

January 10
Lesson 6 (NIV)

CALLED TO FOLLOW

DEVOTIONAL READING: Luke 9:57–62

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 5:1–11

LUKE 5:1–11

¹ One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. ² He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ 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.

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

⁵ 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."

⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ 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.

⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ 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 fish for people." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

KEY VERSE

Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." —Luke 5:10b

CALL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Unit 2: Jesus and Calls in His Ministry

LESSONS 5–8

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recite the plot twists in Luke 5:1–11.
2. Explain the nature of Jesus' calling of the fishermen.
3. Write a statement that rephrases his or her job in terms of Jesus' call to evangelism.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. The Power of Children's Songs
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Shallow-Water Teaching (Luke 5:1–3)
 - A. Press of the Crowd (v. 1)
 - B. Solution of the Ship (vv. 2–3)
- II. Deep-Water Miracle (Luke 5:4–7)
 - A. The Reluctant Expert (vv. 4–5)
 - B. Bursting Net (v. 6)
 - Obedience Before Knowledge*
 - C. Sinking Ships (v. 7)
- III. Simon's Epiphany (Luke 5:8–10a)
 - A. A Sinner's Confession (v. 8)
 - B. The Fishermen's Astonishment (vv. 9–10a)
- IV. Jesus' Call (Luke 5:10b–11)
 - A. Fear Not (v. 10b)
 - B. Fish for Men (v. 10c)
 - C. Forsake All and Follow (v. 11)
 - The Sacrifice of Goers ... and Senders*

Conclusion

- A. What's My Line?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Capernaum Kuh-*per*-nay-um.

Cephas See-fus.

Galilee Gal-uh-lee.

Gennesaret Geh-*ness*-uh-ret (*G* as in *get*).

Kinnereth Kin-eh-ruth

Nazareth *Naz-uh-reth*.

synagogues *sin-uh-gog*.

Tiberias *Tie-beer-ee-us*.

Zechariah *Zek-uh-rye-uh*

Zebedee *Zeb-eh-dee*.

Introduction

A. The Power of Children's Songs

I don't think there is any doubt that putting words to music (or even just to rhythm) helps people learn and memorize. For instance, one of the first songs I remember learning in Sunday school was "I Will Make You Fishers of Men." Even though I don't think I've heard or sung the song in years, both the lyrics and the accompanying motions are still rooted in my memory.

Two generations later, my grandchildren participate in a curriculum group that includes learning facts and concepts via memorized songs. Thanks to one of these songs, my 3-year-old granddaughter was able to keep up with her two older brothers in memorizing all 45 US presidents!

I'm sure my understanding of becoming a fisher of men was quite limited when I memorized the song. But I believe the lyrics made a positive and permanent impression on my developing heart and mind. Looking back, I feel certain that I realized Jesus was extending to me a personal invitation to *follow* him. And I grasped that he was offering me an opportunity for fulfilling service: he would make me a fisher of men.

Today we study one of the passages in which Jesus called men to follow him when they didn't know exactly what that meant. Allow it to renew and re-inspire your sense that Jesus Christ has called you to something eternally significant.

B. Lesson Context

Luke 5:1–11 is part of the third of six major sections of Luke's Gospel. These sections present themselves as follows:

- I: Jesus' human relationships (1:5–2:52)
- II: Jesus' baptism and testing (3:1–4:13)
- III: Jesus' ministry in Galilee (4:14–9:50)
- IV: Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:44)
- V: Jesus' rejection and sacrifice (19:45–23:46)
- VI: Jesus' resurrection and ascension (24:1–53)

The third section covers Jesus' time and energy spent teaching, preaching, and performing miracles. All activities served as demonstrations of the good news, all were essential to Jesus'

mission, and all called for response. That is certainly the case in Luke 5:1–11, today’s text. (Matthew 4:18–22 and Mark 1:16–20 are parallel accounts.)

I. Shallow-Water Teaching

(LUKE 5:1–3)

A. Press of the Crowd (v. 1)

1. One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God.

In Luke 4 we see Jesus teaching and preaching in synagogues; now we see him ministering out in the open for the first time in this Gospel. *The Lake of Gennesaret* was named for the fertile region on the northwest side of the lake (compare Matthew 14:34; Mark 6:53); 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). In the Old Testament it is known as “the sea of Kinnereth” (Joshua 12:3). At 13 miles long and 7 miles wide, 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 “spread throughout the surrounding area” (4:37). The result was that *the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God* (compare 4:42). 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, (compare 1 Kings 12:22; 1 Chronicles 17:3; etc.).

What Do You Think?

What plan can you create to identify and eliminate distractions that work against your hearing the Word of God?

Digging Deeper

Would it help to categorize the distractions in terms of “from the world” (example: 1 John 2:15–17) and “from within oneself” (example: James 1:14)?

B. Solution of the Ship (vv. 2–3)

2. He saw at the water’s edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets.

The 1986 discovery of “the Kinneret boat,” dated to the first or second century AD, offers insight into what these *two boats* may have looked like. Constructed mostly of cedar and oak, the boat measures about 27 feet long, 7 feet wide, and 4 feet deep. It could have supported about a ton of weight—either about 15 passengers or 5 crew members and their catch of fish. (Luke 8:22 may indicate at least 13 people in a boat.)

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. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore.

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 “high fever” (4:38b–39), and many others were brought there with illnesses and demonization (4:40–41). See also the description of a previous meeting with Simon in John 1:40–42.

3b. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

Boarding *the boat* 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 (example: Luke 4:20–21). This was not be the only time that Jesus taught from a boat (see Mark 3:9; 4:1).

II. Deep-Water Miracle

(LUKE 5:4–7)

A. The Reluctant Expert (vv. 4–5)

4–5. 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.”

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 *worked hard all night* without catching anything!

But Simon had already witnessed the power of Jesus in miracles and teaching (see observations on Luke 4:38–41 in 5:3a, above). Those undoubtedly stood behind Simon’s addressing Jesus as *Master*, an acknowledgment of his authority to direct Simon (compare 8:45; 9:33). And so the expert fisherman yielded to the word of the carpenter. This is foundational to Simon’s future faithfulness in leadership (examples: Acts 2:14–40; 10:23b–48; 15:7–11, where he is known as Peter—see commentary on Luke 5:8, below).

B. Bursting Net (v. 6)

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

Despite the apparent foolishness of casting nets after having “worked all the night” and catching nothing (previous verse), *a large number of fish* were 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 nets began to break*. This is also the case in the lives of believers today. Though the blessings we will experience because of our faithfulness are not always obvious or even what we desired at a given time, our God is a God who delights in giving generously to his people.

His giving is not only in terms of quantity but also of quality (Matthew 7:7–11; John 2:10; 10:10b; James 1:17–18). The haul of fish in our text won't be the last one that obedience resulted in (see discussion of John 21:1–11 on Luke 5:11, below).

OBEDIENCE BEFORE KNOWLEDGE

About 10 years ago, our church outgrew its facilities and moved to a new building. For the next several years, our expenses exceeded our income. Then a few years ago, we sensed the Lord calling us to partner with an evangelist to build a Christian school for orphaned children in Gojo, Ethiopia.

It made about as much sense to build a school on the other side of the globe as it did for Simon to let down a net in the middle of the day after catching nothing all night. But the results have been similarly amazing. The year after donating \$120,000 to Gojo, we made budget for the first time in our new building. A Christian school that was renting our facilities spent \$2.1 million to build an education wing—which we now own and the school uses rent free! Even better, many orphans in Gojo are receiving a quality education and responding to the good news about Jesus.

Follow Simon's example: you can act for God on his timing *before* you know completely what he is doing.

—A. S.

C. Sinking Ships (v. 7)

7. 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.

Simon's *partners ... in the other boat* were James and John (see Luke 5:10a, below). The blessing of the fish was so overwhelming that *both the boats* together were barely able to handle the catch! This further emphasizes the nature of the miracle that Luke 5:6 describes.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you help your church see evangelism as best achieved through partnerships rather than by lone rangers?

Digging Deeper

What cultural lone-ranger mores might you have to overcome personally in the process?

III. Simon's Epiphany (LUKE 5:8–10a)

A. A Sinner's Confession (v. 8)

8a. When Simon Peter saw this.

All four Gospels mention that Jesus gave *Simon* the name *Peter* (Matthew 16:18; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14; and John 1:42, which adds "Cephas"). The Gospel writers refer to him as Simon Peter a total of 17 times, but 15 of these are in the Gospel of John. The text before us is the only such occurrence in Luke's writings of the books of Luke and Acts). 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 (compare 2 Peter 1:1).

8b. He fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

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 (compare Luke 5:32; 7:36–48). Realizing himself to be in the presence of a man of God led Simon to the confession we see here.

What Do You Think?

What kind of crisis would have to happen for you to react to Jesus as Simon Peter did?

Digging Deeper

Did you answer that question more in terms of a crisis of unexpected blessing (Peter's situation) or in terms of an unexpected loss or potential loss (example: Matthew 9:18)? Why might this distinction be important?

This scene reminds us of similar ones in the Old Testament. The call of the prophet Isaiah provides one example (Isaiah 6:5; compare Genesis 18:27; Exodus 3:4–6). 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" (examples: John 4:19; 20:15).

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.

B. The Fishermen's Astonishment (vv. 9–10a)

9–10a. 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.

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; see 9:28–36). But for now the focus is on Simon Peter as these others are mentioned only in passing.

IV. Jesus' Call (LUKE 5:10b–11)

A. Fear Not (v. 10b)

10b. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid.

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

B. Fish for Men (v. 10c)

10c. "From now on you will fish for people."

Jesus' words *from now on* reveal that this moment was a turning point (compare Luke 1:48; Acts 18:6). 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 *fish for* 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. Rather than using tools like boats and nets, the fishermen would be empowered by the Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:1–4; etc.).

What Do You Think?

What can you do to help your church evaluate and improve the effectiveness of its evangelistic methods?

Digging Deeper

How would you word a prayer for the Lord's help in this regard?

C. Forsake All and Follow (v. 11)

11. So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

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 boats*, the nets, and the equipment—as well as the greatest catch of fish they had seen in all their lives—to follow Jesus. With one minor exception (Matthew 17:27), this was the last day for three years that Simon, James, and John would spend as fishermen (Mark 10:28; compare John 21:1–14, see below).

In addition to the obvious economic ramifications, forsaking everything brought fundamental social consequences to the men. Their daily routine and their sense of identity would be forever changed. The three had entered into relationship with Jesus, thereby becoming key figures in the community beginning to form around him.

What Do You Think?

What life changes have you made and will you make to "leave everything" in following Jesus?

Digging Deeper

Categorize your response in terms of thoughts, behaviors, and speech patterns.

It is interesting to fast-forward the story by about three years, to the days following Jesus' resurrection. Having three times denied knowing Jesus during Jesus' trial (Luke 22:54–62), Simon Peter's calling as a servant-leader needed to be restored. Once again Simon and his companions fished all night without catching a single fish (John 21:3). Once again Jesus gave instructions to cast their net (21:6a). And once again they immediately caught an incredible number of fish (21:6b, 11). Then three times Jesus told Simon Peter to feed Jesus' sheep, culminating with the simple command, "Follow me" (21:15–19).

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 (Luke 5:8, above), followed by the three fishermen's leaving everything 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; but see a contrast in Matthew 11:23).

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).

THE SACRIFICE OF GOERS ... AND SENDERS

Shortly after I committed to Jesus, I felt strongly that the Lord was calling me to ministry. I wasn't sure what that meant. But I responded by leaving Colorado to go to a Christian college and major in biblical studies. I met my Missourian wife there. After graduate school, we were glad to both be hired by a church just an hour from her family.

Two years later we accepted a call to minister in a small church in Pennsylvania. We ended up living there 12 years. Though it was a sacrifice to be far from both our families, I didn't struggle much with self-pity. But now that our son is grown with a wife and children, I have a keen appreciation for the sacrifice that our parents felt—and that they rarely complained about it.

Forsaking all, as the fishermen did, can take many forms today. What would be a prayer you could pray to invite God to test your willingness in this regard?

—A. S.

Conclusion

A. What's My Line?

When I was a child, I enjoyed a game show called *What's My Line?* Each week a panel of celebrities tried to guess the contestants' line of work by asking only yes or no to questions. Any Christian who appeared on the show really should have been regarded as a trick contestant. Regardless of that person's workaday occupation, he or she also had work to do for Jesus.

Do you realize that *you also* have another line of work? Everyone who responds to Jesus' call to follow him shares a common job title and description (see Matthew 28:19–20). The way in

which we live out that calling varies greatly. But the key component is that we further God's plan of extending his kingdom, which is based and built on the good news of his Son, Jesus.

Simon Peter, James, and John did indeed pull up stakes to travel with Jesus. That fact may serve as an example-call to follow today as Christians relocate to the other side of the globe as missionaries. But strong argument can be made that although Luke 5:1–11 depicts the fishermen's call to full-time, vocational ministry, that text does not thereby serve as a directive that all followers of Jesus must do exactly likewise. Think of the man who wanted to go with Jesus after Jesus delivered him from demonization: Jesus told him to return home and share with the people there what God had done for him (Luke 8:26–39).

Jesus used the disciples' occupation as fishermen as an analogy of what he was calling them to do in ministry for him. How could you do likewise regarding your job? For example, if you are a farmer, what would it look like for you to be a "farmer of people"? Whether your calling is to full-time vocational ministry or to Christian witness in the secular workplace or to serve your family as a homemaker, how can you state your calling as a purpose statement for your life in Christ's kingdom?

B. Prayer

Thank you, Father, for the privilege of responding to your Son's call! Help us fulfill our calls to fish for people. In the Son's name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Followers of Jesus fish for people.
Start fishing!¹

¹ Sloan, A., Taylor, M. A., & Nickelson, R. L. (2021). [Called to Follow](#). In R. L. Nickelson, J. A. Kenney, & M. K. Williams (Eds.), *The NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, 2020–2021* (Vol. 27, pp. 161–167). Colorado Springs, CO: Standard Publishing.