



Unit 11

EXPERIENCING THE CALLING OF JESUS

WEEK 51: FISHERS OF MEN

WEEK 52: COME AND SEE

What if, for one day, Jesus were to become you? What if, for twenty-four hours, Jesus woke up in your bed, walked in your shoes, lived in your house, assumed your schedule? Your boss became his boss, your mother became his mother, your pains became his pains? With one exception, nothing about your life changed. Your health didn't change. Your circumstances didn't change. Your schedule wasn't altered. Your problems weren't solved. Only one change occurred.

What if, for one day and one night, Jesus lived your life with his heart? Your heart got the day off, and your life was led by the heart of Christ. His priorities governed your actions. His passions drove your decisions. His love directed your behavior.

What would you be like? Would your family see something new? Would your coworkers sense a difference? What about the less fortunate? Would you treat them the same? And your friends? Would they detect more joy? How about your enemies? Would they receive more mercy from Christ's heart than from yours?

And you? How would you feel? What alterations would this transplant have on your stress level? Your mood swings? Your temper? Would you see sunsets differently? Death differently? Taxes differently? Any chance you'd need fewer aspirin or sedatives? How about your reaction to traffic delays? (Ouch, that touched a nerve.) Would you still dread what you are dreading? Better yet, would you still do what you are doing?

Keep working on this for a moment. Adjust the lens of your imagination until you have a clear picture of Jesus leading your life, then snap the shutter and frame the image. What you see is what God wants. He wants you to "have the same mindset as Christ" (Philippians 2:5).

God's plan for you is nothing short of a new heart. If you were a car, God would want control of your engine. If you were a computer, God would claim the software and the hard drive. If you were an airplane,

he would take his seat in the flight deck. But you are a person, so God wants to change your heart. He is *calling you* to change your heart.

It's dangerous to sum up grand truths in one statement, but I'm going to try. If a sentence or two could capture God's desire for each of us, it might read like this: "God loves us just the way we are, but he refuses to leave us that way. He wants us to be just like Jesus."

When my daughter Jenna was a toddler, I used to take her to a park near our apartment. One day as she was playing in a sandbox, an ice cream salesman approached us. I purchased her a treat, and when I turned to give it to her, I saw her mouth was full of sand. Where I intended to put a delicacy, she had put dirt.

Did I love her with dirt in her mouth? Absolutely. Was she any less my daughter with dirt in her mouth? Of course not. Was I going to allow her to keep the dirt in her mouth? No way. I loved her right where she was, but I refused to leave her there. I carried her over to the water fountain and washed out her mouth. Why? Because I love her.

God does the same for us. He holds us over the fountain. "Spit out the dirt," he urges. "I've got something better for you." And so he cleanses us of filth: immorality, dishonesty, prejudice, bitterness, greed. We don't enjoy the cleansing; sometimes we even opt for the dirt over the ice cream. "I can eat dirt if I want to!" we pout and proclaim.

But if we do, the loss is ours. God has a better offer. He is calling us to something better. You aren't stuck with today's personality. You aren't condemned to "grumpydom." You are tweakable. Even if you've worried each day of your life, you needn't worry the rest of your life.

Where did we get the idea we can't change? From whence come statements such as, "It's just my nature to worry," or, "I'll always be pessimistic," or, "I can't help the way I react"? Would we make similar statements about our bodies? "It's just my nature to have a broken leg." Of course not. If our bodies malfunction, we seek help. Shouldn't we do the same with our hearts? Shouldn't we seek aid for our sour attitudes? Can't we request treatment for our selfish tirades? Of course we can. Jesus can change our hearts. He wants us to have a heart like his. Can you imagine a better offer?²⁸

— PRAYER —

Heavenly Father, I want to heed your calling to be like Jesus. Help me this week to tune out the voices of the world and focus on hearing you. Thank you for speaking your words of wisdom, mercy, and love into my life. Draw me closer to you each day and guide me with your gentle voice.

— MEMORY VERSE —

Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:17

Week 51: FISHERS OF MEN

When I was in high school, our family used to fish every year during spring break. One year my brother and my mom couldn't go, so my dad let me invite a friend. I asked Mark. He was a good pal and a great sport. He got permission from his parents, and we began planning our trip.

Days before leaving, we could already anticipate the vacation. We could feel the sun warming our bodies as we floated in the boat. We could feel the yank of the rod and hear the spin of the reel as we wrestled the white bass into the boat. And we could smell the fish frying in an open skillet over an open fire.

We could hardly wait. Days passed like cold molasses. Finally, spring break arrived. We loaded our camper and set out for the lake.

We arrived late at night, unfolded the camper, and went to bed—dreaming of tomorrow's day in the sun. But during the night, an unseasonably strong norther blew in. It got cold fast! The wind was so strong that we could barely open the camper door the next morning. The sky was gray. The lake was a mountain range of white-topped waves. There was no way we could fish in that weather.

"No problem," we said. "We'll spend the day in the camper. After all, we have Monopoly. We have some magazines to read. We all know a few jokes. It's not what we came to do, but we'll make the best of it and fish tomorrow."

So, huddled in the camper with a Coleman stove and a Monopoly board, we three fishermen passed the day—indoors. The hours passed slowly, but they did pass. Night finally came, and we crawled into the sleeping bags, dreaming of angling. Were we in for a surprise. The next morning it wasn't the wind that made the door hard to open; it was the ice!

We tried to be cheerful. "No problem," we mumbled. "We can play Monopoly . . . again. We can reread the magazines. And surely we know another joke or two." But as courageous as we tried to be, it was obvious that some of the gray had left the sky and entered our camper.

I began to notice a few things I hadn't seen before. Like the fact my friend Mark had a few personality flaws. He was a bit cocky about his opinions. He was easily irritated and constantly edgy. He couldn't take any constructive criticism. Even though his socks did stink, he didn't think it was my business to tell him.

"Just looking out for the best interest of my dad's camper," I said, expecting Dad to come to my aid. But Dad just sat over in the corner, reading. *Humph*, I thought, *where is he when I need him?* And then I began to see Dad in a different light. When I mentioned to him that the eggs were soggy and the toast was burnt, he invited me to try my hand at the portable stove. *Touchy, touchy*, I said to myself. *Nothing like being cooped up in a camper with someone to help you see his real nature.*

It was a long day. It was a long, cold night. When we awoke the next morning to the sound of sleet slapping the canvas, we didn't even pretend to be cheerful. We were flat-out grumpy. Mark became more of a jerk with each passing moment. I wondered what spell of ignorance I must have been in when I invited him. Dad couldn't do anything right. I wondered how someone so irritable could have such an even-tempered son. We sat in misery the whole day, our fishing equipment still unpacked.

The next day was even colder. "We're going home," my father said. No one objected.

I learned a hard lesson that week. Not about fishing, but about people. When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight.

When energy intended to be used outside is used inside, the result is explosive. Instead of casting nets, we cast stones. Instead of extending helping hands, we point accusing fingers. Instead of being fishers of the lost, we become critics of the saved. Rather than helping the hurting, we hurt the helpers.

The result? Church Scrooges. "Bah humbug" spirituality. Beady eyes searching for warts on others while ignoring the warts on the nose below. Crooked fingers that bypass strengths and point out weaknesses. Split churches. Poor testimonies. Broken hearts. Legalistic wars. And, sadly, poor go unfed, confused go uncounseled, and lost go unreached. When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight.

But note the other side of this fish tale. When those who are called to fish, fish—they flourish! Nothing handles a case of the gripes like an afternoon service project. Nothing restores perspective better than a visit to a hospital ward. Nothing unites soldiers better than a common task.

Leave soldiers inside the barracks with no time on the front line and see what happens to their attitude. The soldiers will invent things to complain about. Bunks will be too hard. Food will be too cold. Leadership will be too tough. The company will be too stale. Yet place those same soldiers in the trench and let them duck a few bullets, and what was a boring barracks will seem like a haven. The beds will feel great. The food will be almost ideal. The leadership will be courageous. The company will be exciting.

When those who are called to fish, fish—they flourish!

Jesus understood this truth. On the day that he performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand, he had just learned of the death of John the Baptist. When he arrived at Bethsaida, he was sorrowful, tired, and anxious to be alone with the disciples. No one would have blamed him had he dismissed the crowds who followed him on foot from the towns. No one would have criticized him had he waved away the people.

But he didn't.

Instead, "when Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14). The Greek word used for *compassion* in this verse is *splanchnizomai*, which won't mean much to you unless you are in the health professions and studied splanchnology in school. If so, you remember that splanchnology is a study of the visceral parts. Or, in contemporary jargon, a study of the gut.

When Matthew writes that Jesus had compassion on the people, he is not saying that Jesus felt casual pity for them. No, the term is far more graphic. Matthew is saying that Jesus felt their hurt in his gut. He felt the limp of the crippled. He felt the hurt of the diseased. He felt the loneliness of the leper. He felt the embarrassment of the sinful.

And once he felt their hurts, he couldn't help but heal their hurts. He was moved in the stomach by their needs. He was so touched by their needs that he forgot his own needs. He was so moved by the people's hurts that he put his hurts on the back burner.

Self was forgotten . . . others were served . . . and stress was relieved. Make a note of that. The next time the challenges "outside" tempt you to shut the door and stay inside, stay long enough to get warm. Then get out. When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

- When those who are called to fish don't fish . . . they fight.
- When those who are called to fish do fish . . . they flourish!
- Jesus felt the hurt of people deep inside—in his gut.
- Jesus was so touched by others' needs that he forgot his own needs.

MEMORY VERSE

Your memory verse for this final unit is 1 Corinthians 7:17. Take a few moments to review this verse, and then write it out from memory in the space below.

The Heart of Jesus

They had received the call and responded. Going out in pairs of two, they went to every town and place where Jesus was planning to visit. They were like the workers in a field who prepared the soil for the seed that the farmer would then sow. And they couldn't believe the results. "Lord," they exclaimed when they returned, "even the demons obeyed us when we used your name!" (Luke 10:17 NCV). Jesus couldn't contain his excitement. "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven," he said to them (verse 18). God's workers flourish when they heed his call and take on his authority to "trample on snakes and scorpions" (verse 19). And the enemy falls.

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

READ: LUKE 5:1-11 AND JAMES 1:22-27

1. Several of the disciples that Jesus called to follow him were fishermen. How did Jesus encounter Peter in this story? What request did Jesus make to him (see Luke 5:1-4)?
2. Peter wasn't eager to throw out the nets again . . . but he followed Jesus' direction. What happened when he did? What did he then say to Jesus (see verses 5-10)?
3. Jesus told Peter that he would now fish for people. What did Peter do immediately afterward (see verses 10-11)? How do you think this calling forever changed his life?
4. Jesus actively met the needs of others—and he calls his followers to do the same. What does James say about the importance of acting on God's Word (see James 1:22)?
5. What illustration does James use to demonstrate what a person is like who doesn't act on God's Word? What does a person receive who does act on it (see verses 23-25)?
6. What does James state about the importance of showing love to others not only through the words you speak but also through your acts of kindness (see verses 26-27)?
7. How have the passages you've studied this week helped you to recognize what it means to "fish for people"? Who do you know who needs your acts of compassion today?