

Part 15: The Form of Following Jesus

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What do followers of Jesus look like? This is an important question because our news media and your high school friends on Facebook are often quick to tell you what they look like for better or for worse.

But it's not just that our world needs clarity on what followers of Jesus look like, but it's often those inside the church who need clarity.

If you think about it, Jesus didn't give us clear cookie cutter identity markers. Unlike other religions he didn't tell us what kind of clothes we need to wear. He didn't tell us what kind of food we needed to eat. He didn't provide for us a specific town in which we need to all dwell, or command us that we should either all be married or all be single.

In fact, if you take a look at Christians across the globe you'd notice that followers of Jesus look different in different contexts. In most of the western world followers of Jesus gather in large public spaces on the Lord's Day, a Sunday. In some Middle Eastern countries followers of Jesus gather in large public spaces on a Friday because that's the day the government allows Christians to gather. In other places where the church is more persecuted, they may gather in a small underground location on a Sunday, or a Tuesday.

In many churches across the world you might find followers of Jesus holed up in a coffee shop on a Wednesday morning reading the Bible or one of many other Christian resources published in their own language. But for the small community of Jesus followers in Burkina Faso, Cameroon (among other places) there is no Bible or Christian resources in their language so they rely on missionaries laboring in the work of gospel articulation.

Today you might be a married man with kids whose relationship towards discipleship and Bible reading might look different than the single college female who is worshipping with you in this very room. There is extreme diversity in following Jesus. In light of this we encounter two warnings. The first is that we need to be careful to not assume that any one cultural expression of following Jesus is the life of following Jesus. Yet, we must also be careful to not assume that following Jesus is so open that it doesn't really have to look like anything.

Today in the book of Luke, Jesus is going to call his first followers, three of whom will be Jesus' closest friends in ministry. In this account we see steps which increasingly call followers deeper and deeper into their walk with Jesus. But we also see four aspects of discipleship which are not only broad enough to work in any culture, but they are also specific enough that you can take clear actions in your own life even this morning.

What we are going to see today as a big picture is that **Jesus calls people, by his word, into a life of following him more and more**. The four aspects of following Jesus we see in this text are **Desire, Duty, Deferral** and **Doxology**.

The goal this morning is to see the way in which Jesus calls all of us to walk deeper into each one of these. Each believer might be stronger and weaker in any one of these areas, but if we want to follow

Jesus we must learn to possess each of these. At the beginning of this passage we will notice two fishing boats, empty of fish, owned by disappointed and frustrated fishermen. But by the end of this passage these same men will leave their boats on the shore, full of fish in order to follow Jesus because they have been captured by the power of something greater. I hope that we might have such a similar experience today in our own hearts.

Let's begin by reading our first three verses this morning: **Luke 5:1-3**.

Have you ever had to write a paper and you had no idea how to begin the process? I've often heard people who want to write a book wrestled with how to start the process at all. For some of us the process to start is so hard because we feel overwhelmed by what we lack, we wonder how we will reach the word requirement at all. For others there's so much going on in our brains, so much we want to say or communicate, that picking a place to start seems devastatingly impossible. But for those who have felt this, for those who are waiting to write a paper right now, let me give you a very helpful hint as to where you ought to start. The top left corner of the page.

It's as simple as that. One cannot start if you don't start there. You might feel doubtful that you can do anything more, but to start there is to be exactly where you need to be. You might already be thinking of what the bottom right might look already on your last page, but you can't get there without starting on page one, top left corner.

Where does the path to following Jesus begin? What is the top left corner for all who would wish to learn more about the gospel? Your **Desire for the word of Jesus**.

Don't we see this in this text? As Jesus' fame is increasing, people were pressing in on Jesus. This doesn't mean that people were leaning in to hear a little better. This means that people were literally pushing up against Jesus because so many people were interested in him. Why? Because they wanted to hear the word of God.

It was just last week that Jesus informed the people of Capernaum that he had to leave them saying: **Luke 4:43**.

We've already seen earlier in temple that people were amazed at Jesus' word, in Nazareth people marveled at his word, in Capernaum they were amazed once more at his word. And as this word of Jesus, the word of the gospel, the word that there was a someone who came into a broken world to accomplish the good news of freedom, liberty, restoration and favor, people couldn't get enough of it. People desired it.

Now, it's important to note that desire on its own is not sufficient in the same way a paper which only has one word in the top left corner is not sufficient. This passage begins with lots of people desiring Jesus, but ends with a smaller group of faithful followers.

We might desire to hear the words of Jesus for a number of reasons. I'm terrified of snakes, but growing up whenever we went to the zoo I would want to go to the snake exhibit. Why? Because I had a desire. What was my desire? It was that perhaps as I had a close experience with the snakes, my fear would go away—it would be normalized, I would see them as ordinary and I could stop worrying about them.

For many people, desire for Jesus' word might begin with looking at your own life, the brokenness in our world, or maybe a keen realization of the evil in your own heart. What you wish to do is to simply come to the word of Jesus so that you might hear just enough to say, "I don't need to fear that anymore. That's a load of baloney." Or you might say, "Perfect, I heard his word, now I've been absolved of everything and I can go back to living however I want to live."

But it's not the presence of desire that creates a follower of Jesus, but instead what you do with that desire. In 2 Corinthians 2 Paul says for some the word of the gospel is a fragrance of joyful life to life, but for others it is the distasteful scent of death to death.

A true desire to following Jesus doesn't create a casual experience in which you walk away. But instead true desire is to hear the message of brokenness in our world, sin in our heart, and the promise of peace with God through Jesus Christ and to never want walk away from those words.

There's a scene in the gospel of John when the many of the crowds who were willingly and desirously following Jesus left him. Jesus then turned to his disciples and said would you want to leave as well. Look at what Simon Peter (who we will meet in a moment) said: **John 6:68**.

We cannot follow Jesus without wanting Jesus. But who do you want Jesus to be? Is Jesus the booster shot you need to return safely to a life of your own choosing? Or do you see in Jesus the only solution to the weight, worry and wounds of your own heart and desire to press deeper and deeper into what he may have? Jesus is not a commodity to be purchased, but a savior meant to be followed.

This is what we see next. Followers of Jesus not only desire his word, but they respond with **Duty towards the words of Jesus**.

Read with me **Luke 5:2-3**.

So here we see a glimpse into the scandal of the incarnation. Here is Jesus in the flesh. That is the second person of the Trinity, who is fully God and fully man. Do you see the unique experience this would have been for Jesus? Here is the one who spoke the earth into being, who by his word sustains the whole universe, and for the first time in eternity Jesus' voice is limited.

There are so many people coming to hear him speak, and he can't address them all. So what does Jesus do? He recruits others to help him. He invites others into his program of redemption.

Jesus sees Simon (who we see later is also called Peter). What we already know is that Simon was part of the crowds who desired Jesus. Jesus just healed Simon's mother-in-law in our text last week. Jesus sees Simon who is a fisherman, who is cleaning his net while his boat sat empty.

And what does Jesus do? He says, "Simon, give me your boat. Take me out a little so I can address the whole crowd at the same time."

The beautiful reality we see here in this text is that Simon not only sat under Jesus words himself, but that in Simon's right desire, Jesus called him deeper. Jesus here asks Peter to participate in following him by helping other people follow him. For those who rightly desire Jesus, Jesus himself asks you to participate in helping others hear the message of Jesus and follow the message of Jesus.

This is what "discipleship" is. Discipleship at its core is following Jesus. But following Jesus means that we call other people to follow Jesus. Here we begin to see the essence of discipleship: we follow Jesus by desiring his words, and helping others do the same. Our definition of discipleship at Sovereign Hope is this: **Discipleship is helping each other follow Jesus in all of life through the gospel.**

This is why we have membership at Sovereign Hope, we are covenanting together to help each other hear and respond to the words and work of Jesus. If Jesus had the words of life, and in conversion he gives them to us, then anyone who is now a Christian also has the words of life and God would have you to do something with that and for that!

Look at the duty Paul defines for the church in **Ephesians 4:11-12**. It's true that Peter here is not just a follower, he is an apostle. But the work of apostles like Peter, of pastors like you have here, is to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

The gospel calls each of us to a duty of helping others hear and respond to the words of Jesus.

What does this look like for you? This is why I love this passage. What we see in this passage is a progressive growth of what it looks like to follow Jesus. The way in which Peter helps disciple in verse 4 is different than how he will help in verse 10. But at each junction he's simply responding faithfully to the next step Jesus calls him into.

Yes, part of being a disciple and a follower of Jesus is the wonderful call of becoming a fisher of men--an evangelist who shares the gospel boldly and openly. By the end of the book of Acts, Peter has embodied what it looks like to be a fisher of men. He is bold, fearless and passionate in his public proclamation of the gospel. God grows Peter's ministry into something monumental, and God will grow you too.

But sometimes being a disciple starts with the simplicity of using your boat to help other people hear and see Jesus.

Isn't that beautiful? Peter didn't go to the lake that day to become an apostle. He went to the lake that day in order to fish. But in God's providence, and by the word of Jesus, Peter's work for his own provision turned into work for the provision of Jesus and others.

When Peter looked at his boat after a night of fishing he saw a failed fishing vessel. When Jesus looked at it he saw a platform for the gospel. And the beautiful joy of it is that Jesus didn't just take the boat himself, instead he invited Peter to participate in it.

Jesus will grow your duty of helping others hear and respond to his word. That's the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit. But to start I'd like to ask you today—what boats do you have laying around your life? What are some of the tools, relationships, positions or skills you might already have that this week you might be able to use as a platform to help the word of God go forward?

For Peter he did nothing but use it as a vehicle for people to hear what Jesus himself had to say. What might that look like for you this week? Kids, I want you to talk about that with your parents on the way home. I'd love it if at lunch with your friends or at community group this week you might help each other find their own boats and talk about what it might look like to respond to Jesus' request to use it for the furtherance of the gospel.

But as simple as it may have been for Peter to let Jesus use his boat for the preaching of the gospel, things got a little more choppy when Jesus calls Peter into something more. It was one thing for Peter to let Jesus borrow his boat as a pulpit, but it's quite another thing when Jesus asks for control over Peter's vocation.

This is where we see our third point this morning. Following Jesus is **Deferral to the word of Jesus**. To defer on something is to give the option to someone else. In football when you win the coin toss you can defer to the other team meaning that the other team gets to choose first.

In a life of following Jesus, we learn what it means to let Jesus choose first. Read with me: **Luke 5:4-11**.

Sarah and I have had people approach us and say, "I don't know how you survive life with four kids!" Our response is always pretty similar. We say, "In God's kindness he gives them to us one at a time."

We see the kindness of Jesus' gentle growth in this passage. At first Peter is asked to put out a little bit, but then Jesus asks him to put out into the deep. In so doing, Jesus now begins telling Peter how to do his own job. While Jesus stood in the boat Peter only had to listen, but now Jesus called Peter to work.

It's one thing to be content in helping other people follow Jesus. It's easy to tell others what it looks like for them to follow Jesus and how Jesus would want them to live. But what happens when Jesus reaches into your own life and tells you how to live? This is what Peter encountered. He had no problem obliging Jesus the professional preacher when he needed help preaching. But when the professional preacher began commanding the professional fisher things got a bit more dicey.

Peter let Jesus know that he and his partners had been fishing all night long. They toiled—these experts worked extremely hard trying to catch the smallest load and took nothing. More than that they had cleaned out their nets. They were ready to be done working!

I used to work in a butcher shop and part of my duties was to clean out the meat grinder. It was not an easy process and took a considerable amount of time. But every now and then I would have cleaned the meat grinder but then we'd run out of ground beef and I'd get one person who'd come and require me to dirty the whole grinder again and then clean it again.

This is what Peter just did with his net. This is often times what it feels like to follow Jesus. We partition portions of our life out and we say: "You don't know what it's like to be in my shoes. I've got a handle on it and what you're asking me to do will certainly not work at all."

Now because we are reading words on a page we can't discern the tone behind Peter's words. Did he say it optimistically: "But at your word, I will let down the nets." Or did he say it begrudgingly, "At your word I'll let down the nets."

But whether he obeyed joyfully, or skeptically, his obedience was rewarded and we know for certain the emotions he had afterwards.

Peter's deferral to Jesus' word bore miraculous fruit. What he thought impossible to bring the slightest benefit proved to be of more benefit than he could ever imagine.

Did you notice Peter's response to Jesus? If this were you how do you think you'd respond? From the outside looking in we would think that Peter would be joyful! He just found the world's greatest and most profitable fishing partner.

But instead the reward of his obedience revealed the absolute holiness and wonder of Jesus.

There will be times in your walk with Jesus where he calls you in obedience to do things that seem costly and even fearful to you. Obeying Jesus might look like bringing to light sins that you've long kept in the dark. Obeying Jesus might look like leaving a lucrative job. Obeying Jesus might look like breaking up with the person you're dating. Obeying Jesus might look like standing against the tides of culture.

But when we are willing to defer to Jesus' word, what we are met with is the astounding nature and character of Jesus. He is holy, we are sinful. He is always right, we are most of the time doubting and wrong. But, when we defer we see the promise of God from **Proverbs 30:5**. We realize that his word is true, that it's always for our benefit.

In this obedience we encounter the reality that this truth-speaking, fish-bringing, boat-commanding Jesus is not like us. And in a profound encounter with Jesus' holiness, obedience becomes a bit more fearful in all the right ways.

It is fearful because we know that obeying Jesus requires us to sometimes distrust our own experience and instead to trust the word of the holy Lord. But in the process we also realize that this Lord is worthy to be wholly trusted.

I love the portrait of following Jesus we see in this passage. There are times where we follow Jesus easily by offering him the most ordinary places of our life. There are times where following Jesus is a bit more demanding because it requires us to work out our obedience. And there are often times where after we obey we feel as if we are sinking because of our obedience. But the beautiful picture in this story is that the sinking boats made it safely to shore.

Jesus didn't miraculously cause the boats to stop sinking, he didn't give Peter and his partners the ability to walk on water. But instead, those who through obedience felt overwhelmed, safely made it to shore even though it was difficult. Our obedience might call us into difficult and scary circumstances, but our obedience keeps us with Jesus and that's the safest place we can be.

The last season of my life has proven this tension in the most painful and in the most beautiful way. I've learned that obedience to a Jesus as big and powerful as this is always a drama of faith. Obedience is not easy, but it's beautiful. Obedience for me is learning to actively distrust my experience and expectations in faith that Jesus has something better for me. It says, "I'm not sure, I'm still a bit scared, but at your word, I'll do it."

The beauty of such obedience is what we see in this text. That at the end of it, we see Jesus as more faithful than we ever thought. Jesus might call you to something big, but after every step we become more and more comfortable with Jesus getting to choose the next one. The Olympian turned missionary, Eric Liddell described this beautifully when he said: **"God's will is only revealed to us step by step. He reveals more as we obey what we know. Surrender means that we are prepared to follow his will step by step as it is revealed to us no matter what."**

Followers do just that. We follow. Where Jesus goes. We go. This might bring us into deep waters face to face with someone terrifyingly powerful. But this isn't where the story ends. Not only do these men make it back safely. But Jesus speaks to them.

Look here: **Luke 5:8-11.**

The joy of following Jesus is that when we are fearful, Jesus speaks to us peace. This world is a fearful place. It is fearful to disobey, and it is fearful to obey. But only one choice is met with the comfort of the word of Jesus.

The wild thing about this text is that the fishermen didn't fear their failure anymore, they didn't fear that the boats were sinking, instead they feared Jesus. This might seem unusual, but this is the joy of following Jesus. When what we fear is primarily our standing before Jesus, Jesus offers peace. That's what salvation is, the promise that through faith sinners can sit fearlessly at the feet of Jesus. And when that fear is solved the world becomes a bit safer. Jesus spoke into their fear with the promise of peace and called them into a life of more dutiful work: fishing for men.

In the midst of all of the drama of following Jesus, these men were astonished. This is our last point today. As desire, duty and deferral push us deeper into the water what we are met with is not fearful apprehension, but joyful and willingly following. This is **Doxology at the word of Jesus.**

Doxology comes from the Greek word "doxa" which means praise and a life of following Jesus is at its core praising Jesus. The drama of obedience is wrapped up in the experience of worship.

I think Luke wants us to see this transformation of heart in this passage. Because if you'll notice in verse 3, Jesus asked Peter to use his boat. In verse 4 he commanded Peter to go out a little deeper and lower his nets. But here Peter, James and John leave everything and follow Jesus without ever being asked.

Isn't that astounding? Remember how this scene started: two empty boats and some disgruntled fishermen. The empty boats sat on the shore as the fishermen left them behind. But here the boats are full to the brim of fish and the fishermen walk away.

Why? Because they realize the privilege of worship—a privilege of being called into a life in service of something greater.

There was a study on social media use which revealed that the group of young adults who used social media the least was those who were in pre-med or pre-law programs. Why were these individuals able to side step the black hole of technological drift? Because they had a bigger vision for life. It was nothing for them to say no to their phones because they were saying yes to a brighter future.

This is the experience these men had with Jesus. Those who had caught an amazing catch of fish were themselves seized by something greater. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said that "When Christ calls a man he bids him to come and die."

By a worldly standard this sounds absolutely terrifying. But for one who, step by step, has waded into the deep with Jesus, it is them alone who sees that it's worth it. That as we die to ourselves, our experiences, our careers, our works of the flesh and idols of the heart we see that Jesus is worth all of it.

Here are men who before Jesus' call were tired because despite their work they took nothing. But after Jesus' called them into deep obedience, they were willing to leave everything.

This is what it looks like to follow Jesus. A life of worship which holds everything in our world loosely for the privilege of clinging to Jesus fully.

Eric Liddell who I mentioned earlier gave up a life of athletic riches to go be a missionary in China where he died in a prison camp. But he found in following Jesus what he willingly gave up: **"I find I need more than an ideal: I need a savior to save me from the guilt of sin; to save me from the power of sin. I need a savior whose grace is sufficient to enable me to live a life of unselfish service and love."**

Consider the parable Jesus himself gives to his disciples in **Matthew 13:44**.

The only way we can go from the desire of the crowd to the doxology of the disciples, the only way to take nothing and leave everything is to see Jesus as something else. The question we ought to ask ourselves at the end of this passage is not: "What does a life of following Jesus look like to you?" That question is answered for us when each of us can answer: "Who does Jesus look like to you?"