

8. Jesus Goes Fishing

Luke 5:1-11

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

Have you ever sat down and strategized/prayed about how to introduce a person to the new life that God offers? It is wise to think through how you will bring up the topic of spiritual things, and how to approach each person as an individual when you invite him to follow Christ. Although there are essential key elements of truth to communicate, there is no "magic formula" when it comes to leading someone to Christ. When we observe the way in which Jesus called Peter to Himself, we can see a strategy of incremental, revelatory experiences that Peter had before he finally wholeheartedly followed Christ. Step by step, Jesus drew Peter to himself, revealing one truth after another. The Lord chose his disciples carefully and prayerfully, and He found different ways to reach them just where they were. He does the same with each of us. He meets us where we are. If you consider yourself to be a Christian, then know this: Christ pursued you. He reached out to you. Your decision, i.e., your commitment to Christ, did not happen randomly.

Wouldn't you like to have known the story that was unfolding "behind the scenes" when you decided to follow Christ? It may have been sudden or a gradual process of discovery. It may have happened through years of hearing the Word of God or on a single night as you reached out in desperation to God, but for each one of us, the Holy Spirit was working, pointing us to Christ, drawing us to the Father. I am confident that there has been angelic intervention, as angels guarded your steps and protected you along the journey until this very day! (Luke 4:10). Every person's story of salvation is different. Let's study how Jesus caught Peter in His net:

¹One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, ²he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets.

Jesus drew the crowd of listeners to where Peter was busy working. Matthew tells us that Simon Peter was there with his brother, Andrew (Matthew 4:18). Both of them were fishermen, and both of them were from Bethsaida (John 1:44), which means, *Place of Fishing*. Jesus chose to preach the Word of God right beside the Sea of Galilee (The Sea of Galilee is also known as the Lake of Gennesaret) rather than from the top of a hill. It would seem that He chose that place deliberately to bring Peter under the sound of His message. Peter and Andrew were listening to Him while at the same time cleaning their nets. □

Why do you think they would be washing their nets? What was the significance that Jesus came to Peter when he was cleaning his nets? □

I was brought up as a commercial fisherman working with my father on his thirty-nine-foot trawler named the *Why Worry*. (When I was in my twenties, we had the *Jane Marie* built—a forty-five-foot fiberglass trawler). My father used to take me out fishing with him from the age of six. I remember that the pay for my day's work was fifty pence in English money, which is the equivalent of approximately seventy-five cents in American money. We used to sail at 3 a.m., which meant I had to get up at 2:30 a.m. We would get home about 5 p.m. He fished six days a

week, and I went along with him one day at the weekend. When I left school, I also worked with him for a few years, of course, for more money! □

The only time we ever washed our nets was when we were putting them away. The rats would get at the nets and eat the small weed, mollusks and sea anemones that would cling to the nets. In eating the seaweed and other sea creatures caught in the net, we would have large holes that we would have to mend. In cleaning the nets, we would spread them out over a large piece of ground to dry and then shake out the weed, one piece of the net at a time. We would use different sets for different seasons of the year. We couldn't catch the same fish all through the year. Of course, I am talking about the east coast of England, not the Sea of Galilee, but I suspect that it was a similar situation. Some fish could be caught more readily at certain seasons of the year and different phases of the moon. The feeding habits of fish would change. □

On the Sea of Galilee, fishermen would mostly use a purse seine net, which is a long sheet of netting with weights attached to the bottom and floats at the top. One end of the net would be thrown out first and would have a buoy attached. The boat with the net being parceled out would go around in a large circle, hopefully encircling a school of fish. As the boat came back to the buoy, they would pick up both ends of the net from the bottom first, which would form a huge bag. The walls of the net would then be pulled into the boat or, in some cases, from the beach with the fish. Today, the fish are hauled out mechanically with hydraulic winches and pulley blocks.

³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." ⁵Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets" (Luke 5:3-5).

Try and imagine what it was like for Peter. He had been fishing all night (v. 5), and now after cleaning their nets of all weed, he was exhausted and wanted to go home. I suspect, also, that he was discouraged and disappointed with catching nothing, and that they were cleaning their nets because they were finished with them for that time. As a fisherman in England, we used different nets in the summer than in the winter months. We are like Peter. When we see little fruit from what we are doing, we sometimes want to give up. Many people are stuck in jobs that seem to have little success, and so they get into maintenance mode, just keeping the motion going and the wheels of daily life turning.

When a fisherman comes back to port, it is such a disappointment to him to have caught no fish and admit to a failed fishing expedition, but this was precisely the situation with Peter. The very last thing he wanted to do was to go out into the boat again! He was probably tired after fishing all night, but since Jesus had healed his mother-in-law, he had no option but to respond graciously and obediently. He got into the boat with Jesus and pushed the boat out from the shore, threw down the anchor, and began to listen to Jesus' talk.

Scripture does not tell us what Jesus taught, but it may have been something that would have prepared the way for what Peter was about to experience! As Peter sat there in the boat, probably

with Andrew, his brother, their hearts were moved at the message of this new itinerant preacher as He sat in the boat and taught them. From the few yards from the beach, they were about to witness a miracle. □

One problem with fishing, which is peculiar to the Sea of Galilee, is the fact that there is little movement of the water, due to it being an inland lake. There is an outlet, the River Jordan, which flows down to the Dead Sea, but in an inland freshwater lake, such as the Sea of Galilee, there is hardly any tidal flow, which means that the water has very little silt and is quite clear and if one fished during the day, the fish could see the net and avoid it. Fish do have a brain! They are smarter than we give them credit. When catching Mullet in England, I would sit on the stern of our boat and watch the Mullet jump over the headline to escape our net. While living in Israel for a year and a half, I had the opportunity to go out with the local Galilee fishermen from Tiberius, and I asked them why they fished during the night. They replied that it was impossible to catch anything during the day, the fish would avoid their nets. During the night the fish couldn't see the net and could be caught easier.

I have found that the Lord will often use some means to get our attention away from the daily grind of everyday living. With Moses, it was a burning bush; with David, it was a Goliath blaspheming the Lord; with Abraham, it was God directing his attention to the stars and telling him that his seed would be more than the stars of heaven, that certainly caught his attention! (Genesis 22:17). With Peter, it was a tremendous amount of fish just when he had begun to think that they had overfished the Sea of Galilee to such an extent that now nothing could be caught at the best time of the night.

How wrong he was! The Lord promised that if you dedicate your heart to Him and meditate (think on, mull over) His Word, and be obedient to what you learn of Him, you will have success. The Lord's promise to Joshua was, **“Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful”** (Joshua 1:8).

How did Jesus get the disciples attention? What events has God used in your life to get your attention? □

As we have said, God has a way of getting our attention. With me, it was a near-death experience that made me stop and think about eternity. With Peter, it was a progression of things he had witnessed. There was the demon cast out in the synagogue, his mother-in-law being healed in front of him, a full evening of healings and deliverances of many people from sicknesses and demons, and now an, impossible event that showed him the reality that Jesus really can do remarkable things when people walk in obedience to Him. Jesus told Peter to go out into the deep water. The Sea of Galilee measures a depth of 200 feet. There's no way, Peter probably thought, that his nets would go anywhere near down to those depths, and during the hot part of the day, that would be where the fish would be kept cool. That would require a lot of depth to their net, which is very unlikely that he had, but because Jesus had said so, he stepped out in obedience. Jesus was a builder/carpenter. What did He know about where the fish were and how to catch them? Peter was not expecting to catch one fish. After all, he was the expert when it

came to fishing. What would this builder-come-rabbi, know about fishing? It was a good thing that Peter obeyed, despite his doubts.

⁶When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. ⁸When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. ¹¹Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

That day Jesus was after catching more than fish. He wanted to catch men. The Lord revealed Himself incrementally to them. First, He asked if He could sit in their boat and talk to the people. Then, He asked Peter to put out a little from shore. Then, He asked them to row out into the deep water and let down the nets for a catch (v. 4). Notice, also, the name change of Simon to Simon Peter (v. 8). How graciously Jesus gave Simon the new name of how Christ sees him—from now on Simon is called Peter, the *rock* or *stone*. He involved them in a miracle. The Lord didn't have to catch fish. He had much bigger things on His mind. We need to be involved with Him in His enterprise to win the lost.

The Lord loves to involve His people in His work of reaching the lost. The famous American evangelist Billy Graham was won to the Lord by a youth leader who asked Billy to drive a few of his youth to a Tent Crusade. He probably knew that Billy would not be ready if he were to ask him outright to attend the meeting, but at least in this way, he sought to develop a relationship and hopefully, down the road, to get a chance to share more. He knew that Billy was a helpful boy and would not refuse to be the driver. Of course, once Billy was there, he had nothing to do so he listened and gave his life to Christ. God had more in store for him than just driving the van!

Sometimes, you can take a little step for God, and the Lord will do the rest, showing us that He can do abundantly more than we could ever ask or think. We need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. It is right to scheme and pray and work with the Holy Spirit in the winning of our friends and loved ones to the Lord. You never know what part you may play, knowingly or unknowingly, in someone else's journey! □

[What do you read into Peter's reaction to the catch of fish \(v.8\)? Why did Simon Peter fall to his knees and ask Jesus to depart from him?](#)

This reaction by Peter is seen sometimes in the Scriptures. When the holiness of God confronted Isaiah the prophet, his response was: "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (Isaiah 6:5). When John the Apostle saw a vision of the resurrected Christ in the Book of Revelation, he fell at his feet as though dead (Revelation 1:17). Moses was afraid even to look when God spoke to him from the burning bush (Exodus 3:6), and when Joshua, the servant of Moses, brought the children of Israel to the River Jordan to cross over it, he had the Commander of the Lord's army appear to Him. Joshua's reaction was to fall facedown to the

ground in reverence (Joshua 5:14). □

If the Lord appeared before any of us, we would also do the same. When we see the light of the holiness of God, we are "undone." Our sinfulness is revealed, but God does not leave us there. He changes our name, our very nature. **"Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing"** (Habakkuk 1:13). Sinfulness cannot bear the presence of God. The evidence convinced Peter in front of him that Jesus was more than a mere mortal. He was persuaded that before him was God in human flesh! At a later date, when asked as to who he thought Jesus was, **Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"** (Matthew 16:16). The evidence as to the true identity of Jesus had slowly become evident to him, even at this early acquaintance of Peter with Jesus. Simon Peter saw himself as a sinful human needing cleansing from his sin.

What Jesus did in telling him where and when to put down the nets was quite impossible in Peter's eyes. First, it was during the day. Secondly, Peter had never seen a catch like this. They did not have nets strong enough or boats big enough. This catch was supernatural, and Peter knew it! Thirdly, Peter's nets were not able to go to the depths where the fish were keeping cool in the heat of the day. Here he was stunned at more fish than he had probably seen in his whole life for a single catch. He frantically called John and James, his partners in the other boat, to come and help them because the sheer numbers of fish brought the boat with only inches away from the water coming over the sides!

Even after the other boat came, they had so many fish, that both boats were close to sinking (v. 7). The miracle was not only the number of fish that were caught but also the fact that Jesus could tell Peter at that exact time, "Let out your nets for a catch." Jesus knew that the fish were there at that precise time. When we obey promptings from the Lord, we often find that the result will be far higher than what we would have been able to accomplish in our routines. □

Peter probably could reason away his mother-in-law's healing, and maybe even the deliverance of the demon in the synagogue, but he was struck with his sinfulness at the impossibility of so many fish caught during the day. He fell to his knees in godly reverential fear at what he had witnessed. Jesus told him: **"Don't be afraid, from now on you will catch men"** (v. 11).

What Did Peter Learn from Jesus that Day?

1. The Lord is well able to appear to people and win them to Himself by dreams and visions, but He chooses to call us to work with Him. His commission to the Church is to make disciples of all nations, not just converts, but to teach them how to walk with Him, just as Jesus taught the early disciples (Matthew 28:18-20).
2. The Lord will often cause a lack of satisfaction and barrenness to come to what we are doing to show us where He wants to involve us. □
3. The Lord will sometimes wait until we are obedient in the small directives before He shows us new things. Lessons that are not learned the first time, often means that you have to go around the mountain again until the lesson is learned.

4. Peter could not reach beyond where he was until he left the fishing industry behind. Think of it: he had the greatest catch ever, and he left it all behind and stretched out to receive the new thing that God had for Him.
5. Dare to reach out into the deep—don't stick to the shallow things of little faith. Dare to risk it all for the glory of God! The man that started the Vineyard group of churches, John Wimber, used to say, Faith is spelled, R.I.S.K. William Carey the missionary to India, said, "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God."
6. In a parallel passage in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus said to Peter, "**Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men**" (Matthew 4:19). When we dare to follow Christ wholeheartedly, Jesus will *Make us* become what He wants us to be. There are lessons along the way of life that will make us more and more like to Himself. □

It can be scary to leave the place of the shallows to follow out into the deep, but that's where the big fish are. That's where we shall experience significant changes to our character and grow more to be like Jesus, and I think that is what all of us would like. I remember many years ago while I still worked on my father's fishing boat with him, the Lord spoke to me from the above verse, challenging me to leave my father's fishing boat behind and follow Christ. I didn't know anything other than being at sea. I just knew that I had to follow His leading. My intellect, or it could have been the enemy, said, "What on earth are you doing?" How are you going to earn a living now—you have never worked on the shore, never worked in an office, who's going to employ you? You've never been to college to learn a trade." □

I didn't know what I was going to do, but I had to leave my father's boat behind and push out into the deep to see what God was going to make of me. I began washing windows for a living—it was a very humiliating time in my life, but learning humility was good for the soul, so I leaned into it and later became a painter and decorator while I learned the Word of God, listening to teaching tapes while I painted. I started my own painting business to support us when church planting. Looking back more than thirty years later, I can testify that God is well able to make of us what He wants us to be. The lessons of God have taken me deeper and deeper into Christ—not that I am perfect—that would be foolish, but I am ever striving to fulfill His calling on my life, and I trust that you are, too.

[Have you ever been challenged to step out into something new, e.g., a new career, a new location, or anything that you had never tried to do before? How did you meet that challenge?](#)

You will never regret leaving the place where you are comfortable in order to respond to Christ's invitation; "Come, follow me." The things of God come to those who respond in simple obedience. One would say, "How can I learn to minister like Jesus?" Respond to His call, do whatever He tells you to do. Jesus would say, "Come follow me, and I will **make you** to become...fishers of men." The primary way that we can develop a life of intimacy with Christ today is by spending time listening to Him, by reading the Word of God, by prayer, and seeking to draw near to Him. Surround yourself with others who are encouragers and lovers of God. He will make you into the person you are to be and direct your life into one of fruitfulness. He who knows you best will invite you to walk with Him and work with Him.

Peter was destined for a new mission in his life. For that new mission, Jesus changed his name from Simon to Peter. The name Simon was a popular name at that time. It was the Greek form of the Hebrew name; "Shim'on," which means "he has heard." Jesus changed his name to Peter, meaning "rock." One thing that we see throughout Scripture is that, when God changed someone's name, He was changing that person's destiny. It was a new beginning and a new mission for Peter. God has a destiny and a purpose for you, too. □

Today, we are actively involved with a net that God is using to reach out into the nations where little is known of the Savior:

⁴⁷Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:47-50).

The end will come when the Gospel net is full, and the fishermen will pull it up on the shore—what a day that will be! Everyone who is actively involved in the task of “fishing for men” will be greatly rewarded by the Master.

Prayer: Father, help us to hear You and to respond. Show us that You have more in store for us than what we could imagine. You can do far above what we could ask or think, so we pray that You would give us the gift of faith. Help us to move in the faith that we have to leave behind the things that would hold us back, and say “yes” to You, to all that You have prepared for us.

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