

## INTRODUCTION

Fishermen have a reputation for being notorious liars. In my barber shop there is a plaque that reads, "The only time a fisherman tells the truth is when he calls another fisherman a liar." That may not be an exaggeration. I had one fisherman tell me he caught a fish so big that when he took a picture of it, the picture itself weighed 11 pounds!

I did a lot of fishing with my dad when I was growing up. I loved to fish. As a young teenager, one of the first novels I read that I couldn't put down was Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. I didn't recognize if there was any irony or metaphorical truth in the book, I just remember being enthralled about a guy catching a fish too big to get into his boat. I don't do much fishing anymore, but I still love to go.

Today we are going to read about where the master fisherman, Simon Peter, gets a chance to fish with the Master of the Fish, the Lord Jesus. It's a great fish story but it isn't fiction or exaggeration. It is true.

Luke 5:1-11. One day Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fisherman, who were washing their nets. He 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. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So 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.

When Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up to shore, left everything and followed him.

In the Gospel According to Luke we are going to be exposed to many parables and many miracles. Today as we look at the miracle of the fish, there is an important Bible principle to note.

### **Note: There is a parable in every miracle of Jesus**

And we are going to see there is a miracle in every parable of Jesus as well. In other words, there are always deeper truths lying below the surface of Jesus' miracles and parables. When you take the time to dig a little deeper, you are richly rewarded. Now, on the surface, we have a very

interesting story about Simon Peter getting a fishing lesson from Jesus. But there is something else here I want to expose to you. Simon Peter also gives us a lesson about

## **SEVEN STEPS TO BECOMING A FULLY DEVOTED FOLLOWER OF JESUS**

As we study this miracle I would like to ask you to see how many of these steps you have taken.

### **1. Friendship with Jesus**

You will remember from the previous passage that Jesus already knew Simon. He had been a dinner guest in Peter's house, as well as healing his mother-in-law. They weren't strangers but Jesus had not yet called Peter to follow Him. At this stage, Peter was just curious about who this Healer really was. Early one morning, Jesus was standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee preaching to a crowd. The Sea of Galilee is also called Lake Gennesaret. It is a large freshwater lake 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. The surface of the Sea of Galilee is 680 feet below sea level so the climate is almost tropical. Peter had been fishing all night long, and as Jesus was preaching, he was busy cleaning and mending his nets. Can't you just see that rough old fisherman sitting there on a log working on his nets? You might say he was logged on to his network. Sorry.

Anyway, the crowd forces Jesus closer to the water. He sees Peter's boat and Jesus asks him for a favor. At this stage, Peter demonstrates friendship by allowing Jesus to step into his boat. Peter expertly maneuvers the boat a few yards from the shore and Jesus resumes His preaching. Try to picture that scene in your mind with Jesus sitting there with His voice carrying over the water. Aren't you glad you can be a friend with Jesus? The New Testament tells us one of the reasons Jesus was criticized by the religious leaders was because He was a friend of sinners. (Matthew 11:19) He wasn't some religious untouchable who refused to associate with bad people. If you are a man, you need to know Jesus was the kind of man's man who would attract a bunch of fishermen. Jesus spent much of His life in the outdoors and He appealed to men. He still appeals to real men today.

I am happy to tell you today that Jesus wants to be your friend. One of my all-time favorite songs goes, "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear." Do you need a friend? Jesus is waiting. But He wants to be more than just a friend. Peter didn't fully comprehend who Jesus was when he allowed Him to use his boat. Friendship with Jesus is only the first step in knowing Jesus in a personal way.

### **2. Failure without Jesus**

When Jesus suggests they do some more fishing after His message, Peter makes a confession of his own failure. Peter points out to the Lord he had been fishing all night and hadn't caught a single fish. Remember, this was Peter's occupation. He had a wife and perhaps some children. If he didn't catch fish, they didn't eat. Surely, Peter felt rotten about his failure to catch fish and to provide for his family. Actually, Peter's admission of failure is a step each of us must make before we can truly follow Jesus.

Peter fished all night and struck out. Fishermen don’t like to admit they haven’t caught any fish. One time when I was fishing with my dad, we were anchored in one of his “hot spots.” We had been fishing for a couple of hours and without even a nudge. One of my dad’s friends drifted by in his boat and asked him how many he had caught. My dad said, “Well, after I catch this next one, plus two more, I’ll have three.” Fishermen don’t like to spend time on the lake without catching fish.

Peter was simply learning a lesson Jesus would later express this way in John 15:5: “I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he shall bear much fruit. For without me, you can do nothing.” You can try all of your life to succeed without Jesus but sometime in your life you too must discover that without Jesus you can do nothing.

Don’t make the mistake of thinking Jesus only accepts people who “have it all together.” He prefers people who are honest enough to admit they have failed. You may be reading this and you have just lost your job and you feel like a failure. It could be that you are married and you and your mate have been trying to have children without success and you feel like such a failure. Some of you are the victims of failed marriages. It seems you have been working all night but your nets are empty. You feel frustrated because you seem to be stuck in a bad job or stuck in what you think is a bad relationship. Rather than feeling like there is no hope for you, I want to say, “Congratulations!” You are right on the same track Simon Peter was on. Before you can proceed with your steps of devotion, you must also admit you are an utter failure. Peter’s next step was

### **3. Faithfulness to Jesus**

After Jesus finished His message to the crowd on the shore, he gave Peter some unusual instructions. He told Peter to launch his boat out into the deep water and try fishing again. Peter’s response must be closely examined. If I had been in Peter’s sandals I probably would have said, “Jesus, I am the fishing expert. You stick to carpentry or to preaching. You leave the fishing to me.” Peter was an expert fisherman. He knew the best time to catch fish was at night. By the way, there are still commercial fishing boats that fish in the Sea of Galilee during the middle of the night. I’ve seen them. Peter also knew a good fisherman never fished out in the deep water. Instead, they fished in the shallow water because that’s where the fish fed. So Jesus told Peter to do two things that cut across the grain of everything he knew to be true about fishing.

But Peter said, “But because you say so, I’ll do it.” The same crowd that heard Jesus preach probably heard Jesus tell Peter to go out into the deep water and try again. They *knew* Peter knew it was the worse time and place to catch fish. So Peter’s response is not just a private statement. It is what we might call a public profession of faith.

So against Peter’s better judgement, he maneuvered his boat out toward the deep water. We can learn a lesson here about the difference between faith and faithfulness.

#### **a. Faith says, “I believe your word.”**

Faith is absolutely essential in the Christian life. Hebrews 11:6 says that "without faith it is impossible to please God." But faith alone is not enough. Faith that does not translate into action is not full faith. If Peter had said, "Lord, you are right. I believe there are fish to be caught out there in that deep water. But I'm too tired to try it." Or "I'm sure there are fish out there as you say but I'm going to let the other fisherman have them." If that had been his response it would have been only partial faith.

Pay attention here. Some people believe there is a God; they believe there is a heaven and a hell; they believe it is possible to spend eternity in heaven—and they still aren't saved. Why? Because they never *act* on their faith. James, Jesus' half-brother, later wrote, "You believe there is one God? Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder. You foolish man, don't you know that faith without deeds is useless?" (James 2:19-20)

### **b. Faithfulness says, "I believe enough to obey."**

Another way to think of the word "faithful" is to turn it around and see "full faith." Peter's profession of faith is a great example to each of us. Peter had to ignore three voices in order to make his profession of faith. First, he ignored the voice of human reason. He was the fishing expert and everything he had ever been taught about fishing told him he wouldn't catch fish at that time at that location. Jesus' request seemed unreasonable. But Peter ignored the temptation to trust his own understanding. I'm reminded of that great verse in Proverbs 3:5 that says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." Some of you have read what God commands you to do, and your response is, "It doesn't seem reasonable to me." You need to say, like Peter, "I don't understand how it's going to happen. But because you say so, I will do what you say."

Some of you haven't obeyed the Lord simply because you can't understand *how* what He says to do will work for you. You haven't invited Christ into your heart because you don't understand how the death of Jesus on the cross can cleanse you of your sins. You haven't followed Him in believers' baptism because you don't understand why you should. You haven't starting giving God a regular percentage of your income because you can't calculate how God can make your 90% last longer than your 100% without Him. You are still waiting until you can figure it out. That's not faith.

Second, Peter had to resist the voice of personal experience. Experience is a powerful force in our lives. We tend to behave according to what our experience has taught us. Experience is what we learn as we pass through life. It's often called "hind sight" because experience always looks backward. Someone once said, "Experience is the best teacher but she is not the prettiest." An old Chinese Proverb says, "Experience is the comb that nature gives to men when they are bald." I'm not sure what that means except to say we often pay such a high price for experience that we often learn the lessons too late for them to be of any use to us. Peter could have said, "Lord, I have just fished these waters, my experience says we aren't going to catch any fish." Or he could have said, "Lord, in my experience of fishing many years, I've never caught fish in deep water in the hot morning hours." Did you notice? He resisted the voice of experience and said, "Because you say so."

I'm certain there is someone reading these words who has had a bad experience in church or with a preacher. You have been mistreated and insulted by someone who claimed to be a Christian. Based on your personal experience, you don't really want to get involved in a local church. You may show up occasionally but you aren't going to really commit yourself to fully be a part of a local congregation. You've been burned. In order to truly be faithful, you must silence that old voice of experience and say, "But because you say so." Don't judge Christianity by other Christians. Some of the meanest folks you'll ever meet are in churches. I think mean people gravitate toward churches because they think they can get away with their meanness there—other groups would kick 'em out! Don't judge Christianity by the worst examples of those in the church, judge Christianity by Jesus Christ. Scrutinize Him, investigate Him and you will end up saying as millions have: "I find no fault in Him."

The third voice Peter had to resist was the voice of fatigue. Peter admits he is tired. He said, "Master, we've work hard all night long." Peter knew he wasn't going to get paid overtime. He was ready to clock out, go home and crash. But, again, he refused his weariness and said, "But because you say so."

It's difficult to do the right thing when you are tired. It's harder to obey God when your body is crying out for you to go home and shut down. I know many of you are tired. You get up early, rush off to work or school and then run around all afternoon and evening. You get home late and stuff some unhealthy food down your throat and crawl into bed. About the time you are just sleeping soundly, the alarm jerks you awake and you drag yourself up to do it all again. Our culture has lost the sense of a Sabbath rest. Sunday is just another busy day for many people, including me!

It was a weary Simon Peter who moved his boat out into the deep water and manhandled the heavy nets back into the water. Many of you can relate to that. It's certainly possible to be too busy to have time for God. The sad thing is that some busy people end up giving God the leftovers of their time, talent, and treasure. They don't have time to obey God because they stay so tired from everything else they do.

I have discovered that sometimes I feel I'm too tired to preach again. Between the second and third services I go into my office for about 15 minutes and I lay down on the couch. I'm afraid some Sunday I'm going to fall asleep! But I have found that when I get up and start preaching, my weariness is replaced with energy. Peter's fatigue is about to be replaced with excitement and astonishment. Like Peter, I have discovered the truth of God's promise in Isaiah 40: "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak ... They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Don't let weariness keep you from obeying God. I've heard people say, "I'm tired of staying in this marriage." Do what God says, anyway. "I'm tired of working with the children in Sunday School." Serve the Lord anyway. Faithfulness is greater than faith because it is full faith.

Now, the story gets interesting as we see the next step Peter takes:

#### **4. Fullness in Jesus**

Peter moved out into the deep water and lowered his nets. He began to pull the net back into the boat as did all night long. Suddenly the net stopped. Maybe his first thought was, “Oh, great! Now I’m hung on some rock!” But then he felt the movement of fish transferred through the net into his hands. There is always a sense of expectation involved in fishing. Even if you are fishing with a hook, there is usually a time between when you catch the fish and when you see the fish. How big is it? What kind is it? For me, it’s what kind of old boot is it? There’s always the element of surprise. That certainly is true when you are obeying God as well!

Peter kept pulling until he could see the fish—hundreds of them—*thousands*! His net was beginning to break and he realized he needed help. He motioned for James and John to come out and help him. They quickly come to his aid and, together, they hauled the huge catch into the two boats. Their boats were so loaded down with hundreds of fish they were almost submerged. What a great fish story! He went from the frustration and failure of no fish to the fullness of an abundance of fish. This is a great lesson about fullness in Jesus.

The key to this entire experience was Peter’s faithfulness to go out into the deep water. He was fishing in water he seldom or never fished in before. There is a great lesson for anyone of us who are willing to launch out into the deep with God. My friend, there is so much more to the Christian life than just praying a prayer, having your sins forgiven and having your ticket to heaven punched. There is an area of blessing and abundance that is only discovered by those who, like Peter, are willing to go out into the deep water. There is a Christian emphasis that has gone by different descriptions, but one that is often used is the “deeper life” approach to the Christian Life. My life has been deeply blessed by reading the daily devotions written by Oswald Chambers entitled *My Utmost for His Highest*. His approach is right in the center of this “deeper life” understanding. I encourage you to get his book and start using it as I do for a part of your daily quiet time.

The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:10, “But God has revealed it (His plan) to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.” A few verses later Paul identifies these “deep things” as “the thoughts of God” and “spiritual truth.” (See vs. 11 and 13)

There are some beautiful basic truths about God we all must learn. It is like having to learn the alphabet before you can read. But not everyone who can read takes advantage of reading the great classics of literature. In the same way, some people who know the basics of the Christian life have not moved on to these “deeper things” of God.

Jesus is telling you to go out into the deep water. You’ll never know His fullness until you do. There is a verse in one of our hymns that expresses exactly what I’m talking about. It’s found on page 243 in the *Baptist Hymnal* (1991 Edition). The words were written by Doris Akers. We often sing the first stanza, but I call your attention to the second verse. “There are blessings you cannot receive; ‘Till you know Him in His fullness and believe; You’re the one to profit when you say; I am going to walk with Jesus all the way.”

By the way, fullness is always shared with others. Peter called James and John to come join them and share in the tremendous abundance of fish. That’s a characteristic of the deeper Christian life. You are never a receptacle of a blessing—you are always a channel of blessings to others.

The Sea of Galilee is clear and fresh, teeming with life because it receives the water from the melting snow on Hermon and from several tributaries to the north. Then it gives its water away as it flows out into the Jordan River to the south. On the other hand, the Dead Sea is dead because it isn't a channel. It only receives the water from the Jordan, but the water doesn't flow out. That's why it is dead. It can't sustain life. Some Christians are like the Dead Sea; they are only interested in receiving a blessing. Others, like the Sea of Galilee, share as many blessings as they receive. That is what it means to experience fullness in Jesus.

## 5. Fear of Jesus

Now Peter's response is surprising. I would have expected Peter to say something like, "Wow, Jesus, this is great! Look at all these fish! I want you in my boat every time I go fishing!" Instead, after they load the fish and make certain their boats aren't going to sink, Peter falls to his knees in the slimy pile of fish and says, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Peter catches a glimpse of who Jesus really is. He realizes Jesus is more than a carpenter, more than a teacher, more than a healer—He is the Lord of the Universe.

Have you ever had the experience when something so strange happens to you that the little hairs on your neck stand up, you get goose bumps, and you literally shake with fright? That's why some people go to scary movies. They like being scared. I think Peter had just such an experience. He had been fishing all his life and had never seen anything like this before. In a flash he realized Jesus had Divine Power. He fell down before Jesus in fear and awe. We sing a hymn that says, "Come thou Almighty King." Peter is in such awe that his song is, "Leave thou Almighty King!" Peter is taking the step all of us must take if we are to be rightly related to God. We must fear God.

Proverbs 14:27 says, "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death." Look at those two pictures: a fountain of life or the snare of death. What makes the difference? The fear of the Lord.

Peter wasn't terrified as if he had just seen a ghoul. It was a holy reverence for Jesus. The fear of the Lord happens when you see Jesus for who He is, and then you see yourself for who you are. In verse 5 Peter calls Jesus "master." That is like the word "sir." He was just being polite. In verse 8 Peter falls down on his knees and calls Jesus "Lord." That word means "boss." In the light of the power and holiness of Jesus, Peter's own sinful condition was only magnified.

Peter's response is exactly correct. When you see God in all His holiness, it only makes you feel that much more unworthy. Remember, in Isaiah 6 that was the prophet Isaiah's same response when he recognized the Lord. He said he saw the Lord high and lifted up and His glory filled the room. Isaiah witnessed mighty Seraphim shouting "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!" Isaiah fell on his face and said, "Woe is me! For I am a man of unclean lips." Have you taken that step, where you are in holy awe of who Jesus really is? I love what Jesus did for Peter. He reassured him, "Don't be afraid. I have a plan for you. I want you to fish for men!" Then we see step number

## 6. Forsaking for Jesus

Verse 11 says they pulled up their boats and left everything to follow Jesus. Don't think that Peter was only walking away from a smelling fishing boat and a tangled net. He was a part of a large fishing partnership. During Jesus' time, it was a highly profitable business. Peter had a family. But when Jesus said, "I'll make you fish for men," Peter walked away from it all. It is important to notice Jesus didn't call everyone He met to leave their jobs and become His full-time disciple, only a chosen few. That's an important point. This text is not teaching that those who are most committed to Christ must leave their secular jobs to be His disciples. There are far too many Christians who seem to feel like second class Christians because they are not in "full-time Christian service." There are many who have entered into "full-time Christian service" on the faulty premise it would make them more significant, spiritual Christians. God calls everyone to be a full-time Christian but He is still only calling a few to make Christian service their vocation for life. However, Jesus does command us to forsake anything that would hinder us from serving Him faithfully. For Peter, it meant leaving his fishing business. What does it mean to you? Don't think that you "lose" when you give up something for Jesus.

Almost ten years ago, a group of fine members of this church came to Alabama and began to talk to us about coming to be pastor here in Tyler. We were extremely happy in our church. It was growing and they were a loving, supportive congregation. I didn't have a gray hair in my head! It was the kind of church that said, "Pastor, whatever you want us to do, we'll do it!" We really didn't want to leave. Alabama was our home. We had friends there. We had just recently moved in a new home that was our "dream home." My brother and sister were nearby. Cindy's parents were there; they were like a mother and dad to me, too.

After we came and preached in view of a call, the church voted on Sunday evening to call us as pastor. It was not a unanimous call, so we were still struggling over whether or not to come. We woke up on Monday morning ready to get on a plane and go "home," back to our church, where we were loved, back to our friends, back to our house, back to our family. We didn't want to give up those nice things. But the Lord gave Cindy a verse—I hate it when that happens! It is a powerful promise from God about what happens when we are willing to forsake some things that are valuable to us, to obey God. After we read this verse, we knew God wanted us here in Tyler. Here it is, from Mark 10:28-30: Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields - and with them persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life."

What that means is that we really don't give up anything to follow Jesus. His blessings are fresh and new every day.

Is God calling you to serve Him in some way, but you are still struggling because you know you will have to give up some things that are important to you? I believe it was one of the hardest decisions of Peter's life to walk away from his boats, his nets, his career. But it was the best decision he ever made! The final step is

## **7. Following after Jesus**



Peter started following Jesus. Wherever Jesus went, Peter went. Whatever Jesus did, Peter did. It's a 24/7 lifestyle. Today, it means we constantly ask ourselves, "Would Jesus go here? Would Jesus do this? What *would* Jesus do?" Here's how Jesus expressed this call in Mark's account: "Come follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." (Mark 1:17) I like that phrase because it means Peter wasn't naturally a fisher of men; Jesus was going to make him into one. So many people are afraid of following Jesus because they feel unqualified. Relax. You are unqualified. The good news is that when you start following Jesus, He begins to teach you and to make you into the person He wants you to be.

Picture old Simon Peter there with a boatload of fish. Jesus says, "Follow me." Peter looks at the fish. He looks at the lake—and he looks at Jesus. Jesus is already walking away. You see, when Jesus calls you to follow Him, He demands an instant response. Just imagine if Peter had hesitated, thought it out and decided, "Nah, I better stick to fishing." We would never have heard of Simon Peter.

But he *did* follow Jesus. And Jesus made him into a people fisherman. About three years after this day, Peter stood in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus had already been crucified, resurrected, and had returned to heaven. Peter stood up to preach and he "cast the net." And the same thing that happened that day on the Sea of Galilee happened again! The net was so full of people it almost broke. Three thousand people were saved and baptized on that one day! Finally, Peter discovered what it is to fish for people! Next week we are going to spend some more time on this text and talk about how to fish for men.

Following Jesus is not easy. He is going to say in the ninth chapter that you can't follow Him unless you deny yourself and take up your cross daily. The trail of Jesus led to the cross. History tells us that after Peter preached for many years, he was arrested in Rome. They were getting ready to crucify him and Peter requested they crucify him upside down because he didn't feel worthy to be crucified the same way Jesus had. Truly, he finally understood the full impact of following Jesus.

Jesus is calling you to follow Him today. Are you listening? Some are being called to salvation. Follow Jesus and be saved. He is calling some of you to follow Him in believers' baptism. Will you follow? Others He is calling for church membership. He may be calling you to a career of ministry. Will you follow?

Which of these steps have you taken? Which ones do you need to take in order to allow Jesus to transform you into a fully devoted follower?

## OUTLINE

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a. Faith says, “I believe your word.”

b. Faithfulness says, “I believe enough to obey.”

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But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. *1 Corinthians 2:10*

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes