

WHEN THE NUMBERS DO NOT WORK**By C.C. Simpson**

It usually starts with a screen glowing back at you. A spreadsheet. A forecast. A set of numbers that refuse to behave. The margin is thin. The pressure is real. People are looking to you for an answer, and everything in front of you says the same thing: This is not enough.

That moment is common in the marketplace. It is also sacred ground, the place where beliefs and values and convictions are put to the test. The question is, will we pass the test – or fail?

This is not a new problem. It is as old as time. We see it often in the Bible. For example, in John 6, Jesus stands before a massive crowd. Thousands of people. Real hunger. Real need. And before He does anything miraculous, He asks a question that feels almost imprudent: “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” (John 6:5).

One of His disciples, Philip, does what leaders are trained to do. He calculates. He checks the purse. He runs the numbers and delivers the verdict. Even if they spend everything, he concludes, it will not be enough. Disciple Andrew tries a different angle. He spots what little they do have. A boy. Five loaves. Two fish. But he can’t even finish the sentence without admitting defeat. “What are they for so many?” (John 6:9).

In his account, the disciple John pulls back the curtain: “He (Jesus) said this to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do” (John 6:6). That line changes everything. Jesus is not confused. He is not asking because He lacks a plan. He already knows the outcome. The question is not about bread. It is about belief. Philip brings calculation. Andrew brings initiative. Both are reasonable. But both fall short. Not because they are wrong, but because they stop where human logic stops.

This is where many professionals live. We are disciplined. Trained. Competent. And when pressure hits, we instinctively default to control. More effort. Better planning. One more attempt to make the numbers bend. John 6 exposes that lie. There are moments when leadership is no longer about fixing the problem but about surrendering it. Jesus does not dismiss what is offered. He receives it. He gives thanks. Then He does what only He can do.

Abundance does not come from better math. It comes from placing what you have into the hands of the Lord, who already knows what He will do. In the marketplace, faith is not tested when the numbers work. Faith is tested when they do not. When the plan feels thin. When the solution feels embarrassing. When your best effort falls short. That is often where Jesus is most determined to show Himself faithful. When the numbers don’t work, the Lord may be testing not your ability, but your trust.

Leadership Takeaways:

1. Not every leadership challenge is meant to be solved. Some are meant to be surrendered.

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2. Competence is a gift, but it becomes a liability when it replaces trust.
3. Jesus asks questions to expose where we place our confidence.
4. God can do more with surrendered resources than we can do with perfected plans.

© 2026. C.C. Simpson is dedicated to fostering a bold and triumphant Christian faith within the global marketplace. Before becoming President of CBMC International, Chris dedicated 28 years to a distinguished career in the public sector – as a Commanding Officer in the U.S. Marine Corps; and serving in the U. S. Secret Service, responsible for protecting seven American presidents and leading elite teams in complex, high-stakes international missions. With his wife Ana, Chris resides in Boca Raton, Florida.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Where are the “numbers not working” in your current season of leadership? Be specific. What pressures, limitations, or expectations are revealing how you normally respond when control starts slipping?
2. In John 6, Philip calculates and Andrew improvises. Which response do you default to under pressure and why? How has that instinct served you well, and where might it be quietly limiting your dependence on Christ?
3. What does surrender look like in the marketplace without turning into passivity or irresponsibility? Where is the line between faithful stewardship and faithless control in your role right now?
4. If Jesus already “knows what He will do,” how should that truth change the way you carry leadership weight this week? What would it look like to lead from trust rather than fear when the outcome is uncertain?

Challenge for This Week

This week, identify one leadership situation where the numbers do not work. Instead of fixing it immediately, bring it honestly before the Lord in prayer. Acknowledge your limits and offer Him what you have, even if it feels insufficient. Then take one concrete step of trust. Release control where you normally grip it tightly. Obey where fear would push you to manage outcomes.

Finally, share this situation with your CBMC team or a trusted discipleship mentor. Invite prayer and accountability. Let others help you discern where faith is being tested. By the end of the week, pay attention to what changes, not just around you, but within you. When numbers do not work, God is often working most deeply in the leader. Lead with trust. The Lord already knows what He will do.

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages: Exodus 4:1-7, 16:1-18, 17:1-7; Deuteronomy 8:1-5; Isaiah 48:10; Matthew 16:8-10

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