, "Send the people away..." ([Mark 6:36](#)). John gives us a more detailed account of two specific interactions between Jesus, Philip and Andrew.

Ever the teacher, Jesus poses Philip a question when He asks "*Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?*" But Philip cannot see the crowds as Jesus does, he can only see the world through his own limitations which constrains his reply, "*It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!*" Philip is leaning on his own understanding and his own resources not Jesus's. We also need to reflect: "Do we see the world and our circumstances as opportunities for compassion or problems to be sent away?"

Andrew is a little further along the discipleship path. He seems to have learned to 'lean on Jesus.' To offer what little he has to Jesus, even though he still has doubts in his heart. After all, Andrew did not do much here except to point out that a boy had some food, five small barley loaves and two small fish, and then wonder how inadequate it was. But as we will read that small act, offering Jesus something and leaning on Him or trusting Him to bless many through it, is a crucial part of discipleship.

This can be applied to us all. Where in our lives do we sense the Lord's guidance but feel the task is either impossible or what we have to offer is inadequate? Maybe it is volunteering to help with a ministry. We may feel that we don't have the right gifting or have enough time or energy to make much difference. Well learning from these passages, let's give what we have to the Lord no matter how small. Instead of helping every week, if that is too much, maybe volunteer once a month or even once every few months and still be amazed over time what Jesus does with what you have offered Him.

And once we start "leaning on Jesus," and seeing what He can do, we become more confident about "living out Jesus."

Living out Jesus (John 6:10-15)

I am going to read out the next two verses, **10 and 11**, and please count how many times the word "sit" or its various forms is mentioned.

Reading: John 6:10-11 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.

So, you may notice in these verses that we have returned to the sitting theme. Remember that sitting at someone's feet was a sign that they had submitted to the authority of a teacher or Rabbi. Notice here John is very specific about who receives food from Jesus as he writes, "*distributed to those who were seated.*" Now we normally assume that most people were seated, but this statement implies that if a person was not seated they may not be fed by Jesus. Any teacher knows this to be true. If a class is full of unruly students running around and being disruptive it is almost impossible for them to learn. Sitting is one of the first signs that someone is attentive and receptive to learning.

Another factor to note is that Jesus is discipling on two levels in these passages. He is teaching the newer potential disciples, represented by the crowd, to respond to His commands by sitting down and listening to Him. A lesson in obedience. But at the same time Jesus is training His 12 disciples (the disciples who have spent a longer time with Him). At this moment, Jesus does not expect the 12 disciples to sit. Instead He wants them to serve, to live out what it means to be His disciples. Jesus does not tell the crowd to sit down directly, He tells the 12 disciples to, “*have the people sit down.*” Jesus wants His 12 disciples to live out what He is teaching them and in doing so disciple others. The people are essentially obeying the 12 disciples’ instruction to be seated which points to the future when they (excluding Judas) will be making disciples in Jesus’s name (The Great Commission **Matthew 28:18 to 20**).

Take, gave thanks, distributed

I would like to revisit **verse 11** which contains the miracle of food multiplication and it involves a very distinctive verb sequence, “took - gave thanks - distributed” as in:

- **John 6:11** “*Jesus then TOOK the loaves, GAVE THANKS, and DISTRIBUTED.*”

It is remarkably similar to, at the last supper when Jesus introduced the first communion service

- **Luke 22:19-20** “*And he TOOK bread, GAVE thanks and BROKE it, and GAVE it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’*”

Or in the story of the “Road to Emmaus,” after Jesus rose from the dead

- **Luke 24:30-31** “*When he was at the table with them, he TOOK bread, GAVE THANKS, BROKE it and began to GIVE it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him,*”

What I find remarkable about the miracle of food multiplication, besides the miracle itself, is how simple it sounds and the more I reflect on this it seems deliberately so. It is a verb sequence that any of us can enact in our own lives and given enough time, many people could be blessed through it.

So let’s examine the key words in more detail. First Jesus TOOK the bread, and here I interpret bread as a physical possession or gift/skill and to shorten this I will just refer to gift from here.

1. TOOK: could mean taking your gift, which often involves recognising what gifts God has given you, take responsibility for it and nurturing/growing it.
2. GAVE THANKS: instructs us to consecrate, to set it apart for God; and
3. DISTRIBUTING means breaking it up and giving it to others.

In this way, we too, under Christ's guidance and power, can "feed" multitudes. Everyone in this auditorium has so many gifts to share but let's choose one example. Take teaching, if your gift of teaching is distributed to 10, 20, 30 students each year this implies over many years your gift will have blessed hundreds of students. If you imagine that just 5% of your students become teachers themselves then, over each generation, the gift of teaching you shared multiples into thousands and tens of thousands. This applies to most ministries whether visiting the sick in hospital, saying a kind word, singing, serving a drink or translating.

Reading John 6:12-13 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.

Here again the disciples are living out their discipleship. They are no longer sitting and listening but serving and actively participating, even discipling, in this amazing scene. Jesus asks the disciples to gather the remaining leftovers so nothing is wasted. Theologian Michael Card refers to this event as, "*the real miracle behind the miracle.*" Jesus, being very much the Rabbi, orders the leftovers to be collected. In [parts] of Judaism the leftovers, or *peah*, were gathered after the meal and given to the slaves¹ so what Jesus is doing here is actually a familiar custom.

In John, the Greek word used for the baskets is *ko-phi-nous*², which refers to a small wicker lunch-pail-size basket. Can you imagine the probability, that after feeding 5,000 men³ plus women and children, such a precise amount of leftovers remain that they fill 12 small baskets? This is referred to as the miracle of perfect provision for the Twelve disciples who, by being provided leftovers, could be perceived as slaves. This is different from the feeding of the four thousand⁴ in **Matthew 15:29-39** where the Greek word used to describe the seven baskets was *spur-is*⁵ which refers to large plaited baskets (almost human-sized) used for carrying provisions which symbolises abundance⁶.

Another point to notice is what happened to the fish? Why is there only mention of the barley loaves left over? It could mean that there is a strong significance in the

¹ John: The Gospel of Wisdom pg 86, footnote refers to Babylonian Talmud Berakot 50b, 52b. Also quotes Mt 15:27 and Mk 7:28 in a book on Luke about women referring to crumbs on table and dogs.

² Biblehub: [Kophinos](#)

³ John 6:

⁴ Matthew 15:38

⁵ Biblehub [spuris](#)

⁶ Luke by Michael Card, pg 122. Read it at this [link](#).

word “barley”. In Mark’s version of “Feeding the Five Thousand” he only refers to loaves, not “barley” loaves. So what is the point that John is trying to make here? Well in John’s time, barley was not normally eaten by humans, it was considered food for animals⁷. Infact, the Romans used to give rations of barley instead of wheat to soldiers who were undergoing a very severe form of punishment called “Decimation⁸.” So John may be emphasising here the lowly status of those who follow Christ, servants not kings, as we will see in the next verses how Jesus regards the human status “king.”

Reading: John 6:14-15 After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” 15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

From a discipleship perspective there are some very important lessons to learn from these last two verses. Remember that Jesus’ disciples sit at his feet and obey him. These verses show what happen when we don’t do that. When we don’t really invest time and effort into learning who Jesus really is and what He sees and wants to do. Instead we try and force Jesus to become something we want Him to be. Here the people intended to force Jesus into becoming an earthly King. John leaves us in no doubt about what happens when we don’t obey Jesus and rebel, Jesus withdraws. But let us remember that Jesus is only withdrawing here, He is not abandoning them, He re-engages with them from **John 6:25**.

Conclusion

So reflecting on what we have learned about discipleship from John 6:1-15:

- **Listening to Jesus:** In **verse 3** we read that Jesus “*sat down with his disciples*” which points to the importance of us also sitting down and “listening to Jesus” through prayer, church, Bible studies and Christian fellowship
- **Leaning on Jesus:** In **verse 8 and 9** Andrew [brings] a boy with 5 small loaves and two small fish. This also encourages us to also bring our possessions/gifts, no matter how small, and to “lean on Jesus” to bless many
- **Living out Jesus:** In **verses 10 and 11**, we saw the disciples were serving and actively discipling the people by sitting them down and gathering the leftovers. Which reminds us about the importance of “living out Jesus.”

⁷ Michael Card, John: The Gospel of Wisdom, pg 86, search

⁸ See Wikipedia: [Decimation](#)

- In **verse 11**, we learned that Jesus multiplies the food through the actions, “TOOK, GAVE THANKS and DISTRIBUTED.” Actions that we can imitate to bless others with the gifts Jesus has given us
- Added a 5th point that circles back to beginning “Seeing like Jesus”: Gives us the opportunity to reflect whether, “*we see the world and your circumstances as opportunities for compassion or problems to be sent away?*”

I hope these verses have encouraged you in your walk as a disciple of Christ and if you are not yet Christian to commit to becoming a follower of Christ. May you all grow ever more Christ-like through listening to Jesus, leaning on Jesus and living out Jesus.

Also, please also remember to pray over the next few weeks about how the Lord would like you to serve Him at KBF. The ministry fair will be in September and the KBF ministry list will be displayed during announcements.