

“Follow me!” We were just going about our lives as normal—fishing along the Sea of Galilee and taking care of our boats and nets. And in an **instant** it all changed. We turned around to see who had approached us from behind and we saw **Jesus**. We couldn’t look away. We were caught in his stare, **hooked** by something indescribable. We wanted to pull away and just go on with our lives, but we couldn’t. Then Jesus said a simple word to us that turned our lives upside down forever, **“Follow me.”** And that was it. We were helplessly **yanked** out of our old lives, out of our old world into something that was totally strange and unfamiliar. It was terrifying. We were like **fish out of water**—choking, flopping around in confusion, tossing and turning, lost and dying. We needed to be back in the water, back in our **comfort** zones, back in what was **familiar** to us. But Jesus would not let go of us. And eventually we stopped our flopping and fighting and just surrendered to Jesus, who had caught us in his net. We slowly **died** to everything we had once known. Yet we were reborn into a whole new world—a new life, and existence began to open up to us, unlike anything we had ever experienced. We thought being caught by Jesus would be the **end** of us, but we were wrong—it was just the **beginning** of something beautiful and incredible.

Jesus told us he would make us into **“fishers of men.”** He would call us to go out and do the same for others as he had just done for us. We would help pull people out of their familiar comfort zones—that were actually destroying them—and bring them into the new life and Kingdom of our heavenly Father. Jesus had **fished** for us, **hooked** us, and **saved** us, by pulling us out of the drowning waters of life in our culture and into the Kingdom of Heaven. Now we were being called to do the same for others. But first, we needed to **learn**, we needed to **grow**, we needed to **mature**. Us being made into **“fishers of men”** was the goal, but we were just beginning. We ourselves were still **fish out of water**. We had no idea what this new life was going to be like. We thought our normal lives had been healthy and good. But as we followed Jesus, we quickly realized how **sick** and **dysfunctional** we had been. We hadn’t realized it, because our old lives had been all we knew and everyone around us thought sickness and dysfunction was “normal” and “healthy.”

So Jesus said, **“follow me”** and took us **away from the crowds**, away from the masses of people living the sick and dysfunctional life he wanted us to leave behind. He took us up on a mountain where he could teach us and show us what true life, healthy life, functional life really looked like. So we followed Jesus up the mountain and there we sat down to learn. To learn what the new life of the Kingdom of Heaven was all about. Jesus started by turning our whole conception of the world on its head. We had been raised to think that the people who were **blessed** by the Creator were **rich, powerful, confident, happy, satisfied, and well liked**. But Jesus told us these were **cursed** conditions and that true **blessing** was found in **poverty, weakness, humility, sadness, hunger, and rejection**—there he said was where our heavenly Father dwelled. Everything we had been taught by our culture was **wrong**. Everything we had been chasing in life was empty and bankrupt. We had been completely captive to the disease of our society.

He told us that if we were to live in the Kingdom of Heaven, then we must let the **light** and **goodness** of our heavenly Father penetrate the deepest parts of our thoughts and hearts. He said keeping our actions in check was not enough, we needed to purify and cleanse our **thoughts, feelings, and hearts** with the Creator’s light. Our **inner** spiritual lives were the source of everything. If we harbored **fear, anger, lust, or hatred** in our hearts, then we were already lost, no matter how good and pious we pretended to be on the outside. He said the central element of this new inner life was **love**—love that extended **beyond** our families, **beyond** those who were kind to us, **beyond** those who could give us something we wanted. He said if we were to be the Creator’s **children**, then we must love like **our heavenly Father**. Our heavenly Father gives sunshine and rain to all creatures, no matter how evil they may be. So we too, must **share**, be **kind**, and **love even our enemies**. This is what would set us apart from the crowds, from the sick and dysfunctional world of Civilization from which Jesus was saving us.

He said we had to stop caring about what people and our families thought. The people of the world did good things so that others would see them and be impressed. He said we needed to live and **practice** this new life of love and goodness in all moments, **especially when no one was looking**. Our heavenly Father was always watching and he would reward us. It was only through constant **sharing, praying, and fasting**—especially when no one was looking—that we would be able to learn to love like our heavenly Father. He said we must stop prioritizing **earthly, material, and visible** realities and prioritize **heavenly, spiritual, and invisible** realities. We must stop storing up earthly and material treasures and store up the heavenly treasures of faith, hope, and love. We must stop worrying about our **lives**. We must stop worrying about our **bodies**. We must stop worrying about **tomorrow**. We must seek only and above all the Kingdom of Heaven. If we did this, then **everything else** would be taken care of. If we pursued the heavenly and spiritual, then we would receive all the earthly and material things that we needed.

He said we must forgive, if we want to be forgiven. We must do to others as we want done to us. How we treated, judged, and measured others would come back upon our own heads. Good trees always bear good fruit. Bad trees always bear bad fruit. We would know **others** and know **ourselves** based on the fruit of our lives. Saying that Jesus was “Lord” was not enough—we must **practice** the will of our Father in heaven. If we sat there and listened, but did **not** practice what he said, then our lives would eventually collapse in ruin. But if we **listened** and went out and **practiced** what we heard, then our lives would stand firm through even the worst disasters.

We felt like **fish out of water**. This whole new life Jesus was teaching us was so strange and awkward. It went against our intuitions and instincts. It felt irresponsible and impractical. It was like we were having to learn to walk all over again. It felt weird and we knew we would stumble and fall as we began to do it. But we needed to just keep **practicing**, keep working at it. Jesus said with time and practice, it would become the most **natural** thing—for this new life was actually what we were made for, we were simply learning to be truly human for the first time. And so every day we saw him, Jesus reminded us again, **“Follow me!”**

Do you ever feel like a **fish out of water** when trying to follow Jesus? You are not alone—it **should** feel that way. Following Jesus is not easy and it goes against **everything** that our culture trains us to be and do. Following Jesus requires us to completely **unlearn** everything we thought we knew and learn a whole new way of **being, thinking, and living**. Overcoming lifelong habits, instincts, and addictions is hard. But Jesus’s calling is powerful enough, his hook and fishing line is strong enough to pull us out of our old lives and into the Kingdom of Heaven. Your old life, habits, and addictions are killing you and Jesus is looking you in the eye again this day and says, **“Follow me!”** May we all be hooked on the fishing line of his Word and yanked out of the sickness and dysfunction that is consuming us and our world. **Amen.**