

Is there a time you can think of that God called you out of your comfort zone? I was a sophomore in high school when my youth pastor asked me to teach Sunday School -- for the middle school boys.

I was sixteen years old. I didn't know much about anything. What was my youth pastor thinking? Fortunately, he didn't just throw me to the wolves. I was a co-teacher with Rich, one of our youth ministry volunteers. We even had a curriculum book to work out of -- so all I had to do was just follow the book!

I'll never forget how terrified I was to teach that first lesson. These were kids I knew, at least a little. Younger brothers of some of my friends. And who was I? Just some high school kid. I had a few Bible verses memorized and could tell you some of the stories about Jesus, but I wasn't qualified to teach.

To this day, I'm not sure why they asked me to help Rich out. Maybe it was because I had shared with my youth pastor I felt a call to ministry, or maybe it was because I was annoying my own Sunday school class. I'll never know.

I do know two things: first, I know I was wildly unprepared to step up in that way. Like, couldn't have been less qualified if I tried.

And second, I know teaching that middle school Sunday School class grew my faith in a big way. I was never again quite as intimidated stepping out of my comfort zone when it came to teaching and leading. I had already done it, and I saw that God never asked me to be an expert. He just wanted me to be faithful and do what He was calling me to do.

So back to that first question: can you think of a time God has called you to serve outside of your comfort zone?

Today, we're exploring acts of personal service because one way God grows our faith is to call us to serve outside our comfort zones. When we step into areas we're weak, we see clearly how God works, and our faith grows!

### **Message**

Our Fall Series is called 5 Things God Uses to Grow Your Faith. Throughout this series, we're talking about what faith is and identifying 5 things God uses to give us Big Faith.

We began by talking about FAITH - what is it? If we go clear back to the beginning of Scripture, we see the whole story of the Bible is really a story of faith.

Then we explored the concept of Big Faith. We imagined what would be different in our lives if we were 100% certain that God existed and we had perfect faith in God? What if you were absolutely certain that God was with you all the time? What if you had no doubt ever that no matter what came at you, God is at work to bring you good and that one day you would look back and marvel at what God was up to now?

that you didn't see? What if you knew in your bones that the laws and principles God gave us were because God wants what's best for us?

Big Faith has five components. If you talk to people who have Big Faith, ask them to tell you the story of their faith, these five things come up over and over. First, we looked at practical teaching. We saw that when Scripture comes alive for us, when we begin to obey God and actually *do* the things God calls us to do, our faith grows.

Then, we looked at providential relationships. We saw that God places people in our lives to help us grow. We asked how we can leverage those relationships to be sure we're paying attention when God brings them into our lives.

Last week, we explored private disciplines. We saw that, just like in other areas of our lives like fitness and hobbies, when we dedicate time to making space for God, our faith grows. Josh challenged us to give the first part of our time, energy and money to God, as an act of faith, so God could stretch our faith.

Today, we're going to explore the fourth thing God uses to grow our faith: personal service. Ask anyone who's been following Jesus very long, and you'll hear them share about a time when they became aware of a need -- maybe someone on a platform talked about it or maybe they were just more aware of this need than other folks were.

When they noticed this need, they sort of froze because they felt completely inadequate. They thought, "Man, I sure hope someone steps up to meet that need because it's obviously important! I would, but I'm not qualified."

And then they think, "Obviously, I'm not going to do it. I'd make a fool of myself," or "I'd ruin the ministry," or "People would leave by the dozens!"

But then, they did it anyway, and they saw God do amazing things. They knew it obviously wasn't them because they weren't qualified or prepared or whatever. They knew it had to be God, and their faith grew.

SO we're going to talk about personal service today because some of you were squirming very uncomfortably just now because you know *exactly* what I'm talking about. For the last little while - days or weeks or months - that's been *you*. God's been calling you to serve in some way and you've been afraid or intimidated.

Here are two things I believe about you right now: First, I believe that God is calling you to serve, which means God wants to bless that neighbor or that co-worker or that ministry here at Catalyst through you. They'll be better off because you say Yes to God.

And second, I believe that God is calling you because God wants to bless *you*. God wants to blow up your faith, help you grow more than you thought possible. Inviting you to serve outside your comfort zone, maybe even outside your skill set and experience, is a way God is inviting you to trust.

[Scripture Slide 1] Let's look at a story that explores this tension. Let me show you what this looks like. Turn with me to Matthew 14. Jesus has just learned of the death of his cousin, John the Baptizer. They had similar ministries - several of John's followers ended up following Jesus.

John was executed by Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who tried to kill Jesus when he was a toddler. So Jesus is feeling both a personal loss and how real the stakes of his public ministry are. He knows he's heading for a cross, but hearing his cousin has been executed makes it that much more real.

So Jesus tries to get away:

As soon as Jesus heard the news, he left in a boat to a remote area to be alone.

Understandable, right? Jesus needs to process this trauma. He needs to spend some time in prayer, to be away from the press of people and their needs.

But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed on foot from many towns. Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Word gets out. Someone spots him on his way out of town and tweets, "OMG just saw Jesus walking by!" and before you know it, people are swarming to him again. I love that Jesus stops, turns back and takes time for them to the point that even the disciples get worn out:

That evening the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves."

But Jesus said, "That isn't necessary—you feed them."

"But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish!" they answered.

The disciples want these people to leave, and they know they're getting hangry, so they beg Jesus to send them away and Jesus just says, "You feed them."

Picture the disciples here: there are twelve of them. And 5,000 plus people (5k men, plus however many women and kids - we're talking 10k plus easy). That's a bad ratio. Cooking for 20 at Thanksgiving is stressful enough.

And Jesus just casually tosses that out there? "You feed them." Really?

They look at Jesus and say, "We barely have enough for ourselves - five loaves of bread and two fish."

This is that moment, isn't it?

They discern a need - remember it was the disciples, not Jesus, who observed the crowd was hungry. So they can tell there's a need: food.

Everyone who follows Jesus faces this kind of moment: you perceive a need. You see a gap. You observe a lack somewhere. And there's something in you that just knows what needs to happen. You're being called to step up.

You look at the fact that you're unqualified. "I don't have the training," or "I haven't been to seminary," or "What if they ask hard questions," or "I'm so busy." And so you try to explain it away. "I'll just pray for them," or "I'm sure someone will step up," or whatever.

But it just won't leave you alone. You don't feel guilty. It's just this gentle insistence that this is *your* thing. That God is calling *you*.

Just like what happened to the disciples. Jesus says, "You feed them." Jesus calls them to serve and they go, "Uh, there's no way! We're not equipped! Cooking food is outside my skill set! I've never done an event on this scale before!"

Can't you almost feel Jesus' frustration with them? Like, come ON guys. I've been healing all day. You've witnessed miracle after miracle after miracle! So he sighs and says,

**"Bring them here," he said.**

What does Jesus say? "Bring me what you have."

"I didn't finish high school." Okay, bring me what you have. "I don't know the Bible very well." Okay, bring me what you know. "I don't have much time." Okay, bring me the time you have. "I don't know very many answers!" No problem. Bring me the answers you have. "I've never done that before." Okay. Bring me whatever experience you have.

Bring me what you have.

**Then he told the people to sit down on the grass. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he gave the bread to the disciples, who distributed it to the people. They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers. About 5,000 men were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children! -- Matthew 14:13-21**

And the disciples distributed it to the people. They took what food they had - food they had given to Jesus and received *back* from him, and they gave out what they had.

And somehow, God did something miraculous.

Friends, every time we hit that tension, where we're being called to step out of our comfort zones, our responsibility is *always* the same. We do what we can, what we know how to do. We take the next right step, do the next right thing. And we trust God is going to do the rest.

We've been trained to think tension is bad, that if we're feeling tension, it means something is wrong. But that's not true. Gym rats know the phrase, "No pain, no gain." It means, when you're working out, that if you don't feel *tension*, you're not actually exercising. That tension, that little bit of pain, means you're outside your comfort zone, and that's where you build muscle.

Similarly, when we feel this tension, it's God exercising our faith. He's stretching us, calling us to step out and *trust* that when God calls us, God also equips us. Trust that God doesn't require us to be experts; God only asks that we come with what we have and give it to God, trusting that God will do the rest.

I will never forget my first night as a youth pastor. This was a number of years after I taught that middle school Sunday School class, and it was another stretch for me. I had never planned to be a youth pastor.

I walked into that first Wednesday night youth meeting nervous, but confident. I had prepared a really thoughtful lesson on the Trinity. It represented a lot of what I had learned in college, getting my theology degree.

I taught the lesson to eight high school students, expecting them to be wowed by my brilliance and how far I'd come since that middle school Sunday school class!

Except they weren't wowed. My lesson was all theory and theology. It wasn't practical at all (remember, practical teaching is the first thing God uses to grow our faith).

I went home feeling pretty defeated. I wasn't sure I could do this youth ministry thing, but I knew God had called me to it. I said as much to God. I confessed I didn't know what I was doing. I had a lot of training as a theologian, but none as a pastor. And I committed to try.

God worked in me, and in those students, and in that church. My faith grew immeasurably, and God reaffirmed my call again and again. Every new challenge in my calling is a little easier to say yes to because of how God has worked out my faith muscle -- not because I'm amazing or have some unique skills or whatever, but because I say yes to God's invitation.

A lot of you here at Catalyst have said yes to getting involved. Whether that's back in the tech booth or with the worship team, whether it's serving in our Synthesis teen ministry or with our kids' ministry --

and by the way, can I take just a moment to say how awesome I think it is that so many of our Synthesis teens are serving? Whether it's in the preschool ministry or in the LAB or back in the tech booth, they are a beautiful example that we're never too young to say "Yes" to God's invitation to serve.

Some of you here are seeing needs here at Catalyst - either in a ministry we already have or you have a dream for a new ministry.

For some of you, that calling is outside Catalyst. Maybe you've sensed a need to do something in your neighborhood, or at your office. Or with some parents in your kids' sports leagues.

What is God calling you to do? How is God inviting you to grow your faith? What's stopping you?

### **Communion + Examen**

[Communion Slide] We bring what we have to the communion table and offer it to God. In return, we receive God's own life.

1. When in the last week did I say yes to God's call?
2. What excuses have kept me from saying yes to God?
3. How might I be tempted in this next week to ignore God's call?
4. What does saying Yes to God's calling look like in my life this week?

### **Assignment + Blessing**

How can you serve this week? Do it!