

## “A Compelling Call”

I once preached a message on a Sunday morning and concluded with the challenge of asking people to hold their hands in front of them and focus on that which Jesus was asking them to release in order to become a fully-devoted follower.

The week following the issuance of this challenge, I met with a young man who triumphantly shared that which he had placed in his hand on Sunday morning. It was one of those thrilling moments for which every pastor lives. I did not hesitate to rejoice with what I believed God was going to do in his obedient life.

The very next week I was confronted by this same young man. This time, he approached me with an entirely different demeanor. With his head down he admitted in defeat something else had taken the place of that which, just one week earlier, he had given to God by resolving to become a fully-devoted follower. His heart was broken and so was mine.

Unquestionably, there are moments in life that significantly test our resolve to be fully-devoted followers. Following Jesus is a cakewalk when He chooses to lead us through familiar terrain or comfortable passages. However, when following Him requires giving up something important to us, or when it challenges the familiar and comfortable things in our lives, or if it flies in the face of reason or natural instincts, then is the time we reach a strategic crossroads in journey. At any moment we choose to put following Him on hold, we jeopardize the integrity of our relationship.

### MATTHEW 4:20

When Jesus called Peter and Andrew to come after Him, He interrupted their routines and disrupted their careers. To follow meant leaving everything behind. One thing stood between them and following. It symbolized their choice of maintaining the status quo or living a life of unconditional following. It was their nets! If they were to follow Jesus, they would have to drop their nets. Their nets represented security, income, familiar commodities. Yet, notice again their response: *“at once they dropped their nets and followed Him”*.

### **A net is anything that inhibits or prohibits our non-negotiated commitment to follow Jesus!**

I do not believe there is a person in this room exempt from becoming ensnared in our nets. Although, I must admit, it is sometimes surprising to see the kinds of nets that entangle our lives.

He was God’s best man. God had carefully groomed and appointed him for spiritual leadership. Jonah was the epitome of a fully-devoted follower until he heard God say, *“Follow Me... to Nineveh”*. At that moment, Jonah paused at the crossroads of decision and consciously concluded he was willing to do just about anything God would ask him to do except that. So, on the rebound, Jonah boarded a boat for Tarshish- which was the exact opposite direction of Nineveh.

As is often the case, Jonah would learn God is relentless in His pursuit of us. God tracked Jonah and sent a storm to try and wake him up. Still he stubbornly refused to listen. When God finally got him to listen and go to Nineveh, He used him in a remarkable way.

Still, here is Jonah, camped on the outside of the city of Nineveh in suicidal despair. He had outwardly conformed, but his heart was kicking and screaming all the way. Here is what was at the very heart of it all: *“That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.” (JONAH 4:2)*

Jonah hated the Ninevites and didn't want any part of a compassionate exchange between God and his enemy. When Nineveh repented and God's judgment was forestalled, Jonah was livid with disappointment, vehemently resisting a call to forgiveness, compassion, love, grace, and mercy.

Now, isn't that interesting? It wasn't fear for his life at the hands of the violent men of Nineveh. It wasn't intimidation at the prospect of preaching God's judgment to the capital of the world power. It wasn't a lack of trust in God to go with him and help him in what was a very challenging assignment. It wasn't comfort or convenience. No, it was a grudge!

The Assyrian Empire was a ruthless and violent adversary. Their violation of human rights makes Tiananmen Square look like a Sunday School picnic. They demonstrated total disregard for the dignity of their conquered territories and stood as a threat to the safety and sovereignty of Israel. As far as Jonah was concerned, no one was less worthy of the grace and compassion of God. He wanted nothing to do with them. This was the net that snagged his life.

The call to follow Jesus is often dramatic and difficult. To respond to this call will sometimes demand dropping every personal agenda of our lives regardless of how unsettling that might be. Jonah's struggle is not at all uncommon. Yet, followers go wherever Jesus leads them- and it's the “wherever” that is so challenging. The impulse of resistance is the pull of the nets that can snag our good intentions and inhibit our spiritual growth.

Take a close look at the palm of your hand. Do you see the lines running through the palm of your hand? Do you know what these lines are? No, they are not lines palm readers study, they are net burns! This comes close to describing the tension of the nets that pull hard on our hands.

So, what do you hold in your hand that is standing in the way of becoming a fully-devoted follower of Jesus?

People can be nets. The “net” might be forgiveness and the knowledge fully-devoted followers are forgivers- and you just don't want to forgive? The “net” very possibly could be the friends in your life who live, walk, and play in the paths contrary to the ways of Christ. And, while a fully-devoted follower would never desert a friend, it is possible becoming a fully-devoted follower may cause that friend to no longer be comfortable with you. Or, the “net” could be a person with whom you are having an affair. The “net” could be a person whom you refuse to love. The “net” could be someone with whom you just do not want to deal. The “net” could be a husband, a wife, a child.

Things can be nets. “Nets” can be the possessions that have become symbols of our significance: a car, a house, a cottage on the lake, a wardrobe, a club membership. It’s not that any of these are wrong if rightly gained and loosely held. But, just think, what if these things become more important than financial faithfulness to the kingdom? What if these things become more important than following Jesus? What if these things become a source of pride? What if these things separate us from others? What if these things are obtained through greed and the loss of integrity? What if these things create financial burden? What if these things become the source of our sufficiency?

**Whatever things inhibit or prohibit our capacity to follow Jesus are “nets” that have entangled and perhaps even enslaved.**

Plans can be nets. I love to plan. In fact, I operate from the premise that says if you fail to plan you plan to fail! And, while plans for retirement, family, savings, vacation, or a corporate climb are good and fine, what happens when following Jesus interrupts those plans? I mean, what if He permits a health crisis, a financial reversal, a career change, or a new step in ministry?

Attitudes can be nets So much about following Jesus as a fully-devoted follower begins and ends with attitude. Serving, caring, understanding, trusting- these are all attitudes reflected in the lives we live. Yet, we have unfortunately learned to use lesser attitudes to manage our lives and manipulate others. Attitudes that consider our own needs above the needs and concerns of others can quickly entangle us on our journey. The tendency to be insensitive, quick to judge, cynical and suspicious contradict the very spirit of Jesus. So, changing attitudes often means reordering the way we manage our lives.

Money can be a net. When you stop to consider all that money represents in our lives, it becomes apparent it is an entangler of great consequence. Some simply like to accumulate money, most see money as a key to security, success, significance, and fulfillment.

It is not at all uncommon to hear people recount the concern that if they commit themselves as a fully-devoted follower, Jesus will threaten the treasury. The truth is, He probably will. And, this is exactly why money is such a strategic net. When we are finally able to drop this net, other nets will drop with greater ease. Jesus must have known the incredible grip money can have on us because He said more about this one topic in His teaching than any other.

Secret sins can be nets. The constant, downward pull of secret sin is extremely debilitating. Involvement with pornography, that quiet affair, the other life lived on business trips, the stealing from your employer- whatever it is, it is a major snare. Dropping your nets may involve confession to God and to others.

I have gratefully observed that Jesus consistently calls us away from everything and anything that stands between us and Him. It is a call to total surrender. He does not ask just for this piece and that piece; there is no guessing and wondering which piece He will require next. He is looking for netless hands in a fully-devoted follower.

The songwriter Judson W. Van de Venter said it best when he penned:

All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live.

This is the essence of following. It is not about a project- it is about a Person. It is not about a task- it is about the worthiness and trustworthiness of Jesus and His cause.

Dropping our “nets” to follow Jesus boils down to a matter of values. Every choice we make in life is a graphic demonstration of the values that drive our lives. Every single time we refuse to drop a “net” because of something we treasure more, we tell Jesus where He stands in our lives.

**Hearts that are growing in love with Jesus produce  
hands that are empty of nets!**

Take a close look at your hands. Are there rope burns from the strain of the “net” you have struggled to hold on to? Can you see the “net” entangling your desire to be a fully-devoted follower? Why not make this the day you choose to drop your “net” at the feet of Jesus!