

12. Jesus Taught His Sheep Many Things

In Mark 6:34, we read, “And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.” In this verse, we see that Christ saw that the crowds were like sheep without a shepherd. The people had many religious leaders, but we see that they were without shepherds. In this verse, we see that, as a shepherd, Christ taught the people many things. Since this event happened in the context of feeding the five thousand, we will look at the things Christ taught His disciples about how to be effective under-shepherds when He fed the five thousand.

After Christ had taught the people for most of the day, the disciples came to Jesus with a suggestion. Mark 6:35-36 says, “When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, ‘This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat.’” The disciples saw the need, but they did not even think of seeing what could be done to meet that need except to send the people away. Christ used the opportunity to teach the disciples to minister to people in need.

In Matthew 14:16, we read, “But Jesus said to them, ‘They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.’” Instead of seeing an opportunity to minister to people in need, the disciples immediately began to focus on the problems. The first problem they saw was the financial problem. In John 6:5, we see that Christ asked Philip a question, “Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?’ But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.” Instead of answering the question, Philip immediately focused on a problem. John 6:7 says, “Philip answered Him, ‘Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.’” Instead of answering the question of Christ, Philip gave a financial report, and said they could not afford to feed the people.

Christ next gave the disciples an assignment. Mark 6:38 says, “But He said to them, ‘How many loaves do you have? Go and see.’ And when they found out they said, ‘Five, and two fish.’” Here, we see that Christ asked the disciples to find out what was already available. Throughout the Bible, God asked people what they had, and then used what they had to carry out His work. An example is found in Exodus 4:2, where we read: “So the Lord said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ He said, ‘A rod.’” Then, Exodus 4:17 says, “‘And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs.’” The Lord used that rod many times as Moses led Israel through the wilderness. Christ wanted the disciples to learn to use what He had provided.

As a result of the assignment Jesus gave the disciples, we see that Jesus taught Andrew and the other disciples another important lesson. John 6:8-9 says, “One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, ‘There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?’” Andrew learned by following the instructions of Christ. He found a boy with a lunch, and he brought the boy to Jesus. Andrew was learning the importance of introducing people to Christ. He did not know what Christ would do, but he was learning by

following instructions.

Next, Jesus gave the disciples another assignment. Here, we see that Jesus showed the disciples how to delegate responsibilities. Mark 6:39-40 says, “Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties.” We also see that Christ showed them that the way to work with larger groups is to divide them into a number of smaller groups, so they would be able to minister to all of the people. The disciples learned this lesson and applied it after the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Even though the disciples had to teach three thousand new Christians, they were able to do it because they divided them into groups that were small enough to combine Bible study and fellowship. This helped each of the new believers to get their questions answered.

The next lesson Christ taught the disciples was that He would do the things the disciples could not do, yet, at the same time, gave the disciples the opportunity to do what they could do. John 6:11 says, “And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.” Christ performed the miracle and multiplied the food. Then, Christ gave the disciples the responsibility to pass out the food. In this way, the disciples learned that they must depend on Christ to do the things that seemed impossible to people.

At the same time the disciples were learning that Christ is the One who must do the impossible, they were also learning that Christ wanted to use them to minister to the people. Christ could have spoken the word, and everyone would have had food in his or her hands. Instead, Christ chose to distribute the food to the disciples and let them have the privilege of becoming partners in the work of the Lord. This is the same thing we want to teach developing leaders. We want them to realize that only Christ can do the impossible, but, at the same time, Christ wants to give them the privilege of becoming partners with Him in doing the work of the Father.

When the people had finished eating, Christ had another assignment for the disciples that would help them to learn. John 6:12-13 says, “So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.’ Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.” Christ waited until everyone had eaten all they wanted. Then, the disciples were instructed to gather all of the extra food that was left after the people had eaten. The first lesson the disciples learned was that Christ was able to supply more than enough for the crowd of five thousand. It did not matter that the lunch was just five loaves and two small fish. Christ had multiplied what they had so that there was more than enough for all of the people who were there that day.

The second lesson the disciples learned was that nothing was to be lost. In this case, they learned as they gathered the food that remained. Later, the disciples learned to apply this same lesson as they led the early church. We have already mentioned that they divided the new believers, in the book of Acts, into small groups where they could both grow through Bible study and also grow in their relationships with one another, as they learned to fellowship with each other.

Growing Christian Leaders Series – Developing Leaders Who Are Becoming Like Their Shepherd 12. “Jesus Taught His Sheep Many Things”

Updated October 2025

Copyright © 2002, Duane L. Anderson, American Indian Bible Institute; 2022, DLA, Serve and Equip

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

This resource is available from and distributed free of charge by Serve and Equip <https://sveq.org>

ANY REPRODUCTION OF MATERIAL FOR RESALE OR PROFIT IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED

The disciples also learned how to apply this same principle when the early church faced the first problem mentioned in the book of Acts. That problem is mentioned in Acts 6:1. In that verse, we read, “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.” The first recorded problem, in the early church, was the neglect of the widows that were not from Jerusalem and Judea. We see that the disciples had learned, from the example of Christ, to take action when there was a problem.

Acts 6:2-3 says, “Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.’” The disciples had learned the importance of resolving conflicts. They took immediate action, but they did not burden themselves down with extra responsibilities. Instead, they encouraged the believers to recognize qualified men and then assigned the new responsibilities to these qualified men. This gave these men the opportunity to grow and develop in their ministry, instead of giving the apostles too much to do.

The disciples had also learned, from the example of Christ, the importance of choosing men who met spiritual qualifications, even though their initial responsibilities were just to distribute the food to the widows. They had learned, from the example of Christ, the importance of making spiritual qualifications the top priority, as they shared the responsibility with others. In this way, the seven chosen would view their responsibility as a ministry, not just as a job to be done. The disciples had learned this because that was what Christ had taught them as He delegated responsibility to them.

One other lesson the disciples had learned is found in Acts 6:4. That verse says, “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” The disciples had learned, from the example of Christ, that they needed to focus on the priorities Christ had given them. They made sure that needed ministries were carried out by others. However, they also realized that they must not neglect the priority the Lord had given them. They knew that they were to spend their time in prayer and the ministry of the Word of God. In the same way, these are also key lessons that we want to help developing learners learn from our example.

Jesus taught His sheep many things. He did not just teach Bible knowledge. He also taught His disciples how to carry out an effective ministry. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to carry out effective ministry.