

Thinking Like A Hero Maker

Acts 6:1-7

Introduction

The human mind is incredibly powerful. Even in an age of supercomputers and artificial intelligence nothing can match the prowess of our brains. Sure, there are computers that can outperform us in singular tasks that they are programmed to do such as chess or analyzing data, but the brain is capable of a vast array of differing tasks simultaneously and can do each one with amazing alacrity. From storing long term memories, to contemplating deep philosophical questions, to performing fine motor skills, to calculating complex problems, your brain can do it all. It has the power to hope and dream and fear and focus and will and determine.

Your brain has the capacity to store around 2.5 petabytes of information, that is a million gigabytes. If your brain was a DVR, it could hold 3 million hours of TV shows. You'd have to leave recording for more than 300 years to fill it up.ⁱ

For every thought you have, a surge of electrical currents from your brain releases an number of neurochemicals that operate your nervous system like a conductor leading a world-class orchestra with every part working in perfect unison without you even thinking about it.

Your brain has an incredible power to focus on something exclusively, and yet when you think about that thing repeatedly, it forms neural pathways that become hardwired in your brain's circuitry. Soon you can do that thing which once took all of your attention without even thinking about it. This is why when you first learn to drive you have to focus on every detail, but after a couple of years, everything happens on autopilot.

Science has found that the mind can, to a large degree, change its own reality simply by deciding to do something and then pursuing it determinedly. Simply visualizing a new reality has the power to transform reality. One study found that a group of people that practiced free throws for 20 minutes a day for 20 days showed 24% improvement. Now get this- the group that only visualized making free throws for 20 minutes a day for 20 days showed 23% improvement over their baseline scores.ⁱⁱ A statistical dead heat. That's the power of your mind.

Similarly, God understands the power of thinking to transform our lives. This is why Romans 12:2 tells us to be, "transformed by the renewing of your minds." A change of thinking can lead to a change of life.

This is what we're talking about this morning. We need to learn to think like hero makers.

Body

Last week we started a new series inspired by the book *Hero Maker* by Dave Ferguson and Warren Bird. The book identifies 5 hero making practices of Jesus. A hero maker is a person who shifts from being the hero to making others the hero in God's unfolding story.

Multiplication Thinking

This morning, we want to focus on multiplication Thinking. Multiplication thinking is when we go from thinking that ministry happens, change happens, growth happens through our own work and effort to thinking that ministry happens through efforts of many.

Multiplication thinking is when we go from thinking "I want to get to heaven" to thinking, "I want to take 100 others with me to heaven." It's when we go from the goal of "I want to keep my children from going off the deep end" to thinking, "I want my children to change the world."

We see the early church practicing this kind of multiplication thinking in Acts 6.

Acts 6:1-7 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Let me point out some advantages of multiplication thinking we see in this passage:

I. Multiplication Thinking Solves Problems

This passage takes place about 34 A.D. The Church has grown from the 120 believers praying in an upper room that we talked about last week and has grown, historians estimate, to about 20,000 Christians in and around Jerusalem.

The growth has been phenomenal, but sometimes growth brings growing pains. Christians are called to care for each other, but the church has been growing so rapidly, that there are some people slipping through the cracks. This lead to a couple of problems.

First, is that some basic needs weren't being met. One of the earliest ministries of the church was to care for widows. Widows were some of the neediest people in the ancient world, because their culture had very little in place to provide for them. Unless a widow was young enough and desirable enough to get remarried, she was often left on her own, and since most people in that day lived hand to mouth to mouth day by day, they were consigned to a life of destitution and begging.

The church was trying to meet this need and was providing a daily distribution of food. We see in earlier examples in Acts that the early took very seriously Christ's call to care for one another. But here was a group of widows being overlooked. Adding to this problem was that there was a racial and cultural component to this oversight. These weren't just random widows being left out. The text mentions Hellenists and Hebrews. 1) The Hebrews were born in Israel, spoke Hebrew, dressed Hebrew, and generally followed traditional Hebrew culture and customs.

2) The Hellenists were also born to Jewish parents, but because they were born elsewhere in the empire or had lived a good chunk of their lives in a Gentile city, or just because of their own personal choice, they adopted to predominant Roman and Greek culture. They spoke Greek. They dressed Greek, and they generally lived according to the Greek culture and customs that had been spread throughout the ancient world by Alexander the Great and continued by Rome.

Most 1st Century Jews hated the Greek culture of the Gentiles and Romans. This culture was called Hellenistic culture. It comes from the word *Hellazein* which means to speak Greek or identify with Greeks. Traditional Hebrews looked down on the Hellenists and often discriminated against them. They saw them as less than real Jews. They were compromisers at best and traitors at worst. And the early church was a community made up of both groups. If such racism and discrimination took root in the early church it could destroy the community and fellowship of love that was growing and spreading.

This is also why we can't allow such racial or culture discrimination in the church today. It is destructive to the community of Christ and the fellowship of love.

The second problem is that the apostles were reaching the limit of their time and energy and ability. We saw last week how our common practice is to lead, serve, minister, or work until we reach the limit of our time and energy. This is what was happening to the twelve apostles. They could lead a church of a few hundred, even a few thousand, but now they can't. In trying to manage all of these people and all these problems it would be easy to neglect the things Jesus had called them to do— and that is, as it says in verse 4, prayer and teaching the word.

Many of us grew up in churches where the pastors did everything. They wore every hat. We might think that's necessary in a small church. But it's also how small churches stay small and never become anything more. Ephesians 4:12 says that the job of pastors and teachers is to

equip God's people to do the work of ministry. It doesn't say that their job is to do all the work of ministry.

I once saw a job description for a minister from a church in Indiana. Such job descriptions are usually half a page to a page in length. This one was a multipage document that went into great detail. It specified things like shoveling the walk, changing lightbulbs, cleaning the baptistry, and setting up chairs.

Now, I'm willing to wear a lot of hats and do what needs to be done, but I knew right away that there would never be a successful ministry in that church with that attitude. Their minister would be so busy doing all these other things, that they wouldn't be able to do what God had called them to do.

This is why there are a variety of gifts and callings. This is why it takes all of us. This is why there's a role for everyone.

This is why the apostles knew they needed to raise up more heroes in the church. Our common practice is to lead, serve, minister, work until we reach the limit of our time and energy, but Jesus had shown them how to dream big and invest in others to multiply their impact. They couldn't just be the heroes. They had to be hero makers. They had to multiply their thinking. This is why they chose the seven.

Let's use their example as a mirror for a little bit. I believe this generation of churches is neglecting our responsibilities. We are allowing the government to do what we are called to do.

In a church our size we tend to meet needs individually. Someone needs gas, we get them gas. Someone needs help with utilities, we pay a bill. Someone needs a wheelchair ramp, we build a ramp. Someone needs someone to talk to, we partner them with a Stephen Minister. There's nothing wrong with that, and love will always happen person to person.

But can we dream bigger than that? Can we imagine ever building or maintaining our own retirement home? A youth center? A shelter for abused women? Or providing the full time support for an overseas missionary so we can have a direct impact taking the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth?

Do you know how these things can happen? Multiplication Thinking.

We often think about benevolence or pastoral care in terms of one person at a time.

That's all well and good, but... go with me here... what if we thought of taking care of 100s and 1000s at a time?

What would have to happen for that vision to become a reality? We'd have to do what the early Church did here in Acts 6. We'd have to raise up heroes, which would require us to have multiplication thinking.

They needed to raise up heroes! So, they shifted their thinking... from being the hero of the story to making heroes of others.

This is what "the twelve" did. Look at verses 2-3:

And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty."

When "the twelve" picked out another 7 men to help them, they increased their potential impact exponentially.

II. Multiplication Thinking Leads to Spiritual Blessings

Look at the direct result of "the twelve" raising up heroes.

Look at the first part of Acts 6:7 *"And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."*

Multiplication thinking leads to spiritual blessings. It says the word of God continued to increase. I don't think it's talking about numbers here, because that's what it says next. The word of God increasing I believe refers to the preaching and teaching of the word. Since the apostles were no longer distracted with this problem, they were able to preach and teach the word more.

I think it also refers to the hearing and the understanding of the word. By taking care of this problem and ridding the church of this division and complaining, people had the opportunity to grow deeper in their understanding and obedience of the word. Satan loves to pluck God's word from our heart by distracting us with all sorts of problems and complaints, but with the problem taken care of God's word was able to take root and bear fruit.

III. Multiplication Leads to Numerical Growth.

Acts 6:7 continues, *"and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."*

This is the first time the word *multiplied* is used to describe the growth of the church.

Acts 2:41 says that 3,000 souls were ADDED that day. 2:47 says, “The Lord ADDED to their number day by day.” 5:14 says, “more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were ADDED to their number.”

But here the number of the disciples MULTIPLIED greatly. That’s the result of multiplication thinking empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Did you notice in verse 7 it says that even Jewish Priests were converting to Christianity and when this happened, it’s very likely many of their congregations would follow.

But, there’s so much more to this story.

Look at what happens because “the twelve” made heroes out of these 7 men.

One of these men was Stephen. In the next verse we read,

Acts 6:8 “And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.”

Stephen was such a hero that the religious leaders stoned him to death. But even his death had an amazing impact. Acts 8:1 tells us:

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Sounds like bad news right, except listen to verse 4, “Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” It was like seeds being spread by the wind. It sparked a revival, and the church grew even more. Stephen was the first martyr. The first great missionary push of the church happened because of Stephen.

Philip was also one of those men made into a hero. He was also one of those scattered by the persecution, and we soon find him taking the gospel to new places. Look at Acts 8:5-7:

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did.

Philip impacted an entire city and changed the lives of countless people!

Next, he shares the good news of Jesus with a Eunuch from Ethiopia. Do you know what church history tells us about this Eunuch? One of the early church fathers was a guy by the name of Irenaeus. He wrote a book in the 2nd Century about a hundred years after this event in Acts. He

tells us that this Eunuch went back to Ethiopia in preached the gospel of Jesus. The church historian, Eusebius, writing in the 3rd century said he was the first-fruits of Jesus from throughout the world.ⁱⁱⁱ There is even a tradition that says the Eunuch baptized the queen of Ethiopia into the faith. There is still a strong Christian presence in Ethiopia today that traces its roots to the Eunuch.

So what does this have to do with us? Good question! In your bulletins there is an insert with an outline of the sermon. In the last part of that outline you will notice some blank lines that seem to be a part of some mathematical formula.

On that first line I want you to write down something you want God to do in your life. It could be a spiritual goal you're trying to accomplish, some way you are striving to grow spiritually.

So, you might right down something like, "Be more open about my faith," "Witness to my coworker," "Read through the entire Bible in a year," "Be more a spiritual leader in my home," "Guard my tongue and control my anger."

Now we want to dream big with that. What if God were to multiply that thing by 10, by 100, by a thousand? Now what would it look like. That's what you write on the next line.

Now you write down "I will share the good news of Jesus with 10 people this year," or 100 people, or "I want to lead a thousand people to Jesus," "I want start a group of ten people who read through the entire Bible." "Within five years I will help 100 people read through the entire Bible." "I'm going to train other husbands or wives to be spiritual leaders in their home." "I will use my tongue to encourage, bless, and strengthen others."

Spend a few moments in prayer and meditation on this. Think of what God can multiply in you.

ⁱ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-is-the-memory-capacity/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.connectionsosp.org/power-visualization-mind-matter/>

ⁱⁱⁱ An early anti-Gnostic theological work; 3:12:8 (180 AD)