

Unlocking the potential



“There’s a boy here . . .”

One of the few episodes from the life of Jesus that finds its way into all four Gospels is the story of the feeding of the hungry crowd. Each writer brings their own perspective to the story, and it is John who informs us that the source of the picnic, with which the people were eventually fed, was a young boy with a willingness to share it. (John 6:1-14) It is through Matthew, Mark and Luke’s accounts that we learn that the disciples first raised the issue of the crowd’s hunger not because they wanted them fed, but because they wanted them gone. (e.g. Mark 6:30-44) This was supposed to be **their** time; time alone with Jesus, and the crowd (including we assume the boy!) were an unwelcome intrusion.

So put yourself in the shoes of the disciples for a moment—by using the crowd’s need for food as a reason to “send the people away”, the only thing they wanted less than a boy with his own lunch, was a boy who is willing to share his lunch with others. Then look at it from the boy’s point of view—he’s in the way, a problem, and what he brings with him is of no value or worth. So long as the disciples’ agenda dictated the terms, his instructions were simple “go away and keep what you have to yourself.”

But then of course Jesus takes over, and turns the situation on its head. “You give them something to eat . . . go and find what you have . . .” and similar questions suddenly place the boy centre-stage, and makes what he has in his hands the most important commodity around.

This may not be the way we immediately interpret this story, but as we explore our NWBA theme “unlocking the potential,” it asks us some powerful questions. What do we have in our hands? Have we too easily assumed the gifts, experiences and resources that we have to offer don’t fit with a particular religious agenda? And for those of us in positions of leadership and influence, the questions are even more challenging. Are our agendas and assumptions, crowding out the gifts and resources that others have to offer? Are we so set on a course of our own making that we overlook potential of others?

One of the ways in which we have summarised “Unlocking the Potential” is to “develop the vision for our local church around the resources that God has given us, not the things don’t have,” and this story from the Gospels is a powerful reminder of why that’s important.

Unlocking the Potential invites us to ask ourselves 5 key questions:

How can those who are appointed as leaders, equip and release others in God’s service?

How can God use the gifts of everyone to build his Church?

How can we work together as local churches to more fully realise the potential of who we are together?

Do we need to learn to do things differently, if we are to recognise and release the gifts and resources that God has given us in one another?

What resources do we need and can we share as God’s people together?

