

# Moved to Equip

by Stewart Ruch

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*Stewart Ruch's sermon emphasizes the importance of igniting imagination and personal responsibility in equipping individuals for service in the kingdom of God.*

**Duration:** 28:05

**Scripture:** Matthew 9:36, Matthew 14:13, Matthew 14:15-17, Matthew 14:19-20

**Topics:** "Spiritual Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses how Jesus ignites the imagination of his followers and invites them into his work. He uses the story of Ralph being invited into ranching by his father as an analogy. The speaker emphasizes that Jesus is not a leader who sends people away, but rather invites them in and teaches them. He also shares a personal story of a coach who cast a vision and helped him improve as a runner. The sermon is based on Matthew chapter 14 and parallels the events in chapter 9.

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## Transcript

I have a lot of favorite family books, stuff that we've read together as a family. So when I preface something by saying one of my favorite family books, I mean it, this has gone through rigorous testing, but one of my favorite family books is a book by an American author named Ralph Moody. He wrote several, but his first one was called *Father and I Were Ranchers*.

And Ralph Moody tells a story of when he was eight years old, his family, he had about four siblings at that point, moved from the East Coast, where his father had developed an illness working in the mills there, and they moved to Colorado, where they were hoping the change in climate would improve the father's health. They actually bought a small ranch, and the father had his eight-year-old oldest son really as his only working companion. They began together to carve out a life on this Colorado ranch.

It's a beautiful book. I highly recommend it. And it's a very touching scene.

I read it several years ago to my kids, and I still remember this scene where the father is with Ralph, and they're outside together, and he puts his hand on Ralph's shoulder, and he says, Ralph, we're partners. And he means it. He's needed Ralph to do this work.

And when he does that, he sparks Ralph's imagination. He brings Ralph into an understanding of his capacity as a boy that was beyond what Ralph ever thought he could do. And not only does his father

spark Ralph's imagination, as he sort of casts a vision for him of partnership on the ranch, he then meets that sparking, he meets that challenge that he puts in front of Ralph with an invitation.

He teaches him and invites him in to the work of ranching. He teaches him how to set out barbed wire. He teaches him how to ride a horse, how to tame a wild horse.

He teaches him how to milk a cow. He teaches him one thing after another. He brings him in to this work that's the family work.

And I thought of that story as I read this story of Jesus in Matthew chapter 14. Now, what we have in Matthew chapter 14 is in many ways sort of Jesus' first training session with his followers. We looked last week, five chapters prior to this, Matthew chapter 9, where Jesus is saying to his followers, I am going to raise up workers for a harvest of men and women, children and youth.

I'm going to raise up workers among those who follow me to love, to serve, to reach the multitudes, the crowds with my love, with my sacrifice, with what I've come to do on earth. And now, in this moment, in Matthew chapter 14, we see how Jesus will do it. We see how he will raise up people around him to go about this amazing work.

This is a critical moment. It's a critical moment in understanding how the Jesus movement will be catalyzed. It's actually a critical moment in understanding Jesus, and last week we talked about being moved by Jesus, that when we see who Jesus is in Matthew chapter 9, when we see his heart of stirring, his heart of love for people, all people, we're moved by him.

But the question then is raised, how do we get from being moved by Jesus in his life, his work, his death on the cross, his resurrection, to being sent out here? To being men and women, children and youth that are sent out to do the work of the kingdom. How do you get from here to here? And the way Jesus starts is he starts with igniting the imagination. He speaks to the imagination of his followers, and two, he then invites them.

He creates this sweet, this full of mercy, it's a very poignant moment that we're going to look at together, where he then invites them into his work. Not at all unlike that story where Ralph's called partner, and then invited into the work of ranching by his dad. Turn with me in your Bibles or your bulletins to Matthew chapter 14.

I want you to notice a few things as we look at this passage. If you weren't here last week, I taught on Matthew chapter 9, moved by Jesus, and I would encourage you, if you're at Res, you're a regular attendee, getting to know us, remember to listen to last week's sermon, because these are building on each other. They stand independently, but they are successive.

And we saw last week, is Jesus has a couple of key sort of experiences. One is, he's in front of a crowd. Two, when he sees the crowd, when he sees the crowd in Matthew 9, he has a response of compassion.

We define that word biblically as meaning stirred in your gut. That's literally the meaning of the biblical word. You're stirred in your gut.

You're having an emotional, spiritual reaction to these crowds who are harassed and helpless. Matthew is drawing a very clear parallel in the literature that he's writing in this gospel here in Matthew chapter 14. Look at it.

He's just withdrawn to a desolate place, verse 13. The crowds have followed him on foot. He went ashore.

He saw a great crowd. We talked last week that when Jesus sees a crowd, he doesn't see a crowd like we see a crowd. He sees individuals and their souls.

He sees and then is heartbroken by the need of every human soul. He has compassion on them. Precisely what we're told in Matthew chapter 9. This is meant to be a kind of parallel chapter.

This is meant to be a parallel moment where we see Jesus inaugurating the movement of the gospel in chapter 9 and now we see him beginning to train into, begin to explain what it will look like and how they will do this work. First of all, what Jesus does is he expands the imaginations of his followers. Verses 15 and 16.

It's a desolate place. The day is now over. The disciples say to him, Send the crowds away to go into the villages and feed themselves.

Okay, what are the disciples doing? Very good leadership work. They're supporting the key leader. They're looking at what's going on.

They know he's got a lot on his mind. So they're out there helping him understand here's what's happening. Here's sort of the pulse of what's going on, Jesus, because you always seem so concerned about the kingdom of God.

Just to remind you, they're really hungry and there's tens of thousands of them. Likely 5,000 men, another 5,000 women or more, plus children. You could have 20,000 people gathered.

It's a desolate area, which means that there aren't villages around whereby they might be able to go to centers where there could be meal or food made of some kind. They're concerned that actually the crowds that have been loving what Jesus is doing are going to start being hungry and they're actually going to possibly turn. A potential riot, a kind of social catastrophe could be right here on the horizon.

They're doing the work for Jesus. Here's what's happening, Jesus. Implied, you need to do something.

You're the reason they all came here. Healing them is great, but what's really important is feeding them. And we can't feed them.

It's impossible for us to feed them. So get them out of here so they can go and feed themselves. Help them take care of themselves.

And this is where Jesus utters six words that utterly change the trajectory of a Jesus movement. That tell us exactly how He's going to bow, going to go about instilling and releasing the work of the kingdom of God. They are shocking words.

Perhaps for some of you you've never read this before. You're not familiar with this section of the Bible. And perhaps you're able to actually enter into this in a way that those of us who might have read it before can't enter into it.

Because at this point this is what Jesus says to them. You give them something to eat. You give them something to eat.

You face the potential catastrophe. Don't send them away to take care of themselves. That is not the work of the gospel.

That is not what I've come to do. It's to create human beings who are more autonomous, more driven to take care of their own needs, more quick to run to the closest village possible and get in the front of the line to get whatever meal they can for their families and to feed them. That is not what I'm about.

I'm not about greater and greater individualization. I'm actually about you feeding them. You can feed them.

And in that moment it says Jesus is grabbing hold of their imagination. He's saying you have a latent capacity because I'm bringing you into the kingdom of God. I am giving you my presence.

I am giving you myself. You will have everything you need. You have a capacity for kingdom work.

Can you imagine that? This is where we get stopped. This is where we get passive. This is where we get frustrated.

This is where we can get passive-aggressive to whatever the work of the kingdom is where we can feel like we're marginalized. We've not been called in. There's others who have the gifting.

Others who have the specialty. Others who are impressive. If we haven't heard Jesus say through the word of God apply to our lives you give them something to eat.

That needs to create a stomach flip at some point. That needs to create a... Do you have an imagination for how Jesus is asking you to give somebody something to eat? Do you have an imagination for your capacity in the kingdom of God? Are you able to overcome understandable and very human barriers of thinking, for example, it's up to someone else like the disciples did to take care of all the problems in this world? Or God's just gonna sort it all out. Well, God will ultimately sort it all out.

But the very point is God wants to sort it all out through His Son, Jesus Christ. Who wants to sort it all out? Through us. You give them something to eat.

And throughout the centuries of the church regardless of the tradition our particular tradition as Anglicans has its barriers but every tradition's had its barriers because we're all human and we're all sinful and we all in some ways are passive and we'd like someone else to get it all figured out and Jesus is speaking right into that. He's speaking right into our lives. He's speaking right into your life and saying, do you have the imagination for the capacity God has given you to give others something to eat? Do you have the freedom? The freedom to imagine how God could use you in stunning ways to give others something to eat? You have to unlock from thinking someone else is gonna do it.

You have to unlock from thinking it's not the right time. It's not the right place. I'm too young.

I'm too old. You have to unlock from all of that. I'm in the wrong line of business.

I'm too busy. You have to unlock from that. Those are lies.

Those are foundational lies and they are part of a strategy of the enemy of our souls in Jesus who wants you to believe that somebody else is supposed to give somebody else something to eat. It's a personal calling on your life. It takes an imagination an understanding an openness to the capacity you really have.

Children to learn from children about imagination is one of the most beautiful things among many things they can teach us as Christians. So Jesus taught that children are first in the kingdom of God and that they're often our teachers. We should take that seriously.

That's not that's not a cute statement on Jesus' part. He means it. They lead in the kingdom of God.

He put his hands on them infants and said to such of these belongs the kingdom of God. So understanding how to work in the kingdom of God helps to understand children and childlike imagination children carry with them if they're given the freedom to have this and not all children get this as they're raised because of so many challenges that children are raised in and oppression that children are raised in the reason we have such a heart for children here at resurrection but a child that's raised up in a healthy environment will have a profound imagination for who they can be and what they can be. That's why they will play and act out different scenarios and imaginations and arrangements.

Yes, pirates yes, pioneers and stuff like that but if you give children scope for their imagination their latent capacity to imagine themselves as things is pretty amazing. I happened upon my kids one time and they were playing some game they were very into it they were out in the yard and I realized that they actually discovered themselves to be Irish potato farmers amidst the Irish famine. And this was this was a big deal so they're digging for potatoes and they've got different groups looking for potatoes and trying to figure out what we're going to do and do we have to get to England and I mean it's all into this on the boat and the channel and all the nine yards and they're working out the fact that they're Irish potato farmers and they're into it their imagination was tapped and they're living in it.

Another time their cousins came over because they've all been raised in a church they wanted to kind of play church so they got all of our tea cozies that's what you put on a teapot to keep it warm it looks like a bishop's miter and so four of them were bishops they were visiting each other from different countries and they were having a bishop's council it was amazing because they had the capacity they could imagine themselves there it's childlike we need a freeing childlikeness to hear Jesus say to us this is where it starts you guys yes eventually training and skills yes, yes, yes but it starts with imagination you give them something to eat and that can look as different as every single person and child and youth in this church it's hard for me to give you examples because I give you one example I'm afraid it's going to lock you in too much I wrestled with this I've got several examples but I'm afraid you're going to hear one and go oh well that doesn't pertain to me okay so don't do that alright we have an agreement? alright so one person I'm thankful for I did a lot of camp with college students for years at a place called Cedar Campus Upper Peninsula of Michigan there's this little tiny plaque up there that says we give thanks for this camp due to Herbert J.

Taylor I'm like who is Herbert J.

Taylor? what I find out is he was a marketplace leader who had an incredible passion to see college students equipped gifted skilled as the writer of Hebrews just said in the Bible lesson that we read skilled in the word of God so he through his leadership gifting and his ability to make money that was one of his gifts was he could make money well he said he bought this land and then with his leadership gifts established this camp for the training up of college students I participated in that where I saw numerous life change one after another he had an imagination he had a capacity to imagine that his marketplace gifts and his leadership gifts could be used in exponential ways in a training of thousands upon thousands of college students that's just one tiny example or take Suzy my friend

in Cambodia who was in Singapore she led Singaporean Airlines hospitality section one of the most renowned transportation groups in the world known for their hospitality she became a Christian in her late 40s and after she became a Christian she got involved with a school not in Singapore where she was from first world city very developed in Cambodia where now she takes the poorest of the poor in the world on United Nations scales and teaches them hospitality industry abilities so they can get out of their villages earn for their families get an education she had an imagination for how God could take her particular calling and gifts in one case a marketplace leader who stayed in the marketplace in another case a marketplace gifted person who left the marketplace either way it was the

imagination that was ignited you may need a healing you may need a laying on of hands in prayer you may need just more regular bible reflection understanding for your imagination to be ignited but it's here in the scriptures the book of Acts had to do with the Acts of the early church the actions of the early church and what you see if you need an imagination ignition is to read the book of Acts from the beginning to the end where you'll see it spreading out to some people but then it spreads out to more people and then churches are being planted by all kinds of different people and it just spreads it multiplies it's an imagination ignition the book of Acts so where are you on this? as we discuss equipping everyone for transformation do you have an imagination? are you hearing Jesus say

to you you hear your name you steward you give them something to eat if you're not hearing that then you might need prayer you might need more bible reflection and maybe there's a passivity that's keeping you from that okay, the next moment is a here's why I love Jesus so much moment it's a moved by Jesus moment and I love this section he cast his vision you give them something to eat he sparks their imagination and so then they try I just love this okay, they're like okay, alright you give them something to eat so they take them their imagination's sparked it's not aflame yet it's just sparked so they're like well, okay we've got five loaves and two fish you can see them going okay, Judas Judas counts stuff Judas, you're good at counting what do we got? he goes back there, you know we

got five loaves and two fish that's what we got okay, let's go to Jesus Jesus, we're the committee on the number of fish and loaves that are reporting out to you and here's our report we got five loaves and two fish in other words, we kind of did our part but again, it's kind of like do something now we're trying to give them something to eat we can't you can we don't know just do something but they're trying and here's what Jesus does and it's really tender and it's really touching he says bring them here to me he invites them he doesn't discipline them he doesn't say ah, you don't understand what I'm saying I'm talking about taking the gospel to the ends of the earth he starts right where they are bring them bring them here to me give me what you've got I don't know if you've ever been

in a situation or relationship I have been in a few cases where actually somebody did challenge me they actually ignited my imagination they called me into something but then they left me there I didn't know what to do in other words I felt called into an opportunity I felt called into a situation I felt called into growth and challenge I didn't know how they left me there I didn't know how to get to where I was supposed to go I didn't know how to get to from kind of the call to actually going and doing I didn't know how to do it and it created a lot of anxiety in me and shame and oh man I can't rise to it it's my fault and Jesus speaks right into that Jesus is not that kind of leader Jesus is not that kind of coach Jesus is not that kind of parent Jesus is not that kind of board Jesus is

not that kind of supervisor that's not what Jesus is like instead he says give me what you have whatever you've got just come here he brings them close and he invites them in I'm gonna make you workers is

basically what he's saying I had a coach like this who did this for me he cast a vision for me I was a runner I was running cross-country very competitively in high school and he came to me about halfway through the season he said we can get your time two minutes faster which for in cross-country for a runner to shave two minutes off your best time puts you in a whole other league of running a whole other category of where I would place I said yeah I'm interested he said well let me show you how to do it and he created a workout schedule for me he worked on my running mechanics he spoke

into my heart ignited my imagination and then he invited me into a process and I did shave more than two minutes off and it was an extraordinary one of the most satisfying experiences of my life because I was experiencing equipping I was experiencing apprenticing I was experiencing both the imagination being sparked from my capacity and then the invitation to help me accomplish that and that's exactly what Jesus does his invitation is two-fold first of all it's supernatural he invites them into the supernatural and to be somebody who's living in the kingdom you have to be ready and willing and humble enough to be invited into the supernatural where you won't always have full control the Holy Spirit has full control you won't always know exactly where what you're doing in the moment as

you're serving somebody or loving them or ministering to them or talking to them you won't always know where it's going because the Holy Spirit has a place he wants to take it but you're actually coming to a profound place of humility and submission by living into the supernatural Jesus invites them into the supernatural what happens? bring them here to me he orders the crowd to sit down on the grass takes the five loaves two fish looks up to heaven says a blessing breaks the loaves give them to the disciples the disciples give them to the crowds and twelve baskets full of broken pieces were left over that's just supernatural there's no other way to describe it there's a miracle that happens the miracle is very very specifically five loaves and two fish are multiplied into the place where

they now feed tens of thousands of people it's a miracle and that's just part of what it means to enter into the life of Jesus is we expect and anticipate and indeed desperately need miracles oh God have mercy on our low expectations for the miracles of Jesus and what it means to step into the miracle work of Jesus to participate and to be a part of that he invites us into that supernatural reality and there's something else happening here that's maybe even more amazing than all the multiplication of the fish and loaves something else is going on here it's an even greater miracle what Jesus does he's actually is beginning to enact a very specific Jewish ritual and what would happen when you'd have a special dinner or a special feast in a place so for example he says to them look with me

in your text he orders the crowds to sit down verse 19 ok when he does that he's actually not just saying make yourself comfortable he's saying we're now entering into a sacred meal it's a little bit like it's like a family moment like in the states when we say let's just eat around the kitchen table come on in let's just eat around the kitchen table it always shocks other cultures when we do that by the way sit down but then he doesn't stop there he does what a Jewish dad does when it's a special special feast he looks up to heaven and he says a blessing ok now those who knew the Jewish background knew Jewish history and knew Jewish roots are going wait a second he's making us a family he's treating us like a family there's a miracle happening here but what Jesus is doing is he's

enacting and saying I am making you a new people I am making you a new people you're not just Hebrews or you're not just from this part of Israel or that part of Israel or that part of Gentile, Decapolis or whatever it is you're not just your race you're not just your background you're not just your mother and your father's background I am making you a new people I am making you a family I am enacting

something so radical and so new that it's utterly supernatural I am making a people who were once no people that's what Jesus is doing he's basically you're going to have my name I'm the father of this family I'm enacting this this will take on even greater meaning and disciples will look back at it later because they would be together at what was called the Last Supper when Jesus

inaugurated what we as Christians call Holy Communion the beauty of the altar and the Holy Communion the same four things happen on that night when he gives us Holy Communion that happened there he has people sit down he takes the bread he gives thanks he breaks it it's exactly the same in 1st Corinthians chapter 11 it describes Holy Communion what is Jesus saying? he's saying I am bringing you into the people of God where my presence supernaturally will always feed you you're thinking scarcity you're thinking I don't have enough to fulfill this imagination you're giving me and I'm telling you I will always have utter abundance you can never run out of my presence that's why there's 12 baskets there's just so much you'll never run out of my presence there will always be enough it's

supernatural and then in that supernatural moment we get the second side of the invitation which is very service oriented he gives the disciples and the disciples hand it out let that be what it is they're handing out a bunch of bread and fish there's this glorious miraculous moment they're blown away and at the same time they're like we gotta figure this out how are we gonna feed 20,000 people and there's 12 of us and so the administrators get administrating and the inspirers get inspiring and the leaders start leading and the servants start serving they're all working together and they're figuring this out and can you imagine they're serving now it's a major job can you imagine the joy of that service I mean you're handing out bread and fish but you're it just keeps coming this is more

this is amazing I mean I'm serving this is a lot of work but you know oh my word I've never served like this before that's when Peter said I'm not fishing any longer this is way more fun this is just way more fun it's service it's hard work but it's supernatural it's Jesus oh it's Jesus he did what no one else could have done make a people of no people make a family where there's no family and yet it's us you give them something to eat the second invitation Jesus makes not only you give them something to eat let me expand your imagination now he says to them bring me what you have I'm inviting you just bring me what you have have you heard that invitation? has that been made clear to you? bring me what you have are you humble enough to bring him what you have? are you humble enough to say

this is actually really what I have? all my anxiety and all my crazy thinking and the lust that grabs hold of my heart and people that I'm really really angry with listen this is what I have it's humbling to have Jesus say to us you give them something to eat perhaps even more humbling to hear his invitation just give me what you have but that's how we move to be moved by Jesus into a movement of Jesus a movement of men and women children and youth who are creatively miraculously in thousands of acts of service giving those who are harassed and helpless something to eat in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit Amen

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