

September 28th, 2025
Back to School Series-Week 4: God's Math

Welcome to our final period in the School of Discipleship! Today we are in Math class, and if you are anything like me, this may have been your least favorite subject in school. Google overwhelmingly reports the same- math is one of the top reported least favorite subjects in school. Anyone else?

In fact, I disliked math so much and found it so confusing, that for my senior year math requirement, I convinced my guidance counselor to let me take personal finance instead of pre-calculus. What's even funnier is that in college, at Messiah (now university), I also needed a math credit for my psychology degree and once again, chose personal finance. I was serious about choosing anything that wasn't full on math! (and guess who does the finances in our house now? David!)

For some of us, Math can be frustrating and boring, with its formulas and abstract symbols and letters. But you know what kind of math I CAN understand and get behind?

Girl Math.

Who's heard of it?

For example, Girl Math is if you buy something in cash, it's free. Because you already took the money out of your account.

Or- if you return an item you just bought on credit and they give you cash back, it's free money? It's money you didn't have before?

Like if you are considering buying a \$20 shirt and you figure you will wear it 2x, then the shirt really costs \$10. It's actually cheaper the more you wear it! And if you wear it more than 20 times, it's also basically free!

Or lastly, this one gets me on the Amazon same day delivery all the time, I spend more to get what I want to be delivered for free. Win win, because it's FREE shipping-look at what I'm saving!

Have you heard of this phenomenon?! It's a popular internet trend all over social media where girl consumers are creatively justifying their purchases. (something we NEVER do, right ladies?!)

These statements are made to seem logical and even beneficial to the spender, but it doesn't always make sense. Probably ever, if we could admit that.

Today, we're going to be talking about another kind of math that doesn't always ADD up.

God's Math.

If you thought about it, you could probably come up with some examples of God's Math in the bible that are hard to wrap your mind around.

Like in the story of creation, how there was nothing in existence, $0 + \text{His words} = \text{an entire universe created into existence}$. God plus nothing equals everything.

Or in the story in Daniel, where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace for not bowing down to the king. 3 men + a really hot fire = 4 people in the furnace when King Nebuchadnezzar peeks in because an angel is there with them.

Or what about the parable of the Lost sheep, where Jesus says that if a shepherd has 100 sheep and 1 goes missing, he won't stay with the 99, he'll go off and search for the 1 that's lost. $1 > 99$? Last time I checked, 99 sheep was a lot more than 1 sheep?

That's God Math

The God Math problem we're going to zero in on today to help us more fully understand God's math in His kingdom is the one where Jesus feeds the 5,000. Where Jesus takes 5 loaves of bread and 2 fishes and it equals enough food to feed more than 5,000 people.

5 loaves + 2 fish = 5,000+

Talk about mind blowing!

We can find this story in the book of John, chapter 6. Before we jump in, let me give you a little bit of back story first.

Jesus is traveling all around and doing his ministry. He is teaching and preaching and performing miracles everywhere He goes. We get this story after he turns water into wine, after he clears the temple, after his interaction with Nicodemus and his encounter with the Samaritan women at the well. This story also comes after he heals the government official's son in Cana and heals the lame man sitting by the pool of Bethesda.

I mention all of this to set the stage here: Jesus has certainly made a name for himself, and word is spreading. Thousands of people have heard of this man and His wonderful works. John also notes that the Passover Festival was near to this time, so there would have been even more people who would have gone out of their way on their travels to catch a glimpse of this Jesus guy.

Where our story picks up today, Jesus is on the Galilean shore and literally thousands of people have crowded around to hear what He is going to say.

If you have your Bibles, turn with me to John 6, or it will be on the screen. We're gonna jump right into the middle of the story where the math action is.

Let's start with verse 9-

"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there)." Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten."
(6:9-13)

What an amazing miracle! Jesus is able to take 5 small loaves of bread and 2 small fish and feed over 5,000 people! Truthfully, we don't fully know just how many were fed that day, because they were only counting the men, not the women and children when they said 5,000 people.

And did you catch what happened when everyone had had their fill? There were leftovers! Not just a little bit either, but 12 baskets left over of extra food. When Jesus says he's gonna provide, he provides!

You've probably heard this story before. It's one that is often found in children's bibles and Sunday school lessons, and it is a really cool miracle we see Jesus perform to meet some of humanity's very basic needs.

But actually, if we look at the exchange between the disciples right before hand, we can learn A LOT about God's math and God's ways.

Let's rewind to verse 5:

“When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many...” (John 6:5-9)

When Jesus saw all of the people gathering around Him, he asked Philip, one of his disciples where they can get some food. Why? Why does Jesus ask Philip, of all people where to secure some food?

Well, it could have been because Phillip was from Bethsaida, a neighboring shore town on the Sea of Galilee. Maybe he would have known where to get some food. It could have also been because Phillip was a fisherman in his previous profession, and so maybe he was going to go out and catch something for everyone to eat.

But what does the scripture say right there in what we just read?

Verse 6:-

“He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.”

So we don't know exactly why, but here, Jesus is asking Phillip where to get food as a test. And how does Phillip do on this test? Phillip responds with-

“It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” (7)

Jesus is testing Phillip's faith. Does Phillip believe that Jesus CAN do it? This response shows us that Phillip is thinking with his mathematical brain, and yea, realistically, it doesn't make sense. But with God math, it can!

Phillip has failed this test. Why did he respond that way? He could have said- “Surely, you are Jesus, the son of God. If you want to have all these people fed, you could speak and it would be so!”

But that's not how he responds. Matthew Henry says it this way, that Phillip took his master's question as if it was coming from an "ordinary *person*", [so] he looked for supply only in an *ordinary way*."

Yet Phillip was one of the first disciples called by Jesus. He has been with him for a while now. He had seen all the miracles we mentioned earlier as he has journeyed with Jesus. And yet, in this moment, when given the opportunity to show his faith in Jesus and what he can do, he fails.

But what happens next? Let's look at verse 8:

"Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many..."

Andrew steps in and takes a slightly different approach. He alerts Jesus to something that is present in the crowd, and although he can't wrap his brain around what they would do with that small amount in comparison to the large group, he offers it up to Jesus as a possible suggestion. He doesn't quite understand how the math is going to work out here, but he offers his suggestion in faith anyway.

Andrew shows some "possibility thinking" here. That's one of our core values here at CCC; we believe in a God in which nothing is too impossible for Him to accomplish.

And so, today, we need to ask ourselves- are we Phillip or are we Andrew? When it comes to God moving in our lives, in our families, in our culture, do we believe like Andrew, that God can do it? Or is our faith unsteady and unsure, like Phillip?

And let's not forget that we're not talking about blind faith here either. Phillip was WITH Jesus. He SAW the man get healed by the pool in Bethesda. He HEARD that the Government Official's son was healed even before the man made it home to him. He was at the wedding and TASTED the wine that was once water at the wedding.

He had been a bystander in ALL of this, and yet, when his faith was put to the test, he wavered. The math just didn't add up and he couldn't believe that there was more than just what meets the eye.

We could read this story and see these two disciples and we could judge Phillip for his lack of faith and praise Andrew for his.

But yet, haven't we all been Phillip?

Haven't we all doubted and not trusted what God was doing in our lives? Haven't we all had moments where we weren't really sure if God was gonna take something so broken and messy and redeem it for our good?

Yet despite, Phillips' moment of weakness, Jesus kept Phillip close and he was a part of Jesus' daily ministry. We see mention of him later in the book of John, when he's helping Greeks come to know Jesus in Cana and later, he is also present at both the last supper and gathered in the room with the other disciples after the ascension of Jesus in the book of Acts.

This should give us HOPE. And we can have that hope for 2 reasons:

1-We can have HOPE because our faith is not based on our **understanding** of Jesus.

We don't have to know the HOW, we just have to know the WHO.

Our salvation and relationship with Jesus isn't dependent on how well we "get it".

Hebrew 11:1 puts it this way:

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

We are not not getting into Heaven based on our understanding of Jesus. We have received the free gift of eternal salvation because we BELIEVE that Jesus is who he said he is and died to save us.

So many times we get wrapped up in the WHAT or the HOW, and because we can't make sense of it with our brains, we hold our hearts back from believing. In our pursuit to understand, we jade ourselves from being able to believe in the unbelievable.

There are MANY things in the Bible that scholars and theologians and people a lot smarter than me have tried to work out and make sense of for many years.

Maybe some of these have tripped you up before:

-The Trinity- God in three persons, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, 3 persons but also 1. How does that make sense?

-Jesus- He's fully %100 God yet also fully %100 human. How can something or someone be %200?

-The virgin Mary- wait, she was a virgin and she conceived with the Holy Spirit AND she was only like a teenager? How?

And that's just the tip of the iceberg! But you know what? No matter how much archaeological evidence they dig up or how many new scrolls they find will ever completely make it all make sense.

We can get hung up on these details so easily in our brains. I am so thankful that my salvation doesn't hang on UNDERSTANDING these things. It hangs on my believing them when it doesn't make sense.

Paul continues that chapter in in Hebrews by mentioning a whole bunch of people who walked and acted in faith, and adds in verse 6:

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (11:6)”

2- We can have HOPE because our faith in Jesus is also not based on the **SIZE** of our Faith.

We don't have to be the best player on the team, we just have to show up for the game, prepared and ready to play. _

Jesus reminds his disciples of that in the book of Matthew when he says:

“Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matt. 17:20-21)

Have you ever seen just how small a mustard seed is? (pic)

Google says they are like 1-3 millimeters in diameter, like the tip of a pen. That's pretty small.

Is your faith just at least that big?

You don't have to start out with anything more. Your faith can start there and then grow.

Like the mustard plant grows. (pic) Some mustard plants can even grow to be 6 feet tall, and in some cases, in optimal conditions, they can be closer to 10 ft. tall! What's

more, mustard plants can generate up to 10,000 mustard seeds in their lifetime. Talk about exponential growth!

Our faith doesn't have to be big and flashy. It doesn't have to be louder or brighter than anyone else's. We are all on our own journeys with Jesus and we just have to continue on toward pursuing a closer relationship with Him. It's one foot at a time. One moment at a time. And before we know it, we can look back and see the exponential growth in our own faith lives and those we have touched along the way.

So my question and challenge for today is this:

In what area of your life does your faith need to grow?

Often times, I find that my faith needs to be stretched and grown in those secret and vulnerable places where I don't want to let anyone in.

Like when we tried for 3 years to get pregnant and each new month brought new tears of frustration and hopelessness and ache in a heart that longed for a child. Now, 11 years later, we have 4 kids in the mix.

Or like when money was tight, with 1 income and 3 toddlers and we struggled to make ends meet so that I could be a stay-at-home mom. It felt like bills and dirty diapers were piling up all around us, and then a check came in the mail from a previous landlord that had forgotten to give us a security deposit back.

Or even most recently, back in February, the very same week we were announcing to our former church that we would be moving to Delaware, and the pediatrician found a lump on our youngest son's thyroid. He used the word cancer to describe it and we questioned if all plans needed to be halted so that we could focus on our family. But we felt like God was telling us to move forward anyway. We announced the move and 2 days later the ENT read the results, saying that it was nothing to be worried about. And he couldn't feel anything and was surprised that the pediatrician ever did.

I share these moments with you that stretched our faith not to show you how great we are at trusting or being faithful but to tell you that it's possible. It's possible to trust God with all and any of your struggles, whether they be fertility issues, financial stressors, or health concerns.

It's possible, in those deep-down places to hold on to faith and know that God has got you.

It's possible to let go, when what you want to do the most is hold on to control.

It's possible to surrender to God the things that mean the absolute most to you in your life- kids, marriage, family, even when it doesn't make sense.

It's possible because we believe in a God who does impossible things!

Paul gives us this really great reminder in Ephesians, so let's leave with this thought today, Ephesians 2:8-9-

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Praise God that our salvation has nothing to do with our hard works! And everything to do with His works.

That's God Math.

The math might not be mathing, but our savior is saving, and that's all that matters.

Let's pray.

Benediction: Phillip-What am I gonna do? OR Andrew-What is God gonna do?