

“Leave the Shallow End”

Luke 5:1-11

Series: Cliff Notes Week 9: Jesus' Calling

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When I visit the Sea of Galilee I like to get up before dawn and pray as Jesus did and then watch the sun rise over the Sea. One time I read in the Bible, “Jesus saw at the water’s edge two boats, left there by the fishermen who were washing their nets” (Luke 5:2) “‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fish for people.’” They stopped gathering fish and started gathering people into God’s family. I looked up from my Bible and there, right before my eyes, were two fishing boats with fishermen emptying their nets. “What a beautiful image of sharing the Good News,” I thought. But then the fishermen took out the fish and whacked them on the side of the boat. I don’t think Jesus meant us to do that.

The shallow end. It’s close to shore. You can see the bottom. You know what’s down below. Go ahead: wade in the water – up to your knees, your waist. Keep your feet firmly on the bottom. Hang out near the beach. Stay tied up to the dock. It’s a good place to start.

But it’s not where you are meant to stay. You are created for more. Jesus is calling you to leave the shore. You are made to go deeper. Why? What’s wrong with the shallow end? It’s familiar. I’m not good with anything unexpected. It’s safe. I want a guarantee everything will be okay. It’s predictable. I don’t do well with surprises. It’s manageable. I need to keep things under control. We like the shallow end of life. And that’s also true when it comes to God. I want a familiar God who thinks and feels the way I do. I want a safe God who takes care of all my needs and never asks me to take risks. I want a predictable God who works all things together for my good according to my timetable. I want a manageable God who answers my prayers and solves my problems the way I want. I want that God to be available when I need Him.

The shallow end of life is familiar, safe, predictable, manageable...and shallow. It’s unsatisfying. Why wade by the edge when you can swim in the waves? Why just touch the surface when you can plumb the depths? Why dangle your feet when you can dive in? Your heart and your history tell you nearly all the growth in your life came when you left the shallows and set sail for the unpredictable deep. The gain comes after some pain.

- Playing guitar requires practices and callouses.
- Scoring goals takes hours of drills, drills and more drills
- Snagging a career demands years of study and lots of experience
- Falling in love exposes you to heartbreak and rejection
- Birthing a child comes after the pain of childbirth with more pain to come
- Enjoying your grandchildren is the reward for not killing your children

If you leave the shallow end, you will face risk, challenge and change. These are often the price you pay for all the good in your life. What’s more, the shallow end is not always the safest place. Storms slam the shore. Storms still find you. Perhaps you are in one right now.

And there's one more reason to go deeper: that's where God calls you to be. Jesus wants more than a shallow, superficial relationship with you. He's not satisfied to have you stand on the seashore or dip your toe in the tide pools. He invites you to go all in, to set sail on an adventure with Him. As you go deeper you find there is no such thing as a shallow God. The real God is not familiar, safe, predictable or manageable. He is mysterious, amazing, and wild. He is also loving, joyful, peaceful, patient and compassionate. The better I know God, the better I know myself. The deeper I go with God, the deeper I become. The sooner I let go of the dock; the sooner I find my life. All this starts with a decision and a step.

Simon is ready for bed when the decision comes to him. Fishing on the Galilee requires you to work a night shift. It's the only time you can catch fish...if you're lucky. And last night Simon was not lucky. Dragging his nets from dusk to dawn around the lake produced not one tiny tilapia. Now, with his boats pulled up on shore, Simon wants to wash his nets and go to bed. There is just one problem: a crowd carpets the shoreline. They push and shove forward to touch the carpenter from Nazareth. Jesus is back from a teaching tour. Simon knows Him. He watched Him cast out a demon in their synagogue. He welcomed Jesus under His roof and witnessed Him heal the whole village starting with Simon's mother-in-law. Jesus' popularity is escalating exponentially. In fact, the tidal wave of humanity threatens to push Jesus into the sea.

So Jesus steps into Simon's beached boat. "Can you put out a little from shore?" the Rabbi asks. I imagine Simon is irritated by this interruption to his well-deserved rest. Yet he complies and settles down to listen. Finally, when the sermon is over, Simon prepares to row the short distance back to shore and get some shut eye. Here's where the decision comes in.

When he finished speaking, Jesus said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Luke 5:4

The Rabbi wants Simon to go in the opposite direction. Simon can refuse. Up to now the tired fisherman has gone along with it. He even let his boat be a floating synagogue. He should tell the Teacher to get someone else to take him on a fishing trip. Simon decides to go, but he also grumbles under his breath. Jesus may know carpentry. He's an impressive preacher with incredible powers. He doesn't know the first thing about fishing. Simon gives him some attitude.

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." Luke 5:5

Somehow Simon convinces his partners James, John and the other anglers to row out into the center of the lake and play out their newly washed nets. A lot of salty language is probably exchanged between the doubtful fishermen until there's a tug on the net. And then another. Then the dragnet starts dragging the boat. The strain is so great the ropes are about to snap. Simon and Andrew pull in the net with all their strength but the weight of it is so overwhelming it nearly capsizes the small craft. So they call the other boat and together they begin hauling in a windfall of fish. In fact, both boats are so full of flipping, flopping fish they start to sink.

And this causes Simon to sink...to his knees. If it were me, I'd invite Jesus to join me on every future fishing trip. Simon begs Jesus to go away.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" 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. Luke 5:9-10

In a pair of leaking boats filled to the brim with slimy fish, the holiness of God appears, and it terrifies Simon to the soul of his sandals. Simon wants God to go away, to get out of His boat and leave Him alone. Not because God is bad but because he is holy. All his life he was taught a holy God cannot stand sin so Simon doesn't want Him to stand beside him for it will be the end of him. But instead of condemnation, Jesus offers comfort and then a commission.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him. Luke 5:10-11

You know Jesus must be God since all those fishermen gave up all those fish to follow Him.

How do you go deeper with God? It begins with a **Decision**. Simon has a boatload of reasons to tell Jesus to go jump in the lake. He's tired. He just pulled an all-nighter. They just finished cleaning the nets. His family is waiting at home for him. He needs to rest. Jesus' request is crazy. It goes against conventional wisdom.

Why don't we pray or read the Word? Why don't we worship? Why don't we join a Growth Group, teach Sunday School, be a youth leader, serve in mission? There are always reasons and excuses. Full schedule. Not enough time. Too many things on my plate. I'm tired. Let someone else do it. I've heard them all. Excuses keep us in the shallow end instead of going deeper with God. The smallest decision can yield the greatest change.

When I was a high school freshman, the drama teacher announced tryouts for the fall play: *Our Town*. I thought about auditioning but then decided to skip it. I feared being turned down. I went out to the car where my mother was waiting. When I told her about the tryouts she told me to go back and give it a shot. So I did. And I was turned down – at least for a speaking part. I was one of the nameless townspeople. Yet that small decision was the start of my training in public speaking. I didn't know then I would be on stage nearly every week of my life. And, more importantly, in the wedding scene of *Our Town* I sat next to another actor: Lisa Thraen – the woman who's been my wife for the last 42 years.

A few months before that tryout I made another small decision. A seminary student I did not know called me out of the blue to come down to our church and meet with him. For some reason I said yes. And during that conversation with Eddie Grant in the church office, I decided to open the door of my heart and let Jesus in. Those seemingly small decisions, a few months apart, changed my direction and my life. What decision is God laying before you today?

After the decision comes a **Departure**. To gain something you must give something up. Simon let go of his need for sleep. He went against all he knew about fishing. He gave up his time. Soon he will let go of his career. He stops catching fish and starts gathering people.

Behind our excuses is our fear. So long as I cling to the dock I'm in control. I'm comfortable in the shallow end. But if I go with God it could mess up everything. I may have to give up my way of doing things. I might have to love people I don't like, forgive people who

don't deserve it, help people who can't help themselves. I might have to go places that are risky, talk with people who are different, spend time and money I want to keep for me. Make no mistake: if you want to grow, you must let go. Jesus got the attention of these fishermen by filling their boats with fish. But once they had the greatest haul in their careers, they realize there is something greater waiting for them. So they let them all go. What are you afraid to let go?

Decision and departure lead to **Discovery**. When you go deeper you know God better and you know yourself better. In the beginning of this fishing trip Simon calls Jesus "Master" – a title of respect. "Whatever you say boss." Later, when Simon is flooded with fish, he calls Jesus "Lord" – a title reserved for God. When you go deeper you know God better. It's a revealing, terrifying, exhilarating, freeing experience. You discover the God you've worshiped up to now is a two-dimensional, superficial, shallow god. You find you've been bowing down to a god of your own making, maybe even a god made in your image. But when you meet the True God, you also discover the true you. Simon, this crusty, salty, hard-shell fisherman who will be called Peter – the Rock – suddenly cracks. He is suddenly, painfully aware of his weaknesses, sins and failures. He also discovers Jesus wants to use flawed, imperfect people like him and you and me.

Decision, departure and discovery lead to **Dedication**. You give yourself to God. We grow by doing. We learn by living it. We practice, experiment, and try things. As Simon and his partners followed Jesus for the next three years, the Lord told them to practice, to experiment, to try things. And notice – they did it together. They needed each other to haul in the fish and to gather people. They were dedicated to each other and to doing God's work.

This is why I am so passionate about Growth Groups. We help each other to grow. Each week, in my Growth Groups, with an "I will..." statement - a specific growth step of what we will do based on God's Word. This is not just about information. It's transformation.

And so today, I ask you to take a specific step, to make a decision. Take out the Go Deeper insert in your bulletin and make a commitment. Write your name on it, select any of the boxes that apply and place it in the offering plate during our last song This shows you are done with the shallow end. You are ready to go deeper.

Gary Haugen had a dream. He heard Jesus calling him to address the massive injustices around the world, the hidden growth of slavery and forced labor and the unthinkable sin of sex trafficking. Gary wasn't naïve about the impossibility of his mission. He worked for the U.S. Department of Justice. To make change, he knew you must get countries to enact laws, to fix their broken and often corrupt legal systems. For three years he shared with friends his vision of starting a non-profit that partnered with nations to help the poor, free the captives, and stop slavery. Yet he was afraid to leave the shallow end and go deeper with Jesus.

I was very excited, in theory, about this dream of following Jesus in the work of justice in the world. But then I had to actually act. I had to walk into the Department of Justice and turn in my badge. I tried to be very brave and very safe. That is to say, I walked in and asked my bosses for a yearlong leave of absence. My bosses politely declined.

I was suddenly feeling very nervous. What was I really afraid of? As I thought about it, I feared humiliation. If my little justice ministry idea didn't work, no one was going to die.

If it turned out to be a bad idea and collapsed, my kids weren't going to starve. We'd probably just have to live with my parents for a while until I could find another job. The fact is, I would be terribly embarrassed. Having told everybody about my great idea, they would know it was a bad idea or I was a bad leader. Either way, it would be humiliating.

So there it was. My boundary of fear. I sensed God inviting me to an extraordinary adventure of service, but deep inside I was afraid of looking like a fool and a loser. When I am older, do I really want to look back and say, Yeah, I sensed that God was calling me to lead a movement to bring rescue to people who desperately need an advocate in the world, but I was afraid of getting embarrassed and so I never even tried?¹

So Gary Haugen left the Justice Department and started International Justice Mission – a Christian organization that helps protect more than 21 million people around the world from violence. They work on every continent to train police forces, restore justice systems, end forced labor and slavery, stop sex trafficking, and stand with the poor. None of this would have happened if Gary Haugen let excuses and embarrassment keep him in the shallow end.

Ready to go deeper?

¹ Gary Haugen, *Just Courage* (InterVarsity Press, 2008), pp. 129-130