

Fishing Lessons from a Carpenter

Luke 5:1-11

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for March 21, 2021

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Summary: When Jesus began to call his disciples, He first tested them, and challenged them, to step out in faith. As we take a look at the first recorded moments between Jesus and Simon Peter, we will explore the mindset of Peter as he is challenged by God, tested by God, and ultimately, takes a leap of faith. At the end of this journey, Stephen Davey will show us that our calling is higher than anything we can understand, and He wants to use us in ways that we cannot imagine.

I have read the account—now something of an urban legend—regarding a concert one evening by Poland's most famous concert pianist and prime minister, Ignace Paderewski. More than 100 years ago, the opulent concert hall was packed with standing room only, everyone filled with anticipation and excitement. One young mother had purchased tickets and brought her young son in order to encourage his own progress at the piano. They found their seats near the front of the concert hall and this young boy was awed by everything, including that majestic grand piano waiting on stage.

Soon the mother found a friend to talk to and, unnoticed, the boy slipped out of his seat. Suddenly, the crowd was arrested by the sound of that piano—they looked up and saw this young boy, seated on the

bench, innocently picking out, “Twinkle, twinkle, little star.” The crowd at first gasped; some began laughing, but then some grew rather irritated and began to shout to get him off that grand piano.

Before his embarrassed mother could find the stairs, Paderewski heard the commotion, realized what was happening and quickly appeared on stage, moving toward the boy.

But instead of shuffling him away, he whispered, “Don’t stop—keep playing,” and leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began filling in a bass part. Soon his right arm reached around the other side, encircling the child, to add a running obligato.

Together, beautifully, the old concert master and the little boy held the crowd

mesmerized. All the while Paderewski kept whispering, “Don't stop son, don't quit; keep playing.” And after a couple of times through that little song, they ended to a standing ovation.

One of the first lessons the early disciples are going to learn is to offer the Lord what little they have in service.

In fact, one of the first commands of the Messiah to those who will follow Him is essentially: “Don't stop; keep at it! It might not be much, but I'll join you—and just watch what your little efforts, plus my sovereignty, will accomplish.”

This lesson doesn't take place in a concert hall, or in a synagogue, but on the sea of Galilee. Let's watch it take place in *Luke's Gospel, chapter 5*.

I want you to notice just the first phrase:

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God...

Luke 5:1a

Make a mental note of that expression—*the word of God*—circle it in your text and draw a line down to verse: “*but at your word, I will let down the nets.*”

This scene is going to be all about the authority and the command of the word of God.

It's one of Luke's favorite expressions; he uses the phrase “*the word of God*” 17 different times in his two-volume series: The Book of Luke and The Book of

Acts—as the foundation of the church—the source of the authority of the church and every Christian.

Adapted from Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke, Volume One* (Baker, 1994), p. 453

To this day, we believe; we follow; we obey; we preach and teach the word of God. Jesus is not only modeling the role of true preaching here, but also is about to demonstrate the authority of God's word, which is His own word.

At this point, Jesus is literally being pressed by the crowd, to the point of potentially being backed right into the lake.

Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale, 1979), p. 112

He either has to get wet or He will have to walk on water more than once.

Verse 1 again:

(Jesus) was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fisherman had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

Luke 5:1b-3

Now, from other gospel accounts, Simon Peter has already met the Lord (Mark chapter 1), and he's already seen Jesus perform miracles and is amazed at the

power of Jesus. He hasn't been officially called to follow Jesus yet; Simon still hasn't connected all the dots.

And now after pushing his boat back out a few feet into the lake, he's listening to Jesus preach while he cleans his nets—Peter is still in the boat.

And next to him, by the other boat still on shore, are his business partners, that's the word used *in verse 10* for James and John.

Clinton E. Arnold, General Editor; Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Luke (Zondervan, 2002), p. 368

By the way, and this will matter later: the word for *nets* here are the large nets used for nighttime fishing; not daytime fishing, but nighttime.

Adapted from Zondervan, p. 368

Now, once again, we're not given the Lord's sermon notes here. In fact, this time we don't even know the text He preached from as He preached the word of God; but we *are* given His closing point of application.

You see, Jesus isn't just going to preach the word, He's going to show us the power of His word.

Here it comes in *verse 4*:

And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

Luke 5:4

The first command "*to put out*" is singular—it's delivered to Simon—so he's evidently steering the boat; the second command to *let down your nets* is plural, indicating others are on board.

Bock, p. 455

It could have been Andrew, Simon's brother, or perhaps a few hired hands.

Jesus finishes His sermon and evidently wants fish for dinner!

"Simon, let's go fishing!"

Bruce Larson, The Communicator's Commentary: Luke (Word Books, 1983), p. 102

"Steer this boat out into the deep." Don't miss what this command means: "Simon, take us back out to where you just spent all night catching nothing."

No fisherman wants to do that.



When have you felt God leading you in a direction you didn't want to go? How did you respond to that situation?

It's obvious to Simon that a Carpenter is trying to give some fishing lessons; Jesus obviously hasn't spent much time on a fishing boat. He's evidently good with a hammer and as a healer and a preacher, but He's obviously not much of a fisherman.

So, Simon responds to Jesus' command, to let down the nets, here in *verse 5*:

*And Simon answered,
“Master, we toiled all night
and took nothing!”*

Luke 5:5a

We were out here all last night and we caught *nothing*.

You know how hard it is for a fisherman to admit that? We caught nothing.

Notice further:

*“But at your word I will let
down the nets.”*

Luke 5:5b

“But at Your word.” Now don’t misunderstand: this expression “but at your word,” isn’t a statement of faith—this is what you could call reluctant obedience to Jesus’ order.

If you have ever thought that maybe God isn’t blessing you as much as He might because you’re reluctant, you’re hesitant, you’re not always wholehearted, your faith isn’t that strong—well, just watch.

We place far too much significance on how willing and how well we play “Twinkle twinkle little star” and far too little significance on word of the Master Creator.

Peter says, “Well, alright—if you say so.”

John Phillips translates it, “Well, if that’s what you want.”

Adapted from John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Luke* (Kregel, 2005), p. 100

In other words, “Because I respect You, I will go along; I’ve seen you do some

amazing things in Capernaum and in my own home, but You are in over Your head—no pun intended, Master!”

Imagine, a carpenter giving a fisherman advice.

Don’t miss this: this is Simon Peter’s boat; this is his field of expertise; these are his nets; this is his business, his years of experience; Simon’s hands are calloused from pulling nets; his eyes are sharp, and his skill has kept food on his table for years. Simon knows fishing!

And now there is about to be some terrible embarrassment ahead for Peter; that shoreline is crowded with hundreds, if not several thousand people who are riveted to this scene—they’re going to watch a fisherman do the unthinkable!

He’s throwing nighttime nets out into the water around noontime. These nets are made of linen which the fish can see during the daytime.

Darrell L. Bock, ed; *The Bible Knowledge Key Word Study: The Gospels* (Victor, 2002), p. 202

This is like my grandson down at the pond in our neighborhood the other day trying to catch some minnows with a yellow plastic shovel. He’s as bad at fishing as I am. The fish see it coming; they’re too fast—it won’t work.

Peter would have been thinking, because he knew, and he evidently knew more than Jesus knew—these are the wrong nets; this is the wrong time of day; this is the wrong spot; this won’t work!

But Peter is to be commended that at least he agreed to let down the nets even

though it went against everything in his body and mind.



Describe a time when you took a leap of faith, without knowing, or even thinking, that it would pay off. Did it pay off in the end?

The nets are lowered into the deep—probably no more than 30-40 feet from the seashore.

Now verse 6:

And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

Luke 5:6-7

You can just imagine the chaos! They drop their nets into the water and instantly swarms of fish literally swim into the nets and pack in so tightly the nets begin to tear! They signal to James and John, which means they screamed at the top of their lungs for help.

James and John paddle out as fast as they can in their boat—both boats are now full and nearly sinking under the weight. The crowd on the bank is

stunned; they're all shouting, laughing, amazed—some are probably wading out to help them bring the boats to shore.

And Jesus is in Simon's boat, evidently just sitting there, watching it all happen.

And now—verse 8:

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Luke 5:8

"I doubted You; I had wrong thoughts about You. I don't deserve to be in the same boat with You!"

When Job saw God's authority over the animal kingdom and His creative power over the entire universe, he said, "*I repent in dust and ashes.*" (Job 42:6). This is the proper response of a human being when encountering the sovereign majesty of God.

Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: Volume One* (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 162

Right there on that boat, Peter collapses at the knees of Jesus, where Jesus is seated, with the realization of what this miracle means.

In fact, Simon Peter becomes the first person in the Gospel account to address Jesus as Lord—"I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Calling Jesus *Lord*, along with bowing before Him, was a recognition of the sovereignty of Christ.

J.C. Ryle wrote in his commentary on this text, “Peter has seen the Lord’s complete dominion over the animal creation. The fish of the sea are as much obedient to His word and will as the frogs and flies and lice and locusts in the plagues of Egypt. The fish are just as obedient as the ravens with Elijah and the whale who arrived to carry Jonah back home.”

Adapted from J.C. Ryle, *Expository Notes on the Gospels* (Evangelical Press, 1879, preprint; 1985), p. 69

Jesus has preached the word of God, and now He delivers the word of God—*His word*—and the fish do not delay. They swim; they surge; they swarm into those nets—why? The silent will and word of their Creator commanded them.

Jesus responds to Simon in *the middle of verse 10*:

“Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching men.” And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Luke 5:10b-11

This is the beginning of their formal discipleship as followers of the Lord. They’re leaving their boats, their greatest catch—the biggest fish story in human history—they are leaving everything to become fishers of men.

They will now begin to catch men and women and boys and girls with the net of

the gospel. Literally translated, they will be catching people *alive*.

Catching fish is usually fatal for the fish. It’s bad news. Jesus uses the idea of fishing here but turns the phrase to refer to catching people *alive*—for the purpose of giving them life.

This is in contrast to the fishing enterprise of Satan who also is busy with his nets, luring and catching people (2 Timothy 2:26).

People caught by Satan are destined to die without hope, but those caught by the disciples will be destined for life everlasting.

David E. Garland, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 230

Now, before we leave this scene, let me highlight some lessons on fishing taught by the Master Carpenter, who is also the Creator.

Catching nothing all night was as much a part of God’s plan as catching a boatload the next day.

Don’t overlook the fact that for Peter, James and John, catching *nothing* was as much a part of God’s will as catching a net full of fish.

God wanted them to spend the previous night without catching anything; that was His plan all along! Can you just imagine some fish swimming near the net and God saying, “Don’t go in there”?

Jesus is going to take Simon Peter back to the place where he had failed all night

long, in order to show him that he hadn't failed after all.

It was actually God's *plan* for him to catch nothing that night, and then for God to fill his boat to the brim the next day.



When have you experienced hardship,
and saw God use it for His glory?

Which reminds us to be faithful at throwing out the net—that's all you can do—but if it comes up empty, it is just as much a statement of success in the eyes of God, as a net that is overflowing.

We define success and failure according to what we can see, but God's at work in ways we cannot see.

Which is why when you lost your job, you thought God was abandoning you, only later to discover how God was preparing you.

That empty bank account, that broken relationship, that accident, those lonely moments—God was just as much at work then as He is when the boats are full and the nets bursting with fish.

God often takes us to places where we are confident to remind us how much we are truly dependent.

The Lord takes Peter back to the place where Peter knew everything about what

he was doing. Peter had spent hours the night before doing everything right but caught nothing.

The Lord is essentially teaching Peter and James and John *why* it is that they will one day catch people alive; and it will have nothing to do with the right expertise, the right experience, the right time of day or the right connections. It will be the result of His will and the power of His word.

We throw the net; God's word does the rest.

A few years after this event, Simon Peter will preach the opening sermon of the church age, on the Day of Pentecost, as the Spirit descends, and the church is created.

Someone might have come up to him afterward saying, "Wow, Peter, what a sermon—3,000 people believed—what a catch!"

They would hear Peter say, "No, no, no, it wasn't that sermon, it wasn't even me. I did my part, but it was the power and the authority of the word and the will of God."

We throw the net; God commands everything else.

God's call for disciples may not change your profession in life, but it will rearrange your priority in life.

The verb tense the Lord uses here for these men to start *catching people alive*

indicates that this will be an ongoing, lifelong engagement.

This won't be like fishing season or hunting season where you bag your quota, or you run out of time and you're finished for the year.

One of my students here at Shepherds Seminary this past fall lives in the northwest—he was Zooming into class each week. One week he asked permission to miss class because elk season was opening, and his family would live off that meat during the winter. Would it be okay to miss class? I have never had a student ask to miss class to go elk hunting, but I agreed. There was only a brief window of opportunity.

For Peter and these men, they are not going fishing for a season; they are going fishing for people as a vocation—this will change the direction of their lives; this season of fishing will not end until the Lord takes them home.

John ends up going to Ephesus, Thomas will go to India, Matthew goes to Ethiopia, and Andrew will end up at the borders of Russia.

And to this day, the Lord's commission might mean for some to leave their boats and their businesses and their native lands for vocational ministry. Our church leaders are praying for many in our own congregation to do just that—to take the net of the gospel around the world.

However, the Lord's commission is not just vocational, it is congregational. It involves us all.

It might not mean that you change your profession, but it will mean that you live with this priority. We have all been assigned as fishers of people, to catch them alive.

You're not just going to that classroom to teach, that boardroom to lead, that shop to repair, that meeting with a client. You're not just paddling around a pond; you're going fishing!

You're going fishing for people who are destined for death who need to be caught for life.

One more lesson learned from the Carpenter on the subject of fishing:

Sometimes special surprises in life are hidden behind doorways labeled: "Simple Obedience."

It doesn't look all that magnificent, all that heroic. Like playing a little tune on the piano while others can play so much better, but then the Master comes along and joins you in making a unique composition—a masterpiece of music.

"Peter, just simply lower your nets into the water." That's all. Just drop your net over the side of the boat.

Ha, what does a carpenter know about fishing? Maybe nothing. But the Creator knew everything.

I can't help but think the Lord was smiling, if not laughing to Himself, as Peter's nets were instantly filled with fish.

"Surprise! Surprise, Simon Peter—you weren't expecting that, were you?"

Just drop your nets and watch what God can do.

The vice president of a mission's organization gave the testimony of a seventy-year-old woman who came to faith in Christ, late in life.

She didn't know any better, so one day she approached her pastor and said, "I believe God is calling me into some kind of ministry to reach people with the gospel, but I don't know how or what to do, what do I do?" He said, "Maybe you ought to go home and pray about it." That's classic pastoral advice when you don't have a good answer—go pray about it.

She did. She went home and began to pray.

It seemed that God was impressing her heart to try and reach out to the students at the university just a few blocks from her home.

She got a stack of cards and wrote on those cards these words: "Are you homesick? Come to my home for tea at 4:00 pm." She then went and posted them on the announcement boards and the job boards where students gathered to check out the opportunities while there at the University of Melbourne.

"Are you homesick? Come to my home for tea at 4:00 pm."

She went home and prepared tea and when 4 o'clock arrived, she sat in her living room and waited—and waited. Nobody arrived.

Days went by and then weeks, and nobody came.

In reference to my earlier story, it seemed like all she could play was "Twinkle, twinkle little star," but people were more interested in hearing a concert pianist.

She didn't quit; she kept making tea every day at 4:00 in the afternoon.

And then, after weeks of waiting in her living room, the doorbell rang. An Indonesian student stood there at her door, rather awkwardly, wondering if he'd made the right decision. She answered the door and when he saw her, he relaxed and came on in. He admitted to her that he was indeed homesick, and he was eager to talk.

She served him tea and listened.

He went back to campus and told all his friends, "Hey, I met a really nice lady that's just like my grandmother—she had good things to eat, and she made really good tea." A few days later he returned with some friends. In a few weeks, more international students were showing up at her door, some homesick; all of them thirsty for something more than tea.

Her quite testimony brought many of them to faith in Christ, and during the final ten years of her life, she caught many of them alive.

When she died, just past the age of 80, her funeral nearly shut down the university. There were 70 honorary pallbearers from countries like Indonesia, India, Malaysia, and many more.

Hundreds of international students had come to her home for tea, and many of them had found her Creator, and the forgiveness and life offered by her Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Messiah, the Carpenter, the Master-Fisherman who caught me. Has He caught you and brought you to life?

Are we joining Him in dropping our nets, to catch others for life—everlasting life?

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