

**Menlo Park Presbyterian Church**  
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Series: Prayer: Does it Matter?  
John 6:1-15

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## **“The World's Most Dangerous Prayer”**

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How are you guys doing this morning? Amen, amen. I've said it before, and I'll say it again. Any here that come hear me preach we have Brother Charles come up, and preach you guys the message for today. Amen? That was awesome. That's awesome.

Sometime last year my boss, Nancy Ortberg, she took me on a trip with her to a church conference in Texas, and I had never before been to a church conference in Texas. But I had heard things about Texas, as I'm sure you guys have. Everything is...what? ...in Texas? That's right. Everything is bigger in Texas, and so I was excited. I wanted to see with my own eyes these mythically sized cars, and buildings, and people. The land of the giants. I felt like I was going to Jurassic Park, and so I brought my camera. I was ready to go.

So Nancy...Nancy fits right in because in her heels, she is like 5'10"...5'11"...6 feet tall. And then there is me, right? So we go off. We land, and I go off the plane, and I'm looking to see if it's true. I'm here to tell you, it's all true. It's true! Oh, my goodness! They have mega churches like Starbucks in Texas. There is literally one on every corner, and the buildings were humungous. If you don't believe me you can walk out these doors right now, and look for yourselves because you can see some of them from here.

And the people! It's insane. The people...I was like, "Wow! How are you doing, sir? Name is Kevin Kim." And they're like, "How ya doing little fella?" "Honey, come over here. Bring your camera. I found me a Pokemon!" It's crazy!

On the ground level, everything looks so big, so intimidating, so powerful, so influential, so deserving of our attention. Then we got on the plane, and we lifted up. As we got higher and higher, everything started to shrink down. You start to see the world in a different light, don't you? It's this moment of reflection and sobriety.

It's this moment of awareness because it helps to see the world from this different perspective. Because all of our hopes, and our dreams, and our ambitions, and our goals, and our influence, and our perceived power, and our problems, and our worries...they looked so big on ground level, but if we pause, and we take a step back, and we let our souls just elevate up, everything seems so different.

Anybody know what this is? Anybody know? It's a famous photograph called, *The Pale Blue Dot*. It was taken in 1990 by *Voyager 1*. Listen to what Carl Sagan has to say about this picture of the earth from 3.7 billion miles away. He said, "Look at that. That's you. That's me. That's us. That's here. That's home. That's now. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you've ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives."

Every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, every hopeful child, every writer, and inventor, and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every superstar, every supreme leader, every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there...on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam." And there is just this shrinking feeling that comes over us when we start to realize we're not as strong and as big as we think we are.

God says through the prophet Isaiah...you think *that* gives you some perspective..."I hold the universe in the span of My hand. It fits right there." I don't know if we've fully tuned into the fact that it is this God we are worshiping. It is this God we're singing to. It's this God we are praying to. Because I think if we understood this, it would dramatically and profoundly shape the way we pray, and the way we go about and think about prayer.

There would be a lot less of this anxiety-driven prayer, and a lot more of, "Wow. God, You are Creator. You are Sustainer. You are awesome, and powerful, and You are good. And You are in control. And I cannot believe that because of the work of Jesus Christ on my behalf on the Cross that I can draw near to You. And so Lord, this is what I'm asking: use me. Use me for Your glory."

Last night my wife and I, we were on Facebook reading through some of our Facebook posts of a friend of ours. A friend of mine actually...a friend I went to college with...and I knew her husband as well, but her husband had died in a swimming accident. He leaves behind his wife who is my friend...they are my age...and a little one-year-old girl. I just thought to myself, *This life is brief, and it's fragile, and then it's gone. We have to make sure our lives count for something.*

We're closing out our series on the most dangerous prayer in the world: "God use me for Your glory." So what I want to do is, I want to walk through this text from John 6 to help us pray this prayer for our lives because if you want to pray this prayer, if you want to pray the use-me prayer, you have to know at least three things. You have to know the God behind the use-me prayer, the type of people He uses, and then how He works through them. The God behind the use-me prayer, the type of people He uses, and then how He works through them.

So if you have your Bibles, turn to John 6:1-15. If you don't have your Bibles, it's all good. I'm going to read it here. You guys can follow along. But don't read it out loud, all right? I'm just going to read it for you. I had to say that for the eight o'clock because they were just reading, so excited. All right.

*"Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed Him because they saw the signs He had performed by healing the sick. Then Jesus went on the mountainside and sat down with His disciples.*

*The Jewish Passover Festival was near. 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?' He asked this only to test him, for He already had in mind what He was going to do."*

Don't you love when Jesus does that?

*"Philip answered Him, 'It would take almost a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!' Another one of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 'Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?' 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. 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.*

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

*After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make Him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by Himself."*

This is God's Word.

The first thing we need to see if we want to pray the use-me prayer is we need to see the God behind the use-me prayer. It's one of the most well-known stories in the Bible. I don't know if you knew this, but this is the only miracle outside of the resurrection that is included in all four gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all had this miracle in them and that is a signal to us that there is something important about this miracle. There is something significant about this miracle, and I think part of that (not all of it) but part of the significance of the miracle is the scale.

This miracle is known as the feeding of the 5000, but it is misnamed. Verse 10 says, "*Jesus had the people* [it's the Greek word *anthropous*] *sit down.*" And then what? "*..five thousand* [there is a different Greek word, *andres*] *men sat down.*" So 5000 was just a census of the men. So if you were to count the women and the children, the crowd easily could have been 15 to 25,000. That's a lot of people.

So this is a well-tested miracle. Scholars will tell you the gospels were circulating around Palestine and the Mediterranean within 40 years of this event. It was almost like a dare on the gospel writers' behalf. It was almost a dare saying, "You know, you want to validate this? You want to see if what we're saying about Jesus is true? Go ask the 20,000 people who ate in the area of Bethsaida because they're all witnesses."

The truth is the Christian faith would have never gotten any credibility, never have gotten off the ground had this not happened. It happened. I think that's one of the reasons why all four gospel writers include it in their account. It's a source of external evidence for the validity of the gospel.

But there is a bigger reason why they included it in their accounts, and I think that bigger reason is this miracle uniquely shows us who Jesus is. This miracle uniquely shows us who Jesus is, and if you want to pray the use-me prayer, you have to first understand who Jesus is. Because if you think this miracle is about food or the fact that Jesus can throw down an awesome buffet, you have it all wrong. This text is not primarily about what Jesus can do. This text is not primarily about the fact that Jesus can do a lot with a little. This text is primarily about who Jesus is.

In Exodus 16, the children of Israel are in the wilderness. They're in the desert, and they're hungry, and they start complaining to Moses: "Moses, where in the world are we going to get any food in this place? I'm looking around, Moses, and I don't see a Trader Joe's around here. We're all going to starve, Moses.

What are you going to do?"

What does the text say? It says, "God." It says God fed the children of Israel in the wilderness with bread from heaven...this stuff called *manna*...which is, when you translate it, "*What?*" I'm serious. That's what it means. *Manna* means, "*What?*" The people of Israel...really creative, right? So it was a sign of God's power that He could sustain life in this desert place, in this dead place. So much so that the prophets afterwards continually said, "Now when the Messiah comes He will feed His people with bread from heaven."

Second Baruch...it's not in your Bible so don't go looking for it. It's an ancient writing. It's an ancient Jewish writing. It's an inter-testament writing. Second Baruch says this, "When the Messiah comes, the treasury of manna shall once again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years." So there is this anticipation that's building up.

Here comes Jesus, and in the parallel passage in Mark 6 it says He led them to where? A desert place. So here is Jesus and a bunch of people in a desert place, and there is this crowd, and they're hungry, and the disciples start to complain to Jesus, "Where in the world are we going to get food in this place?" So what does Jesus do? He feeds them with bread from on high.

What is Jesus saying? What is He saying? He is saying, "Do you see who I am? Do you see who I am? I'm the One who came from heaven. I'm the One who sustains life in the desert. I'm the Bread of God who comes into the world and gives life to the world. I am the Lord and there is no other." Jesus is Lord. That's what the text is saying, and that's important for us to remember because the crowds missed it. They missed it.

Verse 2 says, "*They followed Him when they saw the miraculous signs He performed on the sick.*" And so they walked the eight-mile edge of the Sea of Galilee because they *loved* Jesus as a healer. Mark 6 says Jesus started teaching them. The crowd stuck around because they *loved* Jesus as a teacher. After Jesus fed them in the wilderness, they followed Him back around the other side of the Sea of Galilee because they *loved* Jesus as a provider and a miracle worker.

But verse 66...once they encountered Him as Lord, once Jesus started saying, "I'm the Bread that comes from heaven. I am the Bread of Life." Once they encountered the lordship of Jesus, it says they were offended. The text says, "*From this time on many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him.*"

The crowds tell us this sobering truth: you can love Jesus, and you can follow Jesus, and you can get excited about Jesus for all the wrong reasons, and Jesus will have none of that. Here's the question for us...*Are we following Jesus simply for who He is, simply because He is Lord and He is worthy of our lives, or are we following Jesus because of what He can do for us?* Seeing Jesus as Lord is the first thing we need to know if we are ever going to pray that use-me prayer.

The second thing we need to know if we are going to pray that use-me prayer is this: the people God uses. Who are the people God uses? What is amazing about this is how Jesus goes about performing this miracle. We just said...just minutes ago...hey, here is Jesus. He is the Lord of all creation, holds the universe like this. Paul says of Jesus in Colossians 1, "*Through Him all things were made.*" From the smallest subatomic particle to the massive galaxies in outer space, Jesus...this Jesus...He made it. That is an awesome thought! That is incredible power!

So the people are hungry. The Bible says, "No problem." Jesus goes Harry Potter on them and, "Boom!" Food for everyone, right? That's what the Bible says, right? No, that's not what He does. He goes to His disciples, He says "What do you think? *Where shall we buy bread for the people to eat?*" And the disciples, they freak out. They are running around trying to solve this problem. Verse 6 tells us Jesus already knew what He was going to do. It's this impossible problem. Seems like God is not involved, not doing anything, but all along there was this plan.

Phillip, he throws up his hands and he's like, "Jesus, you are crazy! You are crazy, Jesus. You are crazy. Eight months' wages wouldn't be enough for everyone to have a bite to eat." And then Andrew...God love Andrew. Andrew comes up, brings a little boy and his lunch, and Andrew says, "Well, here's what I have. Um...one, two, three, four, five, and two fish. That's what I have."

I wonder what the disciples were thinking when Andrew said that? *Wow, Andrew. That's great! Way to go! Twenty thousand people, they're hungry, they're going to riot...but hey, we got this! That's one for our side, Andrew.* Everybody is like laughing and they're joking about what the poor little boy had to offer. I don't think Jesus was laughing, but I do think Jesus had a smile on His face. I think He had that, "Man, you all just don't know but I'll show you." I think He had that kind of smile.

He receives the poor boy's offering. We know he is poor from a little detail that we find in John...barley. Barley was the bread of the poor. So Jesus receives this poor boy's offering and then with it He feeds 20,000 people with leftovers. Jesus takes the inadequate and through His power, He makes it adequate.

Jesus takes the insufficient and through His power, He makes it sufficient. Who does God use? It's this little kid. It's a child from a poor family. From every human perspective, he is insignificant. But Jesus takes the insignificant and through His power, He makes them significant.

Some of you guys right now, you guys are going through something in your life and you feel completely powerless. There is stuff going on in your life right now and you're saying, "I don't have the wisdom. This is beyond the scope of my fortitude, and my strength, and my hope." God says, "I know. I see."

Some of you right now, you feel insignificant. "Man, what do I do? I don't do much. I feel insufficient." God sees and He knows. Some of you right now, you want to pray, "God use me. Use me for Your glory. I want to pray this but I feel so inadequate. God, I don't have much to give to you."

God says...I want you to hear this...God says, "I delight in that. I delight in that! I delight in using the powerless, and the weak, and the forgotten, and the outsider, and the little, and the overlooked, and the insignificant, and the insufficient. I delight in that."

Paul says in 1 Corinthians, *"People, think of what you were when God first called you. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many of you were influential; not many of you were from noble birth. But God [in His pleasure] chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise; He chose the weak things of this world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things [the rejected things] the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him."*

God just loves to put treasures in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from Him and not us. He delights in using the weak. So if that is how you feel, that's good news because that is how He

rolls.

The first thing we have to know if we want to be used by God is who God is. He is Lord. The second thing that we have to know if we want to be used by God is who He uses. God loves using the weak and the powerless, and so embrace it. We're in this culture that tries to cover it up. But Paul says, "I delight...I boast in my weaknesses, and insults, in persecutions, in hardships, and difficulties. I delight in that. I boast in that. For when I am weak, I am strong because it is in those moments that God's grace most powerfully flows through me."

The last thing we have to know if we want to be used by God is how He works through people. How He works through people. If you want to be used by God in a powerful way, you have to put everything into His hands. You have to put everything into His hands.

Verse 11 is the part of the passage we do not like. We love the part of *God uses anybody so He can use me. Because I'll embroider that and put that on my bathroom wall.* It feels good. It's Hallmarky, warm and fuzzy. We love the part about, you know, *God feeds the hungry people with fish and chips.* Because mm...that's yummy. That's great, right? But in order to do all of that Jesus had to do verse 11. He took it. He took it. He took the bread.

I mean, think about this. There are 20,000 people in this crowd, and here's this poor kid from a poor family, but at least he had his lunch, right? At least he had lunch. And Jesus takes his lunch. That's jacked-up of Jesus, right? Here's what we learn: the boy lost control of his lunch. He lost it. It's the only thing he had and now it's gone. But because he lost it, because he gave it up, he ended up eating far more of it than he would have had he kept it. Right? Isn't that crazy?

He had this little lunch but because he lost it, because he surrendered it, because he gave it up, he ended up eating far more of his lunch than he ever would have had he kept it. Not only was he filled, but everyone around him was filled, and that is the paradox of God. You cannot out-give God. You cannot out-bless God.

That's what Jesus means when He says, "Those who lose their lives for My sake will find it." Because if you lose your life for Christ...if you give it up and you surrender it...if you lose your life for Christ, you will get your life back but bigger, and greater, and deeper than it would have been if you had kept it. Some of us are just so afraid to completely and fully surrender to God because we're afraid we might lose control. We're afraid we might lose our stuff and so we're holding on to our lunches with white knuckles.

I thought about the crowds and I thought about the boy. I thought about the crowds and here is what I thought. I thought, *Here are 20,000 people and all you could come up with is five barley loaves and two pieces of fish? Come on, man. You are telling me 20,000 people and no one packed a Slim Jim? Someone is holding out, right? Someone is holding out.*

Here's the thing about the crowds: the crowds liked Jesus enough to watch a show and listen to His teaching, but they didn't trust Him with their stuff. Oh, am I preaching yet? The crowds loved professing Jesus. They loved ghost-buster Jesus. "Love Your work with those evil spirits, Jesus." They loved buffet Jesus. They just weren't too crazy about the lordship of Jesus. Just weren't too crazy about the lordship of Jesus.

So when the disciples go around and they're asking, "What do you have? What do you have? What do you

have?" ...here was a chance of a lifetime. Here was a chance of a lifetime to be a part of something bigger and greater than themselves. Here was a chance to embark on this adventure with God. Here was a chance to let the power of God surge through their lives as they prayed, "God use it for Your glory." And they let it pass them by. They let this golden moment, this opportunity to let their lives intersect with the infinite, and the eternal, and the glorious...they let it pass by. But at least they kept their lunch.

Then there is the boy, and he gave it up. He gave it up. He surrendered it. He gave it up and he got to be used by the God of the universe. He gave it up and he got to be a part of this miracle. He gave it up and he got to connect his story into the unending glories, majestic story of God. Now he has a testimony. What do you think the rest of his life looked like? What do you think he did the next time he encountered someone who was poor, or hungry, or thirsty, or needing to hear about Jesus? What story do you think he told them?

When he encountered problems and obstacles in his life, what do you think he thought about? What fed his soul during those dark moments? When he got married and he had kids, what stories do you think he told them? How were their...his children...how were their ideas of faith and generosity and security forever shaped by what their father did as a little boy?

Because everybody here...we are sitting on this moment. Because you have some time. You have some talent. You have some resources. You have a car, you have a house, you have a gift, you have an ability... all of us...we have some loaves and fish. The question is...*What are you going to do with them?*

Now I'll tell you this: I've never known anybody who said, "I'm going to keep my loaves. I want to keep my loaves, and I want to use it on me." I've never met anybody who said that, and at the end of their lives were glad they did. The flip side of that is I've never known anybody who said, "Take it, Lord. Take it. It's not much, but take it and use it for Your glory." I've never met anybody who said that and regretted that decision.

Volkswagen said it best in one of their old commercials. They showed snapshots of life and under it, *This is not a test drive*. Philosophy 101 on the meaning of life from Volkswagen, huh? Snapshots of life and *This is not a test drive*. One life to live. We have one life to live. There is no rewind. There is no redo. One life to live, and this is not a test drive. So don't waste your life. Don't waste it.

Pour it, invest it in something that is eternal, and glorious, and unending, and majestic. Be a part of what God is doing in this world. Step out in an adventure of faith and walk on water. Pray some big, bold prayers and move mountains and change history. Surrender your loaves, and allow the power of God to surge through your life to feed a dying world out there.

Take a risk and give God space to give you a testimony that is going to change your life and generations unknown. Have a bigger vision for your life than just stuff, and comfort, and security. Pray the most dangerous prayer in the world, and ask God to use you. Or you can let the moment pass, and the opportunity slip, and we can number ourselves with that dismal company that was true to self and self alone, but in their lives they knew neither victory nor defeat. But hey, at least they got to keep their lunch.

Let's pray: Father, we are just asking You to magnify Yourself in this place and that in our hearts and in our minds we would resize You, God. We understand we're coming before the King of the universe and this King is not only all powerful and transcendent, but He is intimate. He is relational. He knows each and every one of us by name, and He loves us. And I pray that this truth would stagger our mind and our

imagination, and cause us to lift up our hearts and our hands to say, "God, I want to live for something bigger and greater. I want to have bigger hopes and bigger dreams than what I could imagine. Take my life, use it for Your glory, Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Debbie is going to sing a song for us. This is a song a friend of mine wrote. If you feel like God is moving in your heart right now saying, "Here is my life, God. Here is my life. I want to put it into Your hands." I want to invite you to pray through this song. Just between you and God, just lift up your hands, and just pray through the song as Debbie sings it over us. I'll pray for you. I'll pray that God would use you for greater things and it would be for your joy that He would give you testimonies and stories, and He'd change a generation through your life.