

The Miraculous Catch of Fish: From Indecision to Devotion

The believer was made for devotion, not for lukewarmness. The unhappiest person in the world is the half-hearted believer. He is not wholly committed to anything, and he knows it. He is not completely true to the world, or to the Lord, so he always feels unfaithful to someone. He is never fully plunging himself into one or the other, so he always feels somewhat lazy or less than diligent.

Because he is faithful to both the world and the Lord, he knows he is also unfaithful to both of them, and it makes him all the more miserable. He envies the happiness of his very worldly friends or acquaintances, and wishes he could let himself go like that, but he can't. He wishes he could have the joy of his very committed Christians friends, but he feels he can't surrender to God on that level either. So he is a very, very unhappy person. He chooses heads and tails, so every time he wins, he also loses.

But the Lord Jesus loves you – the half-hearted believer, and wants you to be in full fellowship with him. The miracle of the miraculous catch of fish in **Luke 5:1-11** shows how Jesus gets a half-hearted believer all the way from indecision to devotion:

Let's examine the passage to see **the progression from indecision to frustration, to instruction, to submission, to revelation, to prostration, to commission, and finally to devotion:**

And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto "Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." And Simon answering said unto him, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken. And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

Luke 5:1-11

To put this section in context, this miracle happens shortly after the healing of the nobleman's son. Jesus is starting his ministry in Capernaum. The crowds are coming in great numbers, so Peter lets Jesus sit in his boat to teach the people on the shore.

1. Indecision – being called but not committed

At this point, Peter and the disciples had already been called by Jesus (as seen in **John 1**), but they were not fully committed. They were hovering between fishing and following. They were no doubt listening with half an ear while Jesus taught from the boats, but they were not following Him wholeheartedly.

In the first century, it was not unusual for a rabbi to have a disciples that would follow him around everywhere – be with him always. Jesus had called them to that – but they were not all there. They were hovering between commitment to Jesus and their old life.

Every believer has been called by Jesus to follow Him wholeheartedly. But we know that we are very much like Peter, listening to Him teach, but carrying on with our lives, our priorities, our plans, our goals, our ambitions. Oh, yes – we regard Jesus highly, and we will gladly listen, and even call ourselves followers of Jesus – but we’re less than wholly committed. One foot in the world, and one foot in the church; one eye on serving the Lord, and one eye on what the world has to offer; one hand holding God’s hand, and the other taking the world’s hand too.

Involved but not committed. Present, but not pursuing. Interested but not seeking. Listening but not following. The half-hearted follower of Christ basically has a problem with trust. Can I really trust Jesus with my whole life? What if He doesn’t come through? What if I end up poorer, lonelier, unpopular, unsuccessful? Better make sure I have enough to fall back on if this whole relationship with Christ doesn’t come through.

But what you don’t see is that by so doing, you are undermining your faith in Christ – which is the very thing that will grow your experience of Christ. You think by having a special emergency backup plan you are making yourself safe. Instead, you are making yourself cold. The Lord will not be satisfied to be one of your dependences, one of your goals, one of your means.

Jesus is a loving Lord. He knows what we pursue will not satisfy us. So He is not prepared to just allow His children to remain half-hearted. He engineers a situation to get your attention.

2. Frustration – how Jesus gets your attention (Luke 5:2)

Jesus caused or allowed the disciples to fail in familiar waters. Seasoned fisherman toiled all night and came up with nothing. Now, everyone recognises that it was the power of Jesus that directed all those fish into the nets later on. But not everyone sees it was equally the power of Jesus keeping the fish out of their nets in the first place! Why would He do that? To get Peter’s attention.

Peter has a problem: he’s not yet asking for help. But this has created the opportunity for Jesus to be the One who will change the situation and get a hold of Peter.

Failing in the familiar is often the hardest kind of failure. It challenges our pride. It challenges our security, comfort and trust in ourselves. Failure can come in the form of financial failure, relationship failure, ministry failure, job failure and health failure, among others. We can experience plain frustration and a lack of joy in any or all of these.

3. Instruction – Jesus’ remedy (Luke 5:4)

Now that Jesus has Peter’s attention, He tells him to launch out into the deep and cast his nets out for a catch. Note the methodology – Jesus gives a command. He seldom does something before He has said something.

Why did Jesus give Peter a command? If it was all about the fish, the Lord could have just caused them to have a good catch. But **when our actions are not connected to commands, we do not**

connect them to God's grace. Commands connect us to relating to Jesus Christ. Commands demand trust in Him. Commands demand submission to Him. Commands demand obedience.

Turning points in your Christian life are always going to revolve around the Word of God. There is a command, or a set of commands, that when yielded to, will reveal Christ to you in unprecedented ways. Even your salvation was a command you had to obey: repent and believe (**Acts 17**).

Your failure, especially in the familiar, will drive you to a place of nowhere else to turn. If you stop toiling in your own strength and listen to Christ, He will give you a command or commands relevant to your situation – your Christian life, your marriage, your job, your finances, your ministry, your relationships, your direction. But a rudder only guides a ship when it is in motion. God only guides and shapes you when you are responding to His commands, and carrying on with life under His Lordship.

4. Submission – the only correct response (Luke 5:5)

Submission is the only correct response to God's instruction: *"And Simon answering said unto him, 'Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.'"* (**Luke 5:5**).

Consider the humility needed to obey. A seasoned fisherman who knows where to put his nets is being told by a carpenter, 'Put your nets.' Note that Jesus may give you a command regarding an area of your life where you think you've got together. It takes humility to submit and say, 'Lord, You know best.'

It's worth noting too that Jesus commands the disciples to lay down their nets in the daytime and in the deep – the two ways you don't fish. In our own lives, sometimes Jesus may give you a command that doesn't make a lot of sense to you. It takes humility to submit.

In addition, the instruction itself was nothing extraordinary. It was simply to launch out again and cast their nets in. Similarly, Jesus may give you a command that is profoundly simple – forgive, or pray, or stop doing that, or fellowship. It takes humility to do the simple. Our pride wants things complicated. But God does things in a wonderfully simple way.

Humility must accept that there often is no quick-fix, no 'magic-touch', no special leader, pastor, or author, no special mechanical formula to follow. It is always God telling us: 'Believe what I say, and then do what I say. Trust that I am God and I know best.'

Fortunately, Peter had the humility to say, *'Nevertheless, at Thy word...'* Once again, we see that obedience is based on the premise, 'Lord Jesus, You know better. You are God, I am not.' So:

- Obey in spite of your previous successes doing it your own way.
- Obey in spite of the command not making sense to you.
- Obey in spite of the command seeming too simple to you.
- Obey in spite of what others may think.
- Obey in spite of the risk of looking foolish or the Lord looking foolish.

'Nevertheless, at Thy word...' ought to be the motto of all of us. Even if we think, 'It doesn't make sense, I think I know better, it doesn't look like that will help at all, that doesn't look like the solution...' – but nevertheless, at Your Word. The turning point in your life is when you say admit,

‘God is God; He knows better than I do – He is authorised and qualified to tell me what to do and how to do it.’

5. Revelation – the result of submission (Luke 5:6-7)

The result of Peter’s obedience is a massive catch. Consider the power of Jesus. Not a word spoken. Not a thing said to the sea. But at His Word, at that exact timing, masses of fish swim into the nets. And consider the catch itself: More than they could lift; more than the nets could hold; more than one boat could hold; more than two boats could hold!

Why the miraculous catch of fish? There are at least four explanations.

- 1) To display Christ’s power over creation.
- 2) To display His power to provide.
- 3) To display His power over Peter’s livelihood.
- 4) To display the vanity of Peter’s earthly dreams.

The point is this: He is able to do *“exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think”* (**Ephesians 3:20**). Whatever earthly dream we are chasing – it is really a light thing for Jesus to meet it in a moment. It is a light thing for Christ to fix your marriage, to save your children, to change your finances, to change your job situation, to bring your marriage partner to you, to heal your body.

We are not dealing with a miserly God. We are not dealing with a God with limited resources. We are not dealing with a God who seeks to just barely meet the need. Over and over we see the overflowing, bubbling over, effervescent heart of God.

God created stars that we will never see, filled the earth with flowers and plants and creatures many humans cannot see. He is a big God. And sometimes He makes the point: ‘I can do far more than you ever thought – if you will yield to Me – to My ways, My purposes, My will. If you will stop trying to live your own life, live the half-hearted Christian life, I can give you far more than you ever thought or dreamed.’

Can you commit your life to such a God? Can you trust this kind of God with your future, your family, your wellbeing? Can you obey the commands of such a God?

6. Prostration – the result of revelation (Luke 5:8-9)

When God has just done something tremendous to show you that He is at work, your next response is crucial.

Peter is astonished by the catch. It is beyond explanation, beyond human invention or human ability. It is daytime, not the time for fishing. And fish simply don’t swim into your nets in large droves at that time of day. Without any experience as a fisherman, without years of learning the tides, the winds, the best times to fish, the currents – Jesus has just surpassed the greatest catch Peter had ever seen.

At this moment, Peter could have said, “Wow! Bonus! This should keep us going for months!” If he responded in this way, he would have seen no further than his joy in the catch. Peter could have greedily thought about how he could use the Lord to enhance his fishing. If that seems absurd, consider Simon the sorcerer in **Acts 8** who wanted God’s power for his own glory.

But Peter the disciple realises, 'Jesus can completely change my life. Jesus is completely sovereign over the sea, the fish – and therefore over me, over my life, my future.' He realises who the Lord Jesus is: a Holy God.

And his reaction is right – He realises the hand of God has done this not to get him to focus *on* the fish, but *off* the fish. Some foolishly think God's movement in their life was purely to make their lives wealthier or healthier. God's attention-getting mechanisms cause their dark hearts to focus even more on their job, their human relationships etc. But God wants you not to focus on your own life and comfort. He wants you to focus off yourself, and onto Him – to come to know Him and then make Him known to others.

It was everything Peter had probably dreamed of as a fisherman, and yet it was not as fulfilling as he thought it would be. How many reach the pinnacle of success, and find it is actually not the fulfilment, satisfaction, or pleasure they want? Jesus kindly shows Peter in a moment how fulfilling the greatest of catches will be; He shows Him the pinnacle of fishing – and Peter can see, it is *less* than his heart craves.

Realising who Jesus is, Peter falls at His feet in the boat and says, '*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.*' He prostrates himself – humbles himself – before a holy God.

What has a catch of fish got to do with his sin? Why is Peter talking about sin now? Because his eyes are off the fish, and on the Lord. And any time your eyes are on the Lord, you will be aware of sin. Revival always begins with repentance. And repentance comes from God revealing Himself to you and you becoming aware of His holiness and your unholiness.

An encounter with God is always going to be a profoundly humbling experience, morally. Any experience of worship that is not preceded by repentance and cleansing is almost bound to be false. Because when sinners recognise that they are in the presence of God, the first thing they realise is how unlike this God they are.

How do we usually react? With fear. Our number one problem when God begins to really draw us is fear. Fear of seeing our sin. We shriek in horror; we writhe in agony to see our guilt. And all the more when the standard is no longer other people, but God Himself. Black looks even blacker next to blinding white.

Consider the responses of fear when Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah, Job, Manoah, and John encounter God. We run (like Adam) or we ask God to depart (like Peter). We try to cover our sin like Adam's fig leaves. We accuse or excuse. This is why Jesus' words to Peter are: "Fear not." He's say, 'Be at peace – I have cleansed you. I know you. I forgive you. I accept you.'

But the right reaction is to repent of sin and humble ourselves before Him. Own our half-heartedness, own our disobedience, and seek cleansing and mercy.

Notice how a mundane situation – with a rocking boat, wet clothes, and smelly fish – has been transformed into a fresh encounter with God – with repentance, cleansing and rededication. This can happen to us too, when we recognise the hand of God always at work around us. May we truly be brought to see Him and have the same experience.

7. Commission – being exhorted by Christ (Luke 5:10)

Jesus' response to Peter is, "*Fear not*" – 'be at peace; My grace will let you stay, and from now on, you will catch men.' Here we see that God approaches us mercifully. If God was approaching you destructively, you wouldn't even have time to know about it. But God approaches you to call you to a new level of commitment. He loves you, and seeks you out – usually in the everyday details of your life – like He did with Peter and his fishing.

And not only does God forgive us, He wants to entrust us. First God shows you Himself, then God shows you yourself, then God shows you what He wants to do through you.

Jesus says to Peter: 'From now on you will catch men. I will take you and your natural abilities and transform them for my service. Your catch, your reward, your prize, will no longer be fish – it will be people. And what I will do through you will make this catch of fishes seem mundane.'

A life yielded to God is not boring. You will see more glory than any other life, when you labour together with God: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father*" (John 14:12).

God doesn't give you a task until you have encountered Him and humbled yourself. He will not assign you to service before there has been repentance for half-heartedness, before there is cleansing and rededication. It is once God has showed you Himself and you have responded in humility – that He then says, 'Now you are ready for a task that will reveal Me all the more.'

Here we see why some Christians never really grow. They keep on washing their nets, even when Jesus seeks to get their attention. They refuse to obey the basic commands. As such, they do not come to a personal encounter with Him. Because of that, God never gives them an assignment which will further reveal Him. So they remain in the lukewarm state of wondering why God does not seem real to them, but they keep cutting off the opportunity to know Him at the root.

We see also why other Christians seem to be so revived. They obey God in what He is telling them to do. Through that they come to see and know Him. They love Him all the more. In that humble, submissive state of heart, God entrusts them with more responsibility. As they carry that out, they get to see God all the more. And so they are abounding.

It reminds one of the Scripture; "*For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away*" (Matthew 25:29).

8. Devotion – empowered for radical commitment (Luke 5:11)

Consider now the commitment – "*they forsook all*" (Luke 5:11). The disciples were willing to give it all up once they had understood the power and Person of Jesus Christ. They went from indecision to devotion, from half-heartedness to wholeheartedness, from lukewarmness to fervent following.

They were cutting ties with the old, and throwing themselves wholly into following Jesus. Jesus doesn't call everyone to leave their job, but He does call every Christian to leave serving themselves. He calls every believer to throw himself wholly on following Him.

- Theirs was a commitment of faith – 'God will meet my needs.'
- Theirs was a commitment of trust – 'God will direct my life.'

- Theirs was a commitment liable to be misunderstood. They left their family business.

A revelation of Christ empowers you for radical commitment. Their commitment was not obstructed by their own excuses, by their own reasonings. Radical commitment is devotion to Jesus Christ to a level that inconveniences you. It threatens your well-laid-out plans for your own life. It threatens you with some discomforts. Most of all, it threatens your control over your own life. Radical commitment is shifting the ownership and management of your life from you to the Lord Jesus.

But radical commitment is the place where believers thrive. We were made not to dip our feet into the waters of knowing Christ, but to plunge in completely: *“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,” (Philippians 3:7-8).*

It's not necessarily a call to forsake all possessions – but to forsake ownership. It's not necessarily a call to forsake job responsibility – but to forsake idolising it.

How is your devotion to Jesus? Aer you still listening with half an ear? Still mending your nets? Still frustrated? Then Jesus seeks your wholehearted commitment.

You know that today He is giving you some instructions, if you are listening. If you humble yourself and obey, He will reveal Himself to you in greater ways than before. You will then be confronted with Him. and it will further humble you. But He is not trying to frighten you. He is cleansing you, and equipping you for a task He has for you. That task will reveal Him to you in ever greater amounts. That's how Jesus gets someone from indecision to devotion.