



Children's Ministry Day Sermon 2021

The Available Boy (John 6:1-14)

Welcome. Let's open our Bibles together to the Gospel of John, chapter 6. In a moment, we'll read verses 1-14. Whether you have been in church a long time or today is your first day, you might be familiar with today's passage, as it is one of the most well-known miracles that Jesus performed while on earth. This miracle is often simply referred to as "the feeding of the 5,000" or "the feeding of the multitude."

Today, as we are lifting up and celebrating our children's ministry, we will focus on one of the lesser known characters in the story. John 6 tells of an unnamed boy who was in the crowd.

As a point of introduction, this is the only one of the miracles Jesus performed that is recorded in all four Gospel accounts: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. (See Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-19, and John 6:1-14 for reference.) But also interestingly, the boy we will be talking about today is only mentioned in John's Gospel. Though this boy isn't mentioned in the other 3 Gospel accounts, his presence is still important.

Even though there are four accounts of this miracle, we do not have exhaustive details of this event. Details are sparse. It is also important for us to remember that this boy is not the main character of this story. In fact, as mentioned earlier, he isn't named and he doesn't speak. Allowing important people to remain unnamed is common in John's Gospel. John tells of the woman of Samaria (John 4:7), the son of "a certain royal official" (John 4:46), and "a man blind from birth" (John 9:1). Jesus is the central focus of John's Gospel and of this story. It is Jesus who provides food for the crowds and glorifies God with this miracle. When people saw this miracle that Jesus performed, they didn't praise boy. They praised God by acknowledging Jesus as "the Prophet" (John 6:14). That said, let's see what truths we can glean from this unnamed boy.

Let's read John 6:1-14.

This unnamed boy is mentioned in verses 8-9. Notice again what John writes.

"One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish — but what are they for so many?'" (John 6:8-9 CSB)

Let's take note of 3 important traits about this boy.

1. He was available and willing.

These first two traits are virtually inseparable. Availability, in this case, is about physical proximity, while being willing adds a mental and emotional proximity. Granted, there is a lot we can't know definitively about this boy, but what we do know is that he was there, present in the crowd. The boy doesn't seem to have been hiding out or lost in the sea of people. Some Bible scholars estimate that there could have been as many as 10,000 women and children in this crowd, in addition to the 5,000 men. Matthew's account of this miracle records specifically that the 5,000 numbered in the crowd was a count of the men and not accounting for the women and children (Matthew 14:21). We don't really know how or why the boy caught Andrew's attention in the midst of possibly several thousand other children, other than perhaps that he was carrying food, but we do know that Andrew noticed him. Andrew said, "There's a boy here ..." (John 6:9). Given that children are naturally curious and the Bible paints a picture of Jesus welcoming children, it is certainly possible that this boy was staying close to where Jesus was so that he could see and hear for himself what Jesus was doing and saying.

On this day when we are celebrating our children's ministry and speaking of Jesus' welcoming attitude of children, it should not be lost on us that Jesus cares deeply for children. In fact, it is likely that all of us, at some point in our lives, have sung, "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world." We often sing this to little ones early on in life because we want them to know, even before they can speak for themselves, that Jesus loves them. This isn't just a song we sing though. Consider Mark 10:13-16:

"People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me. Don't stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' After taking them in his arms, he laid his hands on them and blessed them." (Mark 10:13-16, CSB)

Three quick observations from this passage:

1. Jesus invites and welcomes children to come close (verse 14).
2. Jesus explains that “the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” There is a quality about children that God highly values regarding His kingdom.
3. Jesus loves the children. Coming to verse 16, we see an affectionate picture of Jesus. Jesus took the little children into his arms. Friends, Jesus does love the little children. And that, at least in part, is due to their openness and honest trust in Him.

It's not a far stretch to think that, even among a crowd of 5,000+ people, Jesus would have invited and welcomed children to be close to Him.

For whatever reason the unnamed boy was in the crowd that day, being there put him in close proximity to Jesus. Additionally, he willingly shared what he brought with him to eat. This generosity would be an overflow of his desire to be there with Jesus. As in, he had a good attitude about the day. If you've been around children, and adults for that matter, who are being forced to do something or be somewhere, they often do not have a good attitude. And since bad attitudes are most often a selfish mindset, sharing would likely not happen willingly. In addition, Jesus already knew what He was going to do. (See John 6:6.) It is reasonable to believe that Jesus planned to have this boy as part of His miracle because he was both available and willing.

Perhaps he was close enough to Jesus for Andrew to point him out, or maybe Andrew noticed him and asked him to come closer. Whatever the case, when Andrew mentioned this boy's food to Jesus, the biblical text doesn't indicate in any way that the boy is bothered or hesitant to come and share his food with Jesus. It seems like this boy's heart was tuned into Jesus' teaching. The boy was there, and he was willing, and he seems to have had a good attitude about sharing what he had with Jesus.

This attitude of freely giving whatever he had also showed the boy's availability and unwithheld generosity. While Andrew couldn't see what 5 loaves and 2 fish could do in the hands of Jesus, the boy was willing to give all he had to Jesus, trusting Jesus' use of this food for His good purposes.

2. He was useful.

If the boy had just been present but not willing, he would not have been useful to Jesus during this miracle. But because the boy was present in the crowd and because he was willing, he had made himself useful to Jesus. Jesus welcomed the boy's generosity and used it to perform an incredible miracle for this large group of people.

Several instances in the New Testament show us that seeking Jesus alone is not enough. We must also submit to Him, making ourselves available to the

things He wants to accomplish through us. For example, the young ruler in Luke 18 sought out Jesus, but at the end of their conversation when Jesus told him to sell all he had and give it away to the poor, the man “became extremely sad, because he was very rich” (Luke 18:18-23, CSB). This man seemed to lack the willingness to submit to Jesus and be useful for Jesus’ purposes.

Just like the boy in John 6, God does not need us to accomplish His will, but He often chooses to do so. In John 6, Jesus could have turned any nearby stones into bread, but instead He chose to use this available boy who would willingly give all his food to Jesus. Remember John 6:6:

“He (Jesus) asked this to test him (Philip), for he himself knew what he was going to do.”

Jesus had already decided that He was going to do this miracle with this boy’s 5 loaves and 2 fish to feed this multitude. Jesus had unlimited options for how to feed these people, but he chose this available boy. Likewise, God welcomes and often chooses available and willing Christians to be the useful vessels of bringing others to Himself.

Matthew 5:16, for example, says: “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” The light we shine is not just for the sake of having light. No, as our light shines through good works, it must point to Jesus so that God will receive glory. In this way, we are useful to God’s kingdom work.

Through just these short verses in John about this unnamed boy, we can also see the potential of our own children for being available, willing, and useful to Jesus. The example of this unnamed boy gives us insight into the children of our church and community and invites us to pause and ask some key questions of our own church and ministry.

1. Our children want to be with Jesus.

Just like the boy in John 6 and what we saw from Mark 10, Jesus desires to draw our kids into His family. Jesus’ words about the kingdom of God belonging to “such as these” applies to the children of this generation as well. Let’s consider a few questions.

- a. Do we allow our kids to be with Jesus when they are participating in the ministries of our church? Fun and excitement are good, but the focus should be on creating opportunities for our children to be with Jesus.
- b. Do we exalt Jesus with them and for them while they are here?
- c. How does this awareness influence our ministry calendar and programming? Our curriculum? Our budget?
- d. Are there areas in our ministries that don’t exalt Jesus and don’t lead our children to exalt and love Him? How can we adjust our ministries to prioritize adoration of Jesus?

2. Our children are available and willing ... now.

The kids of this church are gifted and able to serve Jesus today.

- a. Are we giving them opportunities to be available now?
- b. Are we modeling generosity and giving them opportunities to be generous now?

3. Our children can be useful today.

- a. Are we helping kids discover their God-given gifts, talents, and abilities?
- b. Are we giving them opportunities to serve? If not, what can we adjust in our ministries to give children outlets for service?
 - i. Many have said, “Our kids are the church of tomorrow.” While there is some truth to this statement, because they will grow and mature and be in leadership positions later on, we cannot relegate them to some future “tomorrow” when they are here, available, and willing to be useful today.

Author Paul Tripp says it this way: “No one knew that after this (miracle), every man, woman, and child who trusted in Jesus and read the Bible would know this boy, know exactly what was in his basket that day, and know how Jesus used him to make the point of points about his identity. Here’s what I’m (Paul Tripp) trying to say: **we will never know which little person God will use, and how.** That means that we’re never just lost in the crowd. We’re never without anything to offer. We never know who the Lord will claim and use in ways that we can’t predict, or haven’t intended.”

With these truths in mind—children are available, willing, and useful today—we must understand and embrace the God-ordained responsibility to strategically disciple children, both as a church and as individual families. In John 6:35, Jesus recalled this miracle the following day by saying “I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever be hungry . . .” Don’t we want our children to “come” to Jesus as the “bread of life” and never be hungry?

Just like this account of this unnamed boy in John 6, our children, in and of themselves, are not the focal point, but rather their ability to glorify God and testify to His goodness, even in their young ages. As we disciple them, we are training them and equipping them to rely solely on Jesus as the Bread of Life. The same way that Jesus desires to draw adults to Himself and make them useful for His Kingdom, He desires the same for our children, for them to come close, be available, and to live God-honoring, Christ-centered, useful lives.