



Come With Me

Discovering *the* Beauty of
Following Where He Leads

Suzanne Eller



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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ISBN 978-0-7642-1812-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016930569

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16 17 18 19 20 21 22 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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Dedicated to Kate
Heaven just became sweeter because of you
Gaga

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Acknowledgments



During the writing of this book, my husband, Richard, was diagnosed with cancer. There's nothing like deciding to pen words about walking with Jesus only to discover that you're going to have to live them with gusto. Thank you to the people who wrapped around us during that time. Some of you showed up at the hospital at 5:00 a.m. to sit with me while my husband was in surgery. Others brought food every night for nearly a month. While I fully blame you for the ten pounds I gained (who can turn down key lime pie and peanut butter cookies?), I also thank you for loving us with casserole dishes, soup, and tangible hands-on love.

To my guy who is kicking cancer like a champ, I love you like crazy. Now that we've done this cancer thing twice, I know one thing: You and I are a good team. You've championed me for the past fifteen years as I've walked this path called ministry. I love you, Richard. You are my soul mate and the man who makes me laugh like no one else.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my children, Leslie and Stephen, Ryan and Kristin, Melissa and Josh. You pulled close around your dad and me as we made difficult decisions. Thank you for that hilarious moment in the waiting room where we laughed until we cried. No one else got it, but we did.

To my beautiful grandbabies, Elle, Luke, Jane, Audrey, Josiah, and Caleb. You make my heart full. Your love for Gaga is pure and joyful and messy and chaotic. Having six grandbabies under the age of five is a delightful whirlwind. Thank you for reminding me that deadlines are important, but those I call family are treasures.

Thank you to Kim Bangs and the Bethany team. Kim, you're my friend as well as my editor. I love how much you love Jesus and how you stand side-by-side with your authors. Thank you to the entire Bethany team, who is as much a part of this book as I am. Your creativity and heart for the project blew me away.

Thank you to Esther Fedorkevich and her team at the Fedd Agency. The day you became my literary agent was a good day. I love your honesty and your heart.

To my "Aaron," Crystal Hornback, thank you for being there when I surrendered to the truth that we all need someone, and you have been that someone times ten.

To Michele Cushatt, who wrote the foreword in the midst of healing from surgery. Your yes in the midst of a hard place rocked my world.

To the 185-plus brave #livefree girls, who are ministry partners of the best kind, thank you for everything you do and for who you are. Thank you to Tara, Jana, Pam, Christy, Carla, Christina, Crystal, Kathy, Michelle, Sarah Anne, and Heather for coming alongside as I wrote this book. Thank you for allowing me to throw chapters your way for your beautiful insight and honesty.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my sisters at Proverbs 31 Ministries, a ministry team who reaches far beyond numbers or a spotlight to come alongside a woman seeking Jesus with all of her heart.

Last and most significant, thank you to my Savior for choosing a once-broken girl to share you with the world. I'm humbled.

Foreword



It matters little that I was only seven years old. I'll never forget it.

My mom and dad stood at my side, singing a hymn. Clearly unruffled by what I was about to do. I, on the other hand, couldn't get my stomach to stop its flip-flops. With my best puppy-pleading eyes, I asked my dad to help me do this thing. I wanted him to hold my hand, walk me down the long church sanctuary aisle, get me to the front.

But as much as I wanted him to come with me, I somehow knew he wouldn't. *Couldn't*. The decision—the journey—was mine.

In spite of my fear, in spite of the impulse to shrink from the moment and find a safe corner in which to hide, I loosed myself of my pew. Desire pulled me forward. I knew I wanted what waited for me.

Jesus!

That Sunday was to be my public declaration of devotion. My chance to let preacher, parents, and a room full of congregants know that I chose to follow Jesus. I was ready, as certain as a seven-year-old can be. Even so, the decision felt heavy on small

shoulders. Now, with so many years between us, I wonder if the girl suspected the complicated life that would follow.

Nearly four decades have passed since October 29, 1978. Thirty-seven years since a simple, ordinary Sunday changed my course. In that span of time I graduated from high school and college, embarked on a few various careers, married, and raised children (*six* of them).

But I've also wrestled with divorce and single-mothering. Remarriage and stepparenting. The too-soon death of my dad. Adolescence and graduation times three. The addition of three small children and a second round of parenting.

Not to mention cancer. Three times.

Intermingled with the joys, I've wrestled with hardships far more painful than my younger self could've imagined. Countless times I've ached for an easier life, a less complicated life. Looking back on innocence, the girl so determined to break free of her pew and follow the One she loved, I can't help but think how many times, as a grown woman, I've tried to glue myself right back to it.

You see, it's one thing to sit in church talking about Jesus. It's another thing to stand up and follow him. Wherever the following leads.

Because sometimes following Jesus means trusting his redemption when your dream of marriage disappears.

Sometimes following Jesus means releasing control when a child struggles.

Sometimes following Jesus means relinquishing comfort to obey his calling.

Sometimes following Jesus means loving and forgiving when a relationship is hard.

And sometimes following Jesus means trusting his sovereignty when death knocks at your door.

I won't lie to you. At times following Jesus feels risky, costly, and hard. I've known seasons when I would've preferred to play church, keep Jesus at a distance, make my own way. It's far easier to wax poetic about faith than to grab Jesus' hand and plunge into the deep unknown with him.

Yet in spite of the struggle—perhaps because of it—I've learned that following Jesus is the only way to truly live.

Because it was Jesus who rescued and rebuilt me when divorce shattered my heart into a thousand pieces.

It was Jesus who whispered wisdom during those lonely years of parenting.

It was Jesus who taught me—teaches me still—how to relinquish control and trust his work in my husband, in my marriage, *in me*.

And it is Jesus who comes near with his peace and the promise of heaven every time terror strikes in the name of cancer.

This is what I know to be true: Suffering and hardship will come, regardless of the depth of our faith. But a shallow faith offers very little in the way of peace and comfort.

In this world you will have trouble!

Jesus guaranteed it. But he didn't stop there. He also promised himself as the salve for our suffering.

But take heart! I have overcome the world.

Here sits our choice. The same choice twelve disciples faced when he called them from their ordinary lives into risky, often hard, extraordinary ones.

Keep Jesus at a distance? Observe his work and words from afar?

Or leave the safety of our seats to follow him?

This is Suzie's invitation, one she has embraced and lived out with great passion and sincerity. Move close! Lean in! Allow

your One and Only to ignite and burn to hot life the kind of faith that can withstand whatever may come.

True, it's not without cost, nor without risk. But it's also not without reward. Wisdom for the questions. Presence in the pain. Peace in the dark. And joy, no matter what comes.

Jesus awaits, my friend. Loose yourself of your pew. And run to him. *Run!*

Your life—the life you long for—depends on it.

Michele Cushatt, author, *Undone: A Story of Making Peace With an Unexpected Life*

Introduction



What would you say if Jesus walked up to you today and said these words?

Come with me.

Wherever I lead.

Whatever the price.

Do you say yes?

Imagine that your yes moves you from faith as usual to faith that changes every aspect of who you are, including how you live, the choices you make, how you think, and even how you approach life. Imagine a faith that spills out into your relationships and impacts the world, especially those within your reach.

Is that the kind of faith you want?

This is the faith that comes from saying *yes* to Jesus' invitation.

But consider this. Saying yes might lead you out of what is safe and predictable. As a grace girl, I love nothing more than the beautiful parts of my faith—like mercy, unconditional love, and the reality of his presence inside of me. But if we are honest, there are places where Jesus might lead where we don't want

to linger. Like loving the unlovable, or believing for a miracle when the answer is nowhere in sight, or leaving what makes us feel comfortable to partner with God in his plan rather than our own.

Saying yes draws us to experience every aspect of our faith. That is the secret nestled in this invitation from Jesus: Every part of our faith is impactful—the welcoming places, the comforting places, and the more challenging places where we move from our will to his.

Come With Me was born after a late-night ~~wrestling match~~ conversation with my heavenly Father. I longed to experience him in greater measure. I didn't want comfortable faith, though I found comfort in my faith. I didn't want to reach the end of my life and say that the ultimate achievement of the cross was that I was "good," though I wanted his goodness in me. That night I took a sticky note and wrote the words "walk into the deep" and placed it in my Bible.

Oh, how I longed to go deeper even if that meant my faith might resemble anything but the norm.

Martin Luther once said, "First I shake the whole apple tree that the ripest might fall. Then I climb the tree and shake each limb, and then each branch and then each twig, and then I look under each leaf."

Luther looked beyond the obvious, which is where I went as well. I opened my Bible to the book of Luke and began to take up residence with the disciples. That often led me to the other gospels, shaking the limbs and twigs of the stories to see what might fall from the disciples' lives.

They became real. More than a great story. More than a lesson. These men had no idea where following Jesus would lead them. As I studied and read, I listened as they slammed into doubt. I stood in the crowd as animosity curled around them

like blue-tinged flames. I wept as they listened to a blind man's cry for help and witnessed the miracle that followed.

I cringed as Jesus rebuked them, for none of us desires to be called out in our weakness or out-and-out disobedience. Yet I celebrated when they realized that he saw something inside of them that they could not see at all. These were real people with real emotions and misgivings, making hard decisions as they followed Jesus.

They didn't have the rest of the story that we have at our fingertips.

"Drop your nets" sounds exhilarating, unless you're the one saying good-bye to your dad, who's standing with his jaw open in disbelief.

"Your name is now Peter" is lovely to hear, unless it means that you are expected to be a rock that can be depended upon, and you're not exactly known for that quality.

"You feed them" is an exciting proposal, unless you're the one holding the meager lunch and see no answer in sight.

In these pivotal moments they stepped from being observers into a partnership with Jesus.

Is that same teaching for us? Every word he spoke to his disciples was spoken with the understanding that generations would hear the same words and be changed by them. Rick Warren was once asked to name the best translation of the Bible. He said, "When you translate it into your life."¹

When we answer the call of "Come with me," something changes. It's no longer about church, though we love our church family. It's no longer about being moral just for morality's sake. It's discovering what it means for faith to infiltrate every detail of your life.

As I lingered with the disciples for several months, I realized that all believers are called to walk as the thirteenth disciple.

We can sit in the crowd. We can follow where he leads. We can listen for his voice and look for him in the ordinary.

I journaled almost daily during those months. There were many times that my words reflected a true struggle. Like the early disciples, I wasn't always certain how to respond or what to do, but I longed to at least hear what was being spoken. Throughout this book I share some of those private entries, for my prayer is that you'll journal as well. Looking back allows us to see the imprint of where we began.

As we follow Jesus as a disciple in our modern world, it shifts the dynamic from religious to relating to Jesus one-to-one; from rote prayers to exploring what it means to believe; from following expectations to responding from the heart.

How did this close relationship with Jesus impact those early followers?

It launched them into the lives of others in ways they never imagined. It caused them to act and react in a manner that didn't make sense in light of who they once were, or even how they felt. They found their part in an overall heavenly plan and were set free to run after that with abandon.

Philippians 3:8 reads, "Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (NLT).

Their worldview changed as it wrapped around the infinite value of knowing Jesus. Halfway into my yearlong journey, I realized how seeing myself as a disciple had changed me. One day I was at a crossroads. A decision needed to be made, and I sensed the direction that Jesus was leading. Before, I would have prayed. I might have weighed the pros and cons. In some instances, I might have sought trusted counsel. All of these are good things to do, but to be honest, sometimes I used them to delay my yes to Jesus.

This time, I imagined Simon, the tired fisherman who had no idea what Jesus was trying to offer him. I could almost hear Jesus' words:

Will you push out deeper?

I reached for my Savior's hand, knowing that if he asked, it was my privilege to say yes.

“Come with me” is an invitation that will delightfully change you forever, whether you've been a believer for years and years or you are hearing his voice for the very first time.

Will you walk it with me?

1

But If You Say So

Great people do not do great things; God does great things through surrendered people.

Jennie Allen, *Restless: Because You Were Made for More*



If I could choose one word to describe the feeling that led me to live this book, it would be *hungry*.

Hungry for deeper faith. Hungry for a relationship with God that changes how I view the world around me. Hungry for his presence to be so big on the inside of me that it shows up in my home, my marriage, my interaction with others. Hungry for more than the status quo, even if that means I need to be brave. One of my favorite songs, “Ocean,” describes what I desired from this journey, which is to “trust without borders.” It didn’t take long to realize that singing these words and living them are very different.

■ Come Sit With Simon Peter

My husband used to work rotating night shifts. There's a phrase passed around the mill for guys who work there. It's the GP Shuffle—the way a guy walks after years of working at the mill, his shins and feet aching from wearing steel-toed boots on concrete for twelve hours at a stretch. That's who I thought about as I sat close to Simon Peter.

He's fished all night long with no success. A weary Simon, James, and John wash their heavy fishing nets while not far away a large crowd surrounds Jesus of Nazareth, the man everyone has been talking about. The fishermen wash their nets, their bodies aching for sleep. When they complete their task, Simon returns to his boat only to find Jesus sitting inside.

“Push me out in deeper water,” Jesus says.

The worn, weather-beaten, fishy-smelling vessel is a perfect floating platform. The crowd can't see or hear Jesus well on the shore, but if he stands in the boat, they'll see him perfectly. Simon grabs hold of the fishing boat and pushes from shore. Later, when the crowd disperses, Jesus has another request for fatigued Simon: “Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish” (Luke 5:4 NLT).

Have you ever had someone ask you to do something that makes no sense in the natural?

What do you do if that request comes from Jesus? Maybe you wrestle with it. I know I have. So does Simon. This isn't an easy request. The fishing nets of that day are circular and weighted around the perimeter with rocks and other heavy materials. It's the most prized tool of a fisherman other than his boat, and washing is imperative to maintain them.

Fishing again means washing the nets again. Then there's the reality that the fish aren't swimming into the nets. Jesus

remains steadfast in his request, and that places Simon clearly at a crossroad. He doesn't *have* to push out the boat. Simon Peter is the boss of his own life. He can turn around and call it a day if he wishes.

He doesn't. Instead he replies, "But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again."

But if you say so.

Can you hear the conflict in his answer? Simon Peter is the fisherman, not Jesus. He's trawled for fish for years under his father's tutelage; it's how he makes his living. Jesus' telling him to fish one more time after an unproductive all-nighter is like the person who has never had children telling you how to discipline yours in Walmart.

Is Jesus a teacher? Yes. Is he the Savior? Simon's not quite sure about that yet. But Jesus is definitely not a fisherman. Simon knows that for a fact.

This flesh-and-blood man who is exhausted to the core does it anyway. What compels him to push into deeper waters when he doesn't feel like it? What might his answer of "But if you say so" teach those of us who desperately long to hear the voice of Jesus but who sometimes resist?

■ Come With Me

Don't Miss Out on Your Greatest Opportunity

Simon is not unfamiliar with this man called Jesus. In Mark 1:14–20, Simon is introduced to Jesus by his brother, Andrew. In that very first meeting Jesus called the brothers to follow him, and they did. Simon dropped his nets, just like that. He even had a name change. Jesus informed Simon that he was to be called Peter, which means "rock." There are two distinctive

encounters with Jesus. The first, where Jesus asks him to drop his nets, and the second, the day that Jesus waits for Simon Peter in his boat. Biblical scholar G. Campbell Morgan writes:

A few weeks before, certainly not more than a few weeks, He had called these men to follow, and they had left boats, nets, and fathers and mothers, kith and kin, and had gone. Now we have no details, but we have the fact, that they were back at the business again.¹

Simon dropped his nets and followed Jesus, but at some point he went back to fishing. Was it out of necessity? Had he dropped his nets out of curiosity, only to find his way back to his old life? We aren't told that information. Instead, the fact that Jesus is perched in a boat waiting on Simon tells us far more about our Savior than it does the fisherman.

He pursued Simon Peter, even after Simon said yes and then went back to fishing. Jesus knew exactly where to find Simon. It was no surprise to Jesus that Simon was doing the same ol', same ol'. It was no surprise to Jesus that Simon was tired, fatigued, and discouraged after fishing all night with nothing to show for it. He also knew what Simon Peter did not: There were deeper waters ahead for Simon.

Have you ever resisted his call to walk into the deep? I have. We hear Jesus calling us to go deeper or to trust or to believe that he knows what we do not, and we start to explain all the reasons that it just doesn't make sense. How many times have I battled what God is speaking into my heart, when he's trying to give me my greatest opportunity?

To trust him. To experience more than the same ol', same ol' in my faith. To actually believe that he's Lord in my life and that he's in the boat with me. When I resist or walk away, have I missed his plan entirely? Not so!

Let's watch as Jesus asks Simon to cast his nets. He lets them down, and suddenly the nets fill, nearly toppling the boat with the weight of scrambling fish. He frantically shouts out to James and John to bring their boat over. More fish fill the nets, and both boats are on the verge of sinking. In the midst of this miracle Simon falls to his knees. "Oh, Lord, please leave me—I'm too much of a sinner to be around you (Luke 5:8 NLT)."

What we hear is not terror, but awe. He's just rediscovered this man called Jesus. Just think, he almost chose the familiar and comfortable over his greatest opportunity.

How many times do I choose to sit in the shallow end when Jesus longs to take me deeper? How many times have I felt God asking me to do something that makes no sense to me, and I argue with him? Too often I've pointed out the impossibilities or obstacles, as if he's not God and doesn't see further down the road. I have requested assurance that it's all going to work out just like I think it should, and *then* I'll push out deeper. I may even hold up an accounting of all the times I tried and it failed, because I've somehow come to believe that faith equals success every time—failing to understand that he's calling me not to success but to faith in him.

Sometimes I start to follow, and then I turn around and climb back into the comfortable places where I'm not challenged and I'll never change. It's the last place I really want to be, but it takes too much faith to do anything different.

Simon Peter became the rock. He saw lame men leap to their feet, healed! He walked on water, if only for a few seconds. Crowds lingered in the streets, hoping that his shadow might



*When I
refuse to
go deeper,
my faith
lingers in
the shallow.*



fall upon them and heal them (Acts 5:15). Though we know these things, Simon didn't as he threw out his nets.

It was only as he sailed into territory that sometimes felt way over his head or experienced forgiveness and grace as he walked with Jesus or climbed the harder paths of faith that he became the rock that Jesus knew he could be.

If Simon hadn't dropped his nets a second time, what words would describe his story? Perhaps his life would have been described as safe. Familiar. A man with salt on his cheeks as he fished all night.

A fisher of men? I don't think so.

“Push Out Deeper” Is Your Invitation

My husband worked at the factory job for nearly two decades, and a part of him—the vibrant part that drew me to him in the beginning—was fading. I encouraged him to move from this job that paid well but robbed him of his personality and energy. When he didn't, I grew impatient.

Then there were the moments when I was just sad.

There were physical implications to standing on concrete for twelve hours at a time, but the shift work messed with his well-being. This was the change most evident after years of working in the plant. My gregarious husband fell into silence. His theory was that if he opened his mouth, the way he felt inside might escape and affect his family. I wanted to fix him. I wanted to make him leave his job because I was ready for it. I wanted to entice him with smiles and silliness to make him laugh again when he felt like doing anything but. One night I lay in bed while tears ran down my face. I loved this guy with everything I had in me and I wasn't going anywhere, but I missed the man I married.

I don't know why nighttime is when God and I meet most often; perhaps it's the only time he has my total attention. But Jesus walked into my sadness. I felt him asking me to believe that fixing or manipulating or twirling away in all of my own efforts wasn't the answer, and that there was a plan for Richard.

More so, that plan might not look like mine. It might not take place at the rate I thought it should.

Was I willing to trust?

Yes and no. There's a hushed and holy place inside of believers where we instinctively understand that God is leading us in one direction or another, but not far away are the emotions that shout, "Just fix it. Don't make me push out in deeper water. Make this easy for me. Do it, God!"

Which do I choose?

I placed my hands over my husband's sleeping body as tears soaked my pillow.

I'm willing to believe.

I didn't know that Richard would leave the factory job months later. I had no idea that we'd sell our home and almost everything we owned to pay tuition as he finished his bachelor's and master's degrees and completed clinical supervisory hours to become a licensed therapist. I didn't know that the man I married would return to me and that his funky dance moves would entice me to laugh—and that I would happily join in.

This is often the hardest part of trusting Jesus.

There's no blueprint. There's no peek at the final product. Simon Peter couldn't see the end result. Instead he was asked to live moment by moment and day by day, walking with Jesus. The "rock" was honed and carved each time he whispered the words "But if you say so." We are changed in the same manner. It's not an it-all-works-out-in-the-end guarantee,

but an experience of relationship and trust. We listen, and if it's God's voice, we respond even when we're not sure of the outcome.

A year after Richard left his job, his body adjusted to normal hours and unrestricted sleep. Vibrant color returned to his personality. He started running. First a mile, then two, and eventually five or six miles each time. This is where I started to see all the pieces falling into place. My guy was his old self. Our marriage became a source of joy once again—normal, but normal was beautiful. Richard moved from an internship at a drug and alcohol center to an official position in a counseling agency.

We had pushed out in deeper waters and it all worked out.

Except . . . Jesus didn't stop asking us to push out into deeper waters. In my life, there was a second time and a third, then more after that, and they keep coming. Not all of our deeper-water experiences can be tied in tidy testimonials. I'll share more of my own stories that took place even as I wrote this book, some of the hardest that I've walked through. I promise that there were times my words were not an immediate yes. Instead, I whispered, "But if you say so."

Our encounters with Jesus as his disciple become less about the end destination and more about the invitation to trust

*I trust that You have a plan for good, and not for harm (Jeremiah 29:11). I trust that if you say go, and even though I want to hold up a fistful of excuses and objections, that going is exactly where I should be.
But if you say so, Lord.*

him, wherever that leads, whatever he asks us to do. For Jesus meets us where we are with one plan in mind: to change us forever.

I don't know what your "boat" is, but he plunks down right in the center of it. He sits in the midst of a hurting marriage and asks us to love when we really want to walk away. He takes a seat in our uncertainties and asks us to believe he can use our lives for his good. He waits in our parenting pain and asks us to hold on to the promise whispered the day that child was born. He walks into our finances and asks us to give when we really want to hold on. He settles into our anxiousness when we've been waiting for longer than we hoped.



*Whisper
yes where
no wants
to take
root.*



So how do we respond?

Accept the invitation. It's okay to acknowledge your doubts, for that's what you do in any healthy relationship—you're honest when you're not sure how it's all going to work out. But this is where change takes place.

Say yes where no wants to take root.

It's Not About the Fish

Can you imagine the joy Simon experiences at the catch of fish? It's a miracle! It will provide for his family. Simon could build a shrine dedicated to the miracle and profit from it. At the very least, he might set up a fishing clinic and show others how to catch a lot of fish too.

Simon walked away from the fish to follow Jesus (Luke 5:11). That changes the perspective entirely. The miracle was never about the fish. Pushing out deeper was never about the fish. That voice asking you to push out deeper? It's not about

the *fish*. Simon walked away from a heap of fish and Jesus became . . .

Healer
Savior
Forgiver
Provider
Lord

That's the real miracle performed in Simon Peter's life, and it's what we discover as his disciples when we say yes—just because he asks. We open our heart to the miracle of walking with Jesus. Maybe he's asking you to trust, and your thoughts go something like this:

- What will I lose (or gain) if I say yes?
- Will I fall flat on my face? If I do, what will people think?
- Am I equipped for this?
- This is not happening on my timetable, so I'll just do this my way.

The focus is the fish, or lack thereof. What if you changed the question to “What miracle is Jesus trying to perform in me?”

If you're a planner, the thought of saying yes when you don't have all the answers might be frightening. This isn't a call to blindly thrust out on your own, but rather to listen closely to the Holy Spirit that lives within you and to take the next step.

Simon Peter would never have caught the fish in his net if he had not sailed to the middle of the lake and thrown out his nets. Jesus didn't throw up a PowerPoint to detail the entire map of Simon's life. Thank goodness, for most of us would tremble at the thought of walking in Simon Peter's shoes. He simply asked him to take the next step.

Let's go fishing, Simon.

Jesus never promised Simon or any of his disciples that following him was a one-time, no-risk-involved, feel-safe-and-comfortable-always venture. In fact, he often assured them of the opposite.

We are asked to push out deeper a second, third, fourth time.

What is God asking you to do? Have you resisted? Has the focus been on the results or on the obstacles over the joy of walking with Jesus?

If so, let's whisper it together.

But if you say so.

TAKING IT DEEPER

1. Read Luke 5:1–7. In what way do you sense Jesus calling you to push the boat out into deeper waters?
2. What might one small step look like for you?
3. “It’s not about the fish.” Describe your response to that statement.
4. What has been your focus (your fish)? Share one way you sense God asking you to shift that focus.
5. Read Luke 5:8–11. Perhaps you had a parent say, “Because I said so,” and that offers a negative connotation. How is this call to trust in Jesus different?
6. Simon was awestruck by Jesus. Are you? Invite the Holy Spirit (read Psalm 51:12) to ignite that awe within you once again. (Make that a prayer and share it here.)

7. What does it mean to whisper yes where no wants to take root?

SCRIPTURE

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish.”

“Master,” Simon replied, “we worked hard all last night and didn’t catch a thing. But if you say so, I’ll let the nets down again.”

Luke 5:4–5 NLT

PRAYER

Lord, if you ask, that’s enough for me. I will follow you. I’ll take a step into deeper waters and walk with you. I offer up my fears and climb in the boat, for you are with me.

LIVING AS A DISCIPLE

- If you sense his leading, whisper yes where no wants to take root.
- Give greater weight to walking with Jesus over the end results.
- Take one small step and celebrate your new journey of faith.