

Harvest Appeal

Harvest talk 2024



What is in your hands?

You will be familiar with the phrase, 'use what you have in your hands'.

It implies, use what you already have available to you. Perhaps it first requires us to ask ourselves: what do I have in my hands? What do I have available to me?

As with many idioms we use today, this originates in the Bible. It was in Exodus that we heard Moses question his leadership abilities and God responded by saying, 'What is that in your hand?' What seemed insignificant to Moses, a staff, a tool of his trade, when used in God's strength, was powerful. God asks us to look at what we have in our hands.

Moses' story is not the only time that we are taught about using what we have in our hands in God's strength.

In the gospels, we also have the example of feeding the five thousand.

The passage in Mark describes a situation where there was a great need: There was a spiritual hunger – people were following Jesus, seeking his teaching. There was material hunger – people were hungry for physical healing and hungry for food.

In other gospel accounts, when this story is told, it says Jesus healed the sick.

As this story goes on, we see he is concerned that they are hungry for food too. Jesus is not only concerned with the spiritual side of their lives but also their physical needs as well. He demonstrates clearly that God is concerned about every aspect of a person's life and wants to meet all our needs.

Firstly, Jesus recognises the need of his disciples to rest. So he takes them to a remote place. However, when they get there, the place is less remote than they were expecting, as thousands of people had gathered with a spiritual hunger that only Jesus could satisfy. 'When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.'



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As the day drew on, the still tired and probably hungry disciples encouraged Jesus to send the people away to find food. They said in verse 36, 'This is a remote place, and it's already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.' What the disciples failed to recognise, and we often overlook as well, is that the answer to this problem was already in their hands. It just needed Jesus to reveal and multiply it.

Therefore, to deal with the dilemma, Jesus challenged the disciples to take action with him asking, 'How much bread do you have?' In other words, 'What do you have in your hands?' It was almost laughable. A few fish and just five loaves – very little to feed over five thousand people.

And then we see something amazing happen: Jesus took the five loaves and two fish. He looked up to heaven, broke it and gave thanks. After he blessed the food, he gave it to the disciples to distribute it. Jesus began by addressing their immediate need. He called the disciples to action, took what they had in their hands, and multiplied it. Next to nothing became so much that the disciples ended up picking up the leftovers and filling 12 baskets.

It's the same today:

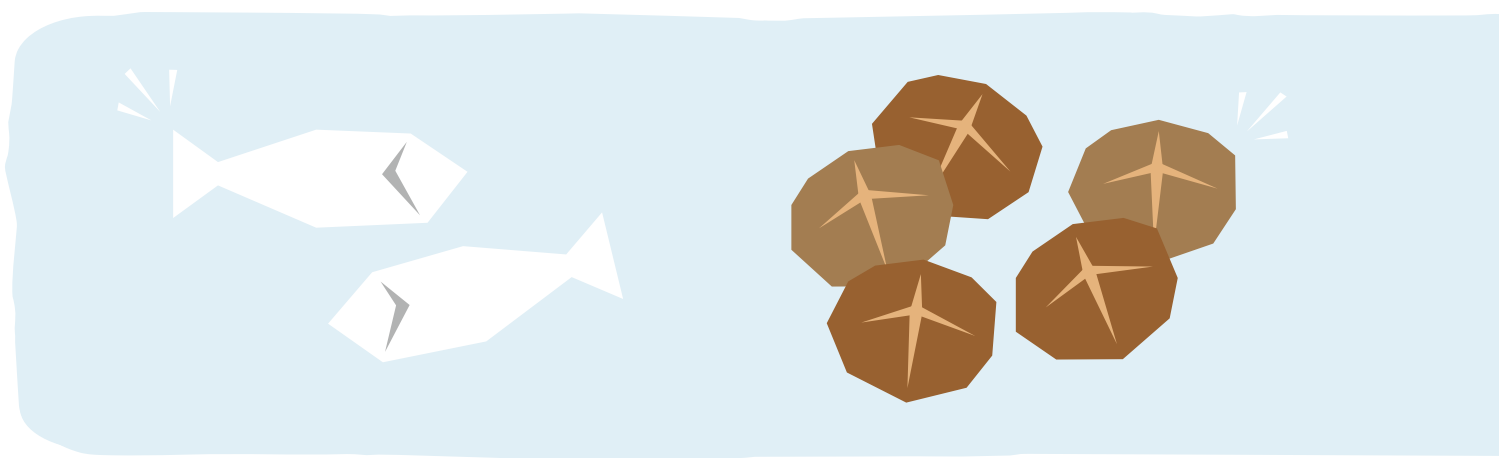
Spiritual hunger – the world is full of people hungry for spiritual reality, for hope, for peace and meaning to life. Whatever the national statistics are, the church is growing rapidly across large parts of the world.

Material hunger – across the world, many people are living in extreme poverty, on less than \$2 (c.£1.57) a day.

The feeding of the 5,000 is one of the Bible studies used in Tearfund's Transforming Communities training. This training equips local churches to lead their communities out of extreme poverty and create lasting change in their communities. It starts by studying God's word, in this example asking those participating, 'What do you have in your hands?'

This may seem like a strange question to ask someone living in extreme poverty. Someone like Isaac (who we will hear from in a moment).

Isaac lives in South Sudan. In 2016, when conflict broke out, Isaac and his family had no choice but to leave their home and seek refuge in Uganda. Later, when they returned to South Sudan, all that they had built up there as a livelihood had been destroyed.



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Let's hear Isaac's story – Play video

Isaac experienced the support of his local church. Through training and Bible study, he learnt about the God-given resources he had in his hand. This story wonderfully illustrates how Tearfund works. At the heart of Tearfund's Transforming Communities work, the local church helps people see their situations differently and focus not on what they don't have, but on what they do have and what they can do by working together.

This brings about a change of mindset, which results in extraordinary transformation. This is what happened to Isaac!

Isaac learned to see what resources God had given him, just as Moses used the staff in his hand and the disciples used the offering of five loaves and two fish.

Using these resources, Isaac can feed his family and pay for his children to go to school, giving them hope of a secure future.

This approach supports communities to rewrite their own stories, building a future filled with hope and opportunity.

Tearfund wants to see more people like Isaac experience whole-life transformation. Isaac's story is just one example of the need we see in the world and, like the disciples, we can be overwhelmed as to how to respond. One of Tearfund's partners in Rwanda describes the church as a dormant giant: once awakened, it can bring transformation to any community.

Tearfund has a vision to see 250,000 churches become transformation centres in their communities, and Tearfund invites the local church, that's you and me, to be part of this.

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Can we follow Jesus' instruction to his disciples and focus on what we do have, rather than what we don't have? Is it time to act and see how God multiplies and uses what he has given us?

£24 could equip one church leader to lead lasting transformation in their community, releasing people like Isaac to overcome extreme poverty.

As well as giving, Tearfund greatly value our prayers.

Prayer points

Tearfund, through the local church, has a vision to establish a lasting, hope-filled future for all. This will happen one transformed life at a time, by:

Breaking the cycle of poverty and hunger.
Restoring broken relationships with God, others, creation and ourselves.

We believe that by the power of God at work through the church, using the gifts that God has placed into each of our hands, we can overcome extreme poverty. With your support, we can see relationships restored and lasting transformation.



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