

I know what some of you are thinking today. This could be given at Christmas, Or Easter, and now you are talking about all the things I have to do to get through the summer with before we start in the fall. You feel overwhelmed.

And if we can rise above our own personal circumstances enough to see the bigger picture, we feel even more overwhelmed. We see problems far bigger and more complex than our ability to figure out. The war on terror, poverty and homelessness, American politics, you name it was have it.

Are you feeling overwhelmed yet?

Feeling overwhelmed is simply a part of life. Sometimes we feel like the little boy trying to plug up holes in the dam with his fingers. Each time he sticks his finger in one hole, two more holes open up.

Following Jesus Christ as a Christian doesn't make that sense of feeling overwhelmed go away. We not only worry about things like our kids and our health, but we also have concerns about reaching lost people for Christ, about the vitality of our church, about the spiritual climate of our culture.

Today we're going to talk about running on empty. Today we're going to look at a situation where some of Jesus' followers felt overwhelmed.

Jesus invites his followers to leave the crowds for a quiet place to rest

Jesus is reminding us, the essence of being a Christian isn't doing stuff for Jesus, but it's being with Jesus. Jesus is inviting them to hang out with him, to let down their guard, to not need to perform or act, but to simply be.

They were feeling overwhelmed by the chaos, the coming and going of the crowd, the constant needs people keep bringing to Jesus.

Sometimes I feel like the mythical figure Atlas, who in Greek mythology carried the world on his shoulders. We carry the burdens of our friends and our family the burdens of our church family and our community, the burdens of our nation. Sometimes it can feel crushing.

When we start feeling that way, we need to be reminded that following Jesus is first and foremost a relationship with Jesus. It's not doing stuff for Jesus to impress him, it's not conquering the evil of our world as a kind of Christian super-hero, but it's being with him and being with his people in community.

Jesus sees the people as sheep without a shepherd. Jesus sees the crowd as needy and aimless, without direction or guidance.

Several years ago Grace Baptist Church in Philadelphia had to turn away a little girl named Hattie May Wiatt from children's ministry because of overcrowding. That day Hattie May Wiatt started saving her pennies to help the church make more room in their children's ministry. Two years later, Hattie May tragically died. In her pocketbook next to her bed her parents found 57 pennies and a piece of paper with a note saying that the money was to help the church build a bigger children's ministry. At Hattie May's funeral, her mother gave that 57 cents and the note to Pastor Russell Conwell, the pastor of Grace Baptist Church. That Sunday, Pastor Conwell shared Hattie May's story with his congregation. People's hearts were touched; a realtor gave the church a piece of land to expand the children's ministry, asking for 57 cents for a down payment. A local newspaper carried the story, and soon news about Hattie May Wiatt's 57 cents spread across the country. The pennies grew far beyond Hattie May's initial 57 pennies. Grace Baptist Church not only built a new children's ministry wing, but also a new ministry center, today seating over 3,000 people. Out of that movement of generosity from Hattie May's example the church built Temple University in Philadelphia, and Good Samaritan Hospital. In fact, you can visit Temple University today and find a picture on the wall of Hattie May Wiatt, a little girl whose 57 pennies were used by God far beyond the limits of her life.

God can take whatever we give him, no matter how small and insignificant it seems, and use it in incredible ways, far beyond our expectations.

Are you running on empty? Do you feel overwhelmed with people's needs that are far beyond your capacity to meet? Do you feel like Atlas with the world on your shoulders. If so, know that if you give what you have to Jesus, he can use it far beyond your wildest dreams. Although you might still feel overwhelmed from time to time, you'll spend more time in amazement at how God has taken such small things from your life and used them to such great effect.