

I learned my multiplication tables two years before most students learned their multiplication tables in the Omaha Public Schools. The reason for that was the fact that my brother, two years older than me, had real trouble when his class was learning the multiplication tables. Night after night after night, week after week after week either my Mom or Dad would sit down with my brother after dinner and lift up multiplication flash cards. Many nights I was stuck at the dinner table "finishing" my meal since I was not a clean platter. I would hear  $3 \times 7 = 21$ ,  $4 \times 8 = 32$ ,  $9 \times 3 = 27$  and so on. Sometimes my brother got on a roll but I always knew that when they got to  $7 \times 8$  that he would get stuck and being a squirrely little brother I would shout out 56! Since my big brother was better at everything than me I took great delight in the fact I learned to multiply quicker than him. I am sure my presence did not help the learning process.

That memory came to mind as I read about the multiplication principle that Jesus shares. He says,  
"Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,  
it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

How might our lives, single grains, multiply and bear much fruit? I think it can happen as we give away two of our most valuable possessions; time and effort. It is good and healthy to engage in our primary work. It is valuable to enjoy quality time with family and friends. It is necessary to occasionally pamper ourselves. Yet, it is important to give away some of our valuable free time in an effort to help others. That is when our single grain multiplies and bears much fruit.

Netflix, the streaming video service, has a new series entitled "My Next Guest Needs No Introduction." It is hosted by David Letterman, retired late night television host, as he interviews famous folk. The episodes are infrequent as he only hosts an interview once or twice a year. A recent guest was the actor George Clooney. Most of us know him as an actor, director or producer of movies. He gained wide recognition in his role as Dr. Doug Ross on the long-running medical drama *ER* from 1994 to 1999. While working on *ER*, he began attracting a variety of leading roles in films. In addition, a number of publications named him "Sexiest Man Alive" over the years. He is a talented and good looking guy. If that were the whole of his life Jesus would look at it and say he is like a grain of wheat that has remained a single grain. Yet, if you know more of the George Clooney story, which brought forth David Letterman's interest, you know it has produced much fruit, the multiplication principle that Jesus was teaching.

For the past ten years Clooney has focused a good deal of his energy on correcting the abuse of power and the mass atrocities perpetrated by the governmental leadership in South Sudan. The president and vice-president have sent troops to take land from people who have lived on it for generations. Oftentimes this has meant killing hundreds and thousands of people. What is the interest in the land? It was found to have oil underneath it. He started off in 2007 by producing documentaries about the atrocities being committed by the Sudanese government so the world might know. Genocide was happening, tens of thousands of people were being killed, and refugees by the millions were crossing borders in search for safety.

Clooney's efforts produced many newspaper headlines but nothing changed. Frustrated, in 2010 Clooney took the next step as he conceived of and, with John Prendergast (human rights activist) founded the "Not on Our Watch Project" which sent up satellites with the aim to detect and deter mass atrocities along the border regions Sudan and South Sudan. It was more information for the Washington D.C., the powers in Europe as well as the United Nations. Once again, action for change did not come about.

In this time period Clooney traveled to cities and towns in the affected regions. He was oftentimes warned not to visit one village or another because of the danger being attacked. The warning became a reality once as the group of SUV's he was in was pulled over. All in his party were forced out of their vehicles, down on their knees and Clooney had the butt of AK47 rifle pressed on his chest as they were being questioned. Clooney grew up going to church each and every week with his family. I wonder if the words of Jesus came to "Very truly, I

tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” He was there to help, he was there seeking justice, he hoped his actions would produce fruit and death does not come much closer than to have an AK47 rifle poked in your chest. Obviously, he survived.

Upon reflection he decided his efforts were sharing information but having limited impact for positive change. Yet Clooney was not deterred. He decided to use a different strategy. He hired accountants. Less chance of coming face to face with an AK47 rifle when one works with accountants. In this case, he decided to work with forensic accountants from the FBI. They traced the dirty oil money of the political leaders in South Sudan, the same one who were behind the mass atrocities and even acts of genocide in their acquisition of oil rich lands. These criminal leaders were placing hundreds of millions of dollars in large banks around the world while tens of thousands of people died and millions became refugees. After the forensic accountants did their work Clooney visited the banks that received tens and sometimes hundreds of millions of dollars from these politicians. He showed the bankers the forensic evidence that the bankers no doubt already knew. They were dealing in tainted, blood soaked money. Then Clooney gave each bank the option to either work with the Treasury department and freeze the funds or find themselves on the front page of the Wall Street Journal. The banks cooperated. Positive change is now emerging.

Clooney could have lived the life of an international movie star. That’s a special life. But such a life remains a single grain. Instead, he has sacrificed a great deal of his time, his treasure and even his safety in helping innocent victims in the South Sudan. He has produced an untold amount of fruit for people in war torn countries like Sudan, South Sudan and recently he has been working with refugees from Syria.

This is the multiplication principle that Jesus teaches at work.

“Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,  
it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

How might our lives, single grains, multiply and bear much fruit? It happens as give away two of our most valuable possessions, time and effort. Let me reiterate, it is good and healthy to enjoy quality time with family and friends. It is good and healthy to occasionally pamper ourselves.

Yet it is also important to give away some of our valuable free time in an effort to help others. That is when our single grains multiply and produce fruit.

Please think of how might the multiplication principle of Jesus works in your life. I have thought about that as I have sat in on Benson Refugee Task Force (BART) meetings recently. They are doing some exciting things. Most of us know of the Clothes Closet that BART hosts three times a year. Many of you have volunteered your time or donated your clothes. We will be having an “Undie Sunday” for it in April. The multiplication effect of the Clothes Closet is tremendous. Think for the 300 children who received new winter coats last November from the clothes closet. The coats not only kept them warmth but also feed their self esteem as they could wear a new coat to school over the winter. Good self esteem impact learning during a school day. The multiplication principle of Jesus has an exponentially larger total than we might imagine. That is a way forward for God’s goodness in this world.

The BART Board has been recently being reviewing how other parts of their program can produce fruit. In that effort they reviewed the citizenship classes they offer. The citizenship classes offered by BART held on Wednesday evenings at the library in Benson experienced sporadic attendance. What was the problem? The classes were held at a time and location that was convenient for the volunteers but not the target audience, refugees. What time might be convenient? One group suggested after their prayer gathering on Saturday evening at 8:30 p.m. Another group suggested after their worship service on Sunday afternoon at 3 p.m. Not the most convenient times for the volunteers.

Yet, with a sacrificial spirit from the volunteers the class times are changing. We have young adults giving up 90 minutes of their Saturday nights to teach citizenship classes. We are looking for people to give up 90 minutes on Sunday afternoons to teach citizenship classes. Maddie Malone, who grew up in this church, is on the BART

Board. She has teamed up with Marjorie Shreve and Pam Font-Gable to establish citizenship classes that are user friendly for refugees. As these classes thrive they will bear abundant fruit that will provide multiple blessings to the families of the refugees that become citizens.

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How might our lives, single grains, multiply and bear much fruit? I think it can happen as we give away two of our most valuable possessions; time and effort. It is good and healthy to engage in our work. It is valuable to enjoy quality time with family and friends. It is necessary to occasionally pamper ourselves.

Yet, it is important to give away some of our valuable free time in an effort to help others. That is when our single grains multiply and bear much fruit.

In what ways can each of us give away some of our valuable free time in an effort to help others? As we answer that question the fruit producing principle of Jesus comes to life.