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Bigger Fish to Fry: Getting the Most Out of God's Promises

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based on thoughts by Bill Hybels
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With everything going on here, it's important to remind ourselves why we're here. As you may know, our mission is to "Go and make disciples." And when we get it right, our vision is "to be a regional equipping center for Christ-focused life transformation for the unconnected 1000s." I think this is the kind of church God is calling us to be. A church that's like a beacon of light in a dark forest. God wants us to shine, in order that people would come into the light. Yes, it's scary. Jesus himself said "*People prefer the dark, because our deeds are evil.*" John 3:19

I believe that the Church is the Hope of the World, because we've been entrusted with the message of the Gospel. In every seat here this morning is a multiplier of the faith, touching 10s, 100s, 1000s, even 10,000s of persons with faith, hope, and love. So this morning, I want to look at how it began...

Luke 5:1 One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people 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 Peter, 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 catch people." 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Unlike Steve and me, the longer Jesus teaches, the bigger the crowd. And they were rapt on his every word. Jesus kept teaching, and the crowd got too big. Jesus needed assistance to share His message with such a large crowd. He needed a new plan, and he sought out Simon Peter. Would Simon be able to contribute to Jesus' mission in some way? There were several issues here: The crowd needed to hear Jesus, Jesus needed help to be heard, and Jesus needed to know who would help Him on His mission. In this account, He solves all 3 problems at the water's edge, administering 5 tests to Simon along the way.

First, Jesus gets in Simon Peter's boat and asked him to put out from shore. This was the "BIAS TOWARD ACTION TEST." Quick! Help, He said! Jesus got new information, and He looked quickly for an action-oriented inner circle. Jesus was looking for an action guy for launching His church. He was looking for "make-it-happen" kind of people. And even after a night of fishing, Simon pulled the boat back out. Would you pass this leadership test? Who takes responsibility? Do you do this? And do you allow people to help you? Getting God's Word to the crowd takes energy! God's still looking for people to roll up their

sleeves to attack the forces that hold us back. So many people are paralyzed by hang ups, past mistakes, and opinions of others. Too many people in the world are undecided, divided, and distracted because they have so much stuff. Jesus says “It’s time to take a stand, church,” and our verse seems to suggest the best way to get people to hear is with a bias toward action.

Second, the sermon was over, and Jesus says “Simon, let’s go fish.” Head for deep water and put the nets out! (in broad day!) This is the “CAN YOU FOLLOW DIRECTION” test—the submission test. Simon said “Master, (*not* of fishing!) we (not you) fished all night (the time you’re supposed to fish)...but because you say so, I will.” BYSSIW. Church, if we’re going to be a beacon for God to our region, you and I need to pass this test. But we rarely go all out. Instead, we obey TO A POINT, rather than passing fully the BYSSIW test. God is looking for His leaders to have a cooperative spirit. If you are putting together a team for business, or civic, or church duties, use temporary task forces, and watch and see what they do in a meeting: Is there a sense of submission? Or do I say “Let’s go,” whether or not the vote went my way? These people show strength and humility. They’re honest at the time of decision, but equally supportive when the plan is not theirs, and they’re NOT talking trash. In an organization, with people like this, the whole atmosphere changes.

Third, after Simon catches 2 boatloads of fish, and they haul them in, he falls at Jesus’ feet. This is the “WHO GETS THE CREDIT” test. This was important. Who gets the credit, in a hot-dogging, credit-hogging world? Team dynamics means no credit-hogging. We’ve seen this in Detroit, whether it was the Pistons, or the Red Wings, (we’re still holding out for the Lions), isn’t this a part of the winning Detroit teams’ appeal? They are great teams, subdued rather than individual glory hogs. It’s the same in God’s Kingdom: Build for the glory of God, not yourself. No “I’m the man” stuff. Whatever people are noticing that’s going well in your life, or in your family, or in this church for that matter, give credit to Christ all the time. (Any leadership, wisdom, and opportunities come from Him). Heaven is watching. Someone who can do this is a class act. Why’s it going so well? GIVE CREDIT to Jesus, like Simon did. God gives grace to the humble. Proverbs 3:34 “*He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble.*”

Fourth, after the huge catch, after their amazement, Jesus says to them, “You think *that* was fun? Think of this: you can fish for PEOPLE.” This is “THE GRANDER VISION TEST.” Jesus is saying you’ve got a great purpose, and it’s not just to make money for yourselves on perch. It’s about people. It’s the value of the dollar vs. destiny. What do you want to be about? THE BIGGER FISH! I’m just asking you today what Jesus asked Simon and the others: Will you try it? Will you take your skills with perch and apply them to people for Jesus’ sake? The challenge of competing for money is fun. But think of going after people! Talk about bigger fish to fry! Lives touched and transformed, with Jesus! And don’t mess up. God treasures His kids most. Your *new* objective is the thrill of people’s destinies on payday. The grander vision seized you. It wrecked you. You can’t go back to living for perch only. The adventure of bigger fish is one of the most powerful reasons for living, no matter *what* your career is. Christ requires your gifts, your service, and your life. It’s the most powerful way to live. And Simon didn’t think back: he left his earthbound vision for a grander challenge.

- **I don’t know where you are individually, but church, I challenge you to this:** We’re not just about playing church anymore. We’re about changing the world.
- **And you’re invited to this grander vision.** People’s eternal Destiny is greater than Dollars. There are bigger fish to fry.
- The heavenly challenge becomes greater than the earthly one.
- Leigh and I tithe to this church, in addition to giving to other things. This year, the commitment we’re writing on our card to Dexter UMC’s mission, is \$5,700. It may or may not be significant for you, but we want to do our part to significantly impact people through our church!
- Let’s each of us fish for people—Jesus has called us together for such a time as this!

Fourth, Simon and the others pull their boats to shore, leave everything, and follow Him. This is the “WILL YOU LEAVE IT TEST.” Talking paying the price, here. It is a costlier vision. Something you don’t often hear much about it, because it’s hard...till you decide to do it. Then it’s easier. But notice in the account, Jesus doesn’t demand they leave their nets behind. But they do it. They’re called. Now, if this call grips you; if it’s powerful, go for it. To whatever amount you value His call, leave it, whatever the “fishing

nets” are in your life. No matter what your career, or your age, you can leave them, if this grips you enough. If it doesn't, then just ask God for your next step, whatever that is for you.

Jesus' invitation increases the quality of Your Dreams. He doesn't demand on this one. (He wouldn't want me following Him to COST me something, would He!) Church, the “Will You Leave It Test” makes us have to decide. Jesus is saying, you can live for the lesser dream. OR, you can give your life, nets and all, so you can experience God more. Following this test the stuff usually gets left behind. Because Jesus promises MORE than all the stuff in the world combined! The Grander Vision has a price tag for Peter and the rest of the Christ followers. It's the “Will You Leave It Behind Test.” And they chose it. They can't fish for perch any more. Remember Jesus Himself showed us how to pass this one...

- Jesus left heaven and all its benefits behind to come to this fallen, troubled world for us to show us how to really live. He left heaven behind.
- Yes, Jesus returned there, but not before He left His blood behind, for the grander vision. He laid it down for you and me and for the world, for our salvation, the perfect Lamb.

The Bias toward Action Test, the Submission Test, the Who Deserves the Credit Test, The Grander Vision Test, and the Will You Leave It Test are good leadership lessons, but they're also simple opportunities for us to live for Jesus Christ. In our influence at home, or at work, we administer these. And Jesus still calls people to follow Him today. We pass them ourselves, and we pass them together as a church.

It's not for a grade, but for a chance to fulfill your part in God's story, revealed in Jesus Christ. Don't shrink back. Peter faced them, and wound up “The Rock.” The events in Peter's life being a part of the chain of events that can only be called the greatest adventure of the human race. We're not playing church anymore. We're fishing for people, impacting the world for Jesus Christ. And today may be your day to begin. Amen!