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FORGET ALL THIS—I'M GOING FISHING!

I was reading this morning from my new book, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, by David G. Benner. He was talking about Peter, and one of the stories he referred to is found in John 21:3-11, which occurred shortly after Jesus' resurrection from the dead:

"Simon Peter said to them, I am going fishing! They said to him, And we are coming with you! So they went out and got in the boat, and throughout the night they caught nothing.

Morning was already breaking when Jesus came to the beach and stood there. However, the disciples didn't know it was Jesus.

So Jesus said to them, Boys (children), you do not have any meat (fish) do you? They answered Him, No!

Then He said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find [some]. So they cast the net, and now they were not able to haul it in for such a big catch (mass, quantity) of fish [was in it].

...Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, It is the Lord! Simon Peter, hearing him say it was the Lord, put (girded) on his upper garment—and sprang into the sea.

When they got on land (the beach), they saw a fire of coals there and fish lying on it [cooking], and bread.

*Jesus said to them, Bring some of the fish which you have just caught. So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net to land, full of large fish, 153 of them; and [though] there were so many of them, the net was not torn. (John 21:3-4-7, 9-11, *The Amplified Bible*)."*

The first thought I had after reading this passage was that not one of these disciples was out discipling. Clearly, they'd chosen to go back to fishing for fish, at least for the day—and Peter was leading the charge. The King James Bible says he declared, "I go a fishing". (I can't help but picture him dressed like King Henry VIII when I read that.) Maybe he was toying with "going a fishing" for good. His intentions may have been to leave behind the supernatural stuff. There was no way to do all that without Jesus, anyway. Neither he, nor the other guys had any idea how to carry on or be disciples. He knew fishing. He could support his family with it. But Jesus had other plans. In later verses, Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him more than "these". I've always understood that to mean, "Do you love Me more than all the other guys here love Me?" But isn't that really an unanswerable and incendiary question to ask of Peter? Could he possibly weigh the love each of these men had for Jesus, somehow compare it to his own, and then give an accurate answer? Doubtful. It seems simpler to picture the scene as it was, not ignoring the "elephant" on the beach—the net containing the miraculously large catch of fish—153, to be exact. I picture Jesus holding up one of those fish just before putting it on the fire and staring into Peter's eyes while asking, "Do you love Me more than these?"

"Do you love me more than these?" might be translated to "Will you stop being so dependent on that boat now? Will you follow Me and trust that I will provide for you beyond what you could ask or

imagine? Trust that I will command the catch while having a good, hot breakfast waiting on shore?" He was asking Peter to commit for life. Would he leave the job he was good at, seeming security in the natural realm, nets he could throw and drag in without God's help? He was the leader of this little band, after all. His decision might very well determine theirs.

Jesus asked for some of the fish. Why didn't Peter just go get a few out of the net instead of dragging the entire net full of all those heavy fish to Jesus by himself? It reminds me of the little boy who gave his lunch to Jesus. Was Peter feeling like that little boy, saying Jesus could have them all? Maybe when Jesus showed up on the beach, Peter assumed He was there to stay and they could go back to following Him around again. Maybe this was his red-blooded way of telling Jesus, "If You are here, I'm all in." Whatever his motive, this net-stretching haul had to be eerily familiar to these fishermen. Here's Luke's account of what happened one day shortly after they met Jesus in the beginning of His ministry:

"Once when he was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, the crowd was pushing in on him to better hear the Word of God. He noticed two boats tied up. The fishermen had just left them and were out scrubbing their nets. He climbed into the boat that was Simon's [Peter's] and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Sitting there, using the boat for a pulpit, he taught the crowd.

When he finished teaching, he said to Simon, 'Push out into deep water and let your nets out for a catch.'

Simon said, 'Master, we've been fishing hard all night and haven't caught even a minnow. But if you say so, I'll let out the nets.' It was no sooner said than done—a huge haul of fish, straining the nets past capacity. They waved to their partners in the other boat to come help them. They filled both boats, nearly swamping them with the catch.

Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell to his knees before Jesus. 'Master, leave. I'm a sinner and can't handle this holiness. Leave me to myself.' When they pulled in that catch of fish, awe overwhelmed Simon and everyone with him. It was the same with James and John, Zebedee's sons, coworkers with Simon.

Jesus said to Simon, 'There is nothing to fear. From now on you'll be fishing for men and women.' They pulled their boats up on the beach, left them, nets and all and followed him. Luke 5:1-10, (The Message Bible)."

Peter left all the fish the first time, and he makes the same choice the second time. But the second time, there's been a lot more water under the boat. He'd spent more than three years living with this Man and experiencing all kinds of things a fisherman doesn't usually experience. Afterwards there was the Crucifixion, his own betrayal, and the bewildered feelings of grief, shock, brokenness, and the big cliffhanger of, What do we do now?

The question echoes in my own head. Yes, *what do we do now? What do I do? Why does God have to be so supernatural?* He is "omni" everything—omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent. He designs universes with no apparent boundaries. He's the "nothing is impossible for Me" God. And He calls

His followers His “children”. Which makes the saying, “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” suddenly fill with pressure. Gotta make dear old Dad proud. I think Peter felt something like this. He had no idea how to hold a candle to God.

To his credit though, Peter didn’t understand about the Holy Spirit yet. He didn’t yet get it that the Holy Spirit is the secret to all things. He still lived in a strong grip of “the Law” and hadn’t fully comprehended “the Love”. Basically, God’s secret plan was that Jesus would lay aside His “God-ness,” come to earth as a man and demonstrate what it can be like for humans who operate in submission to God the Father through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (Of course, for brevity, I’m leaving out the rescue operation He was simultaneously performing called “salvation” to all who would come to Him.) Then, when it was time for Jesus to go back to the Father, He and the Holy Spirit would kind of trade places and the Holy Spirit would lead all of Jesus’ followers in the same way He had led Jesus.

The power source, then, is the Holy Spirit. Jesus could be one person on a beach. But the Holy Spirit can be inside an infinite number of people on infinite beaches, or anywhere else, all at once. A quantum shift—to say the least. Jesus was the prototype for how one man full of the Holy Spirit can operate. The signature line from the movie, Knight and Day, starring Tom Cruise and Cameron Diaz comes to mind: “With me (hand held high)—without me (hand held low). WITH me (hand held high)—WITHOUT me (hand held low). Peter’s inaugural speech in Jerusalem, recorded in the historical account of Acts (which occurred very shortly after the catch of 153 fish), shows what Peter was able to do WITH the Holy Spirit empowering him:

“Those who accepted and welcomed his message were baptized, and there were added that day 3,000 souls. (Acts 2:41, The Amplified Bible).”

“I’ve heard people say that God needs us. This simply is not true. He needs nothing. He is and has been completely self-sufficient for all eternity. But we have been on His mind forever. And those thoughts have been for our welfare and blessing, and not our calamity. His ideas for us are good, incredibly good. He has great dreams for us, just as any good Father has for His children. He told Jeremiah that He knew him before he was born. God was so involved in His dream for that prophet that he experienced him, before he was. That is intense dreaming, the kind that God is very capable of.

The all-sufficient One prefers partnership in which His brilliance and beauty are seen in those who worship Him by choice...we are His dream come true. He longs for those who want to learn to display His heart and ways, to become co-laborers in establishing His kingdom and bringing glory to His name. He desires for us to live in the authority of power that Jesus lived in. Jesus must be re-presented in our generation.” Bill Johnson, Experiencing the Impossible, p. 133-134

He has a really cool plan that requires the participation (and existence) of the people He made the plan for. So, this isn’t an empty proposition of “Me God, you slave”. He wants cooperation, not

manipulation. Now, I won't go so far as to say He doesn't compel. He is masterfully persuasive, but in a good way, always. For our benefit in the long run, consistently. However...

It isn't unusual for Him to let us prove to ourselves just how bereft we are without Him. This often involves letting us climb all the way to the top of our mountain in our own strength. He'll wait years for us to do this, if necessary. But when we get there, we can't always sustain the responsibility like we thought we could. And then comes the fall, the sinking into the sea, the lying to the servant girl about knowing Jesus. He lets us make fools of ourselves so we see where we end, top out, run out of power, genius, energy, ideas, youth, morality, honesty, civility—you get the picture. And the ones that He used in the Bible as examples of this process are some of the greatest of humankind: Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Samson, King David and Bathsheba, King Nebuchadnezzar, James and John, Peter and Paul. Every one of these people did foolish things along the way, were publicly exposed, took responsibility, turned around and lived victoriously and unashamed afterwards. God waited patiently for them to learn how far they could get without Him. Then He lifted them up, dusted them off and showed them what it was like with Him. It encourages me to know that some of them fell and were restored after they'd been in His service for a long time. It helps me not feel so lonely.

“Knowing God and knowing self are therefore interdependent. Neither can proceed very far without the other. Paradoxically, we come to know God best not by looking at God exclusively, but by looking at God and then looking at ourselves—then looking at God, and then again looking at ourselves. This is also the way we best come to know ourselves. But God and self are mostly fully known in relationship to each other... Deep knowing of God and deep knowing of self always develop interactively. The result is the authentic transformation of the self that is at the core of Christian spirituality. Too easily we have settled for knowing about God.” David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*

To sum up:

1. “Casting the net on the right side” is a way of saying, “Lean toward the supernatural way of seeing everyday life so that you don't miss the miraculous while you're trying to cling to the status quo.” (As an artist, I also can't help but imagine the “right side” of the brain, which is the childlike side—the “believing the impossible” side. Just a thought.)
2. “Do you love Me more than these?” really means, “Do you love Me more than what these mean for you—more than what fishing means for you? Do you love Me enough to leave the seeming security of your little boat behind? Even your own strength?”
3. “I go a fishing” may be a brief period when you go back to the drawing board to see if you can find the miraculous again after you've been rattled, broken, disappointed, intimidated, frightened out of your mind, humiliated, or all of the above (as in Peter's case). I've had to go a fishing many times in my life. Though I may have felt desolate on the way to my lonely fishing hole, and I may have spent

a long time on the bank doing seemingly nothing, God has always faithfully encouraged me by helping me fill my net again. A Christian (Christ follower) doesn't have it all figured out. They've just chosen to follow the One they believe does. They want to get Home in the end, and He audaciously claims to know the way—to be the Way. They're not willing to risk traveling some other path.

4. "Bring some of the fish you caught" is an encouraging directive to remember the triumphs we have experienced with God. Of course, even "the fish" we catch were put in the net by Him, though we still participated. And when we bring these remembered quests and victories out into the open through our minds and our mouths, we also bring them to Him as an offering. And if we can keep this process going, He may let us in on all sorts of miraculous activity.

5. "With me, without me" is a good picture to remember. Sure, we've got talents and abilities, ideas and certain levels of energy to put toward the fulfillment of dreams and aspirations. God wants to be WITH us in the midst of catching "the fish we've caught" so He can MULTIPLY our capabilities, influence, and output. He doesn't take away or take away from what we can do. He refines and super-sizes it. That's one of His super powers as the ultimate Superhero—only He doesn't leave after the rescue is over. He's in it for keeps.

What He wants us to grasp is that, by choosing to work WITH Him, we will be catapulted into all we ever dreamed of doing to help the world around us. He wants us to realize that everything we were fishing for in our own strength is found when we cast our nets on the right side. Jesus was a much better fisherman than Peter—on the first day we see him talking to Peter—and on the last. Just because Jesus' choice was fishing for men didn't mean that He couldn't catch all the fishy fish he wanted to with the same power. When we finally surrender to fishing WITH Him, we start to understand what true fishing is all about. And we, like Peter, may decide to declare wholeheartedly of all the work we've done WITHOUT Him: Forget this—I'm going fishing!

References:

1. Johnson, Bill. *Experiencing the Impossible*. Bloomington: Chosen Books, 2014.
2. Benner, David G. *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery*. Downers Grove, 2015.