

# CALLED TO FOLLOW

**DEVOTIONAL READING:** Luke 9:57-62  
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Luke 5:1-11  
**TODAY'S SCRIPTURE:** Luke 5:1-11

## I. Shallow-Water Teaching Luke 5:1-3

**1 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,**

**2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.**

**3 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.**

1. *The lake of Gennesaret* was named for the fertile region on the northwest side of the lake; the word *Gennesaret* means “garden of riches.” The authors of the other Gospels refer to this freshwater body as “the sea of Galilee” (Matthew 4:18; Mark 1:16; John 6:1), and John also calls it “the sea of Tiberias” (John 6:1; 21:1). This picturesque lake served as the backdrop for much of Jesus’ ministry.

Jesus had just healed many people at Capernaum (Luke 4:31-41), located on the northwest shore of the lake. Reports about Jesus and His amazing deeds “went out into every place of the country round about” (4:37). The result was that *the people pressed upon him to hear the*

*word of God.* The phrase *the word of God* could mean either the word that comes *from* God or the word that tells *of* God. Either way, this marked Jesus’ ministry as prophetic for Jews steeped in the Old Testament.

2. *Fishermen* of the era often used a large dragnet, which required two or more men to deploy, or else a smaller and circular casting net. After returning from fishing, they needed to wash and stretch their nets to prepare them for the next outing.

3a. This was not the first time Simon and Jesus had met (see Luke 4:31-38a). At Simon’s home, Jesus had healed Simon’s mother-in-law from a “great fever” (4:38b-39), and many others were brought there with illnesses and demonization (4:40-41).

3b. Boarding *the ship* solved the problem of the crowd’s pressing on Jesus, allowing Him to still be seen and heard. Jesus then *sat down*, the normal position for teaching. This was not to be the only time that Jesus taught from a boat (see Mark 3:9; 4:1).

## II. Deep-Water Miracle Luke 5:4-7

**4 Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.**

5 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.

6 And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.

7 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.

4-5. Although Jesus addressed *Simon* in the first of these two verses, the instructions Jesus gave included Simon's partners; the word translated *let down* is plural in the original language. Jesus' directions would have seemed absurd to a professional fisherman. Simon and his partners had *toiled all the night* without catching anything!

But Simon had already witnessed the power of Jesus in miracles and teaching. Those undoubtedly stood behind Simon's addressing Jesus as *Master*, an acknowledgment of His authority to direct Simon. And so the expert fisherman yielded to the *word* of the carpenter.

6. Despite the apparent foolishness of casting nets after having "toiled all the night" and catching nothing, *a great multitude of fishes* was caught! If Simon and his fellow fishermen had followed conventional wisdom instead of Jesus, they would not have experienced this miraculous catch. Jesus did not tell the men to cast their net in order to catch a paltry or even ordinary haul of fish: the abundance was such that *their net brake*.

7. Simon's *partners . . . in the other ship* were James and John (see Luke 5:10a). The blessing of the fish was so overwhelming that *both the ships* together were barely able to handle the catch!

### III. Simon's Epiphany Luke 5:8-10a

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

9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:

10a And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon.

8a. All four Gospels mention that Jesus gave *Simon* the name *Peter* (Matthew 16:18; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14). This is important in studies of the Gospels because this man goes by the names Simon, Peter, and Simon Peter; the reference is to one and the same person (see 2 Peter 1:1).

8b. Following the miraculous catch of fish, and the breaking nets and sinking boats that result, we come to the third focus of Luke's narrative. Simon Peter's response, in word and behavior, was rightly characterized by awe and respect.

Luke uses the word translated *sinful man* more than the other three Gospel writers combined. Luke's strong tendency is to use this word in a compassionate way in referring to the targets of God's grace. Realizing himself to be in the presence of a man of God led Simon to the confession we see here.

We should point out that Simon Peter's recognition of Jesus as a man of God isn't necessarily bound up in his address of Jesus as *Lord* at this point. The word being translated that way is often just a polite term of respect, sometimes translated as "sir"

Perhaps a more fitting comparison (given Simon Peter's limited awareness of Jesus' full identity at the time) are the actions of Joseph's brothers when they

met him in Egypt. They bowed before Joseph, knowing that he had the power to approve or deny their aid request (Genesis 42:3, 6), but they did not know his true identity (42:7-8). Even so, that did not prevent them from recognizing his authority.

9-10a. *James* and *John*, the sons of *Zebedee*, Simon's business partners, are mentioned by name for the first time in Luke's Gospel. Jesus would soon choose all three men to be counted among the "twelve . . . apostles" (Luke 6:12-16). But for now the focus is on Simon Peter as these others are mentioned only in passing.

#### IV. Jesus' Call

##### Luke 5:10b-11

**10b And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.**

**11 And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.**

10b. Though *Jesus* addressed *Simon* directly, it seems safe to assume that James and John could hear the comforting *fear not*. This phrase previously was spoken in Luke's Gospel in contexts of angelic visitations to Zacharias, Mary, and the shepherds (Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10). This suggests that Jesus' presence was similarly disturbing, perhaps even terrifying.

10c. Jesus' words *from henceforth* reveal that this moment was a turning point. A dramatic break with the past is at hand, and Jesus' announcement of Simon's career shift was a masterful play on words and concepts. Unlike fish, which are killed when caught, the individuals Simon Peter would catch would be brought from death to life (Ephesians 2:1-6). Jesus turned a normally deadly activity into an analogy of something precious and life-giving. He was doing

nothing less than calling Simon to participate in Jesus' mission of gathering people into the kingdom of God.

11. When comparing Simon's call in the four Gospels, various details make it a challenge to piece together exactly when and how Jesus called him. Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:16-20 record Simon's calling; these accounts are briefer and include the call of Andrew, who was Simon Peter's brother. John 1:40-42 records Simon's calling *as a result of* Andrew's meeting Jesus before Simon Peter did.

So the call and response may have involved multiple steps, with Luke recording the culminating event: Simon and others leaving their fishing vocation to follow Jesus permanently.

The word *they* indicates that James and John took Jesus' words of calling Simon to include them as well. So the three men left *their ships*, the nets, and the equipment—as well as the greatest catch of fish they had seen in all their lives—to follow Jesus.

An essential purpose of today's lesson passage is to convey to Luke's audience the proper response to Jesus and His calls to ministry. Simon Peter's confession of his sinfulness, followed by the three fishermen's forsaking all to follow Jesus, stands in sharp contrast to what we see in the surrounding narratives. The people of Nazareth rejected Jesus, even trying to throw Him off a cliff (4:29)! Amazed by Jesus' authority to teach and perform miracles, the people of Capernaum demonstrated the opposite extreme, begging Jesus not to leave them (Luke 4:42).

In Luke 5 we continue to see both extremes. The common people swarm on Jesus in order to be healed of their afflictions (5:15), but the religious elite who came brought skepticism and opposition (5:21, 30).

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

## CALLED TO FOLLOW

### Into the Lesson

*When I was a child, here's what I said I wanted to be when I grew up:*

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Today's lesson focuses on vocation; that is, what we're doing now that we're grown up—and what the Lord may be calling us to do.

### Into the Word

Explain the nature of Jesus' calling of the fishermen—both in terms of the calling itself (verse 10b) and what Simon and the others gave up in the process (verse 11).

1—Explain the nature of *calling* as the fishermen may have understood calling and the sacrifice at the time.

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2—Explain how you understand the calling and the sacrifice for those fishermen now.

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### Into Life

With the use of a smartphone or other internet-connected device, search the internet for lists of professions or occupations.

List five professions or occupations.

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Choose several of those (possibly at random) and answer the following question, for each:

How could God use a Christian in this profession or occupation to serve Him in a unique way?

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How do you understand verses 10b-11 in terms of your own calling today?

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### THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Followers of Jesus fish for people. Start fishing!