

Put Out into the Deep 2025
Psalm 42:1-2, 5-8 Luke 5:1-11

Psalm 42:1-2, 5-8 (New Revised Standard Version)

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts; all your waves and your billows have gone over me. By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.

Luke 5:1-11 (New Revised Standard Version)

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

A friend and member of my church in North Carolina, a young Marine,
invited me to go shrimping with him when the season first opened,
so, we met at his shrimp boat a little before sundown.

He explained that my part was to help put out the shrimp net
and help pull it back in, and dump out everything in it
after each run of dragging the net through river bottom.

After we emptied the net and put it back out for another run
my job was to pour whatever we had caught out on the sorting table,
to put the shrimp in the cooler & discard the rest over the side.

It was an incredibly tiring and totally exhausting long night's work.
Putting the net out and then hauling it back in without a winch
was a back-breaking task that took all my strength each time,
and by sunrise when we finally came back to the dock,
I was spent and weary beyond words with nothing left.

But I still needed to help rinse out the net and hang it up to dry,
then clean the boat so that everything was ship-shape and secure.

Our deal was that for all my hard work, we would split the catch.
But it had been a terrible night and we caught practically nothing.

If Jesus had come by at that point, wanting to preach from the boat,
and then asking us to put the nets back out into the deep,
I'm not sure that I would have been willing to go along with it.

In the Luke passage, Peter is surprisingly cooperative with Jesus,
and learns about a much better way to catch even more fish,
which is to have Jesus in the same boat with you
and follow directions when he urges you to go deeper.

In John 21 there is a similar fishing-story about Jesus and Peter.
Once again, Peter's been out all night and hasn't caught any fish.
Jesus tells him to cast the net on the other side of the boat,
and he catches so many fish that the nets are nearly bursting.

Here, Jesus got into Simon's boat and taught the crowd from there.
Afterward, vs. 4~8

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.'

When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!'

Simon Peter was the unfortunate victim of defective theology.

He believed that we have to be good enough and godly enough
before the Lord will come near, love, bless and accept us,
and that our good & worthiness must come before God's grace.

But righteousness does not derive from anything that we do,
but is entirely from what Jesus has already accomplished for us,
for even our best and most faithful efforts are not nearly enough,
and in fact, it is entirely God's love and grace
that enables any good works that we accomplish.

Aware of his shortcomings, Simon was afraid in the presence of Jesus.

And though **Simon had given up on himself**, Jesus had not. vs. 10-11

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

And every day in countless ways we are called afresh to follow,
with new opportunities for us to grow and to serve faithfully,
for our lives to reflect in amazing and wonderful ways
God's grace, love, truth, compassion, joy and power.

This is good news. It's hopeful, not threatening or fearful.
It's a wonderful promise that things can change and be different
as our lives move toward something more meaningful & gracious.

The point of this passage is a call to discipleship, to follow.
Follow me is the call to a life of discipleship that we all receive,
& when someone chooses to respond **extraordinary things can happen.**

**The point is, we are living projects of God's purpose and grace,
called to be and to serve as expansions of God's Kingdom.
We are called to see and respond to our world in new ways,
as salt and light making a difference in the lives around us.**

So, this was more than just another story about catching lots of fish.
It was a prophetic sign and a theological encounter

which served to reveal his power & who Jesus really was,
through which Jesus connected and transformed Simon.

Jesus so completely changed Simon's perspective & his priorities,
that he eagerly left everything behind to follow his Lord Jesus.
When Jesus said, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people,
they came along with him, had the adventure of their lives,
and the world has never been the same since.

An experience with Jesus creates new beginnings & new possibilities.

This story about the power of gracious love to change human lives,
as throughout our lives, and experience by experience,
God continues to call us deeper, to follow & respond.

And if we will stop and pause, listen to the Lord, trust and obey,
if we'll allow ourselves to be found, loved and graced by God,
then as we follow Christ our direction in life will change,
as our relationship with the Lord grows deeper & stronger.

Faith then, is our response to God's prior mercy, grace & blessings,
which will reorient everything about how we choose to live,
as a taste of God's gracious love and empowering presence
creates in us an even deeper hunger and longing for more.

One of the places where I have observed this truth most powerfully,
has been in the courage and strength of Christian perseverance,
tenacity & trust even amid terrible loss and suffering in life.

In my experience, my most significant moves toward spiritual growth
toward more a mature and deeper faith, have almost always emerged
from my worst hardships, mistakes and from painful adversity,
and wrestling with my most difficult questions and failures,
and unsettling situations that defy simple or pat answers.

In other words, when my faith has matured and ripened the most,
it's been when God has had to pick me back up, forgive & heal me.

At the time horribly unpleasant, yet eventually somehow beneficial.

Faith includes how we choose to deal with problems & disappointments,
as something God can use to teach or heal us and our relationships,
as a source of **opportunity to grow toward a deeper walk of faith.**

I saw and witnessed this truth most mightily and unexpectedly
in Abetifi, a small village high in the mountains of Ghana.
One Sunday when our group was worshipping in their church,
that faith-community was saying goodbye to a local family.

A woman of that community and congregation had died recently.
She had been in charge of the schools in that district,
and it had been her salary that had provided
for their family, which included 6 children.

Without that income,
the family couldn't afford to stay together in Abetifi.

Her widowed husband was leaving shortly to look for work in Accra,
and the children were to be split up among their relatives
who lived in different and distant regions of the country.

The children were about to leave the only home they had ever known,
away from all their friends, their church and their school,
away from the comforts of their family and the familiar,
in addition to grieving the tragic loss of their mother.

It was very difficult and a crushing reality for that family.
For all of them, their lives were going to be very different,
as they faced an unknown and fearfully uncertain future.

On this their last Sunday worship service together as family,
the father asked his 14-year-old daughter to sing Psalm 42.
It was one of the most moving and most powerful and inspiring
moments of worship that I have ever been blessed to experience,
and amazing **hope and insight into human suffering and struggle.**

In a delightfully clear and sweet, beautiful and courageous voice,
she stood all alone, singing a cappella and looking to her God.
Her music echoed the poignant and piercing words of Psalm 42:1-2.

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the
living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?

I can still hear her voice, tight with the emotional struggle,
as with great feeling, and with astonishing grace and poise
she declared her faith, her trust, and her hope in God,
" You alone are my strength, my shield, To You alone may my spirit yield
You alone are my heart's desire, And I long to worship Thee."

That remarkable young African girl made this psalm soar for me.
Despite losing almost everything in life that she had ever valued,
upheld by her faith, with astonishing courage and trust,
she found voice, courage, strength and trust to cry out,
"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

Her pain and loss, were so intense and so encompassing,
that nothing less than God Almighty could possibly help,
and so, she hungered and longed for a deeper presence of God.

Her faith, her courage that day, her powerful and inspiring music,
singing to God amid so much heartbreak, hurt and suffering,
demonstrated her relationship with **her living-loving Lord.**

And even as she faced ultimate upheaval and absolute uncertainty,
what an inspiring and authentic declaration of her depth of faith,
that more than 30 years later, so powerful, it still speaks to me.

There was little or nothing left in life for her to hold onto,
except for her personal relationship and walk with God.

That young girl came to God in abject emptiness, suffering and hurt
but because she knew & trusted God in such a close and personal way,
she had courage to go on, **clothed in the assurance
of the truth and promises of God in Jesus Christ,**
and so, she hungered and longed for a deeper presence of God.

She had absolute and resolute confidence in Christ Jesus her Lord

because she already knew and trusted God to strengthen & sustain.

The music of her singing that day illustrated the vast difference
between knowing that God exists and actually knowing the Lord,
between merely knowing about God and having a real relationship.

It's the difference between knowing doctrine and biblical facts
and living within a meaningful growing journey of faith with God.

**And that which so moved and inspired me, her trust in the Lord,
so obviously present and active, powerful and authentic in her
was what gave her the strength to so courageously persevere.**

At the end, facing our maker, the final & critical question won't be,
how much did I win and accomplish, and was I successful in life,
or even how many points did I put on some celestial scoreboard.
The only meaningful, the important and critical question will be,
have I received and trusted God's grace, and walked in God's love?

Today we too are being invited to follow Jesus as his disciples,
for the Spirit is at work transforming and blessing our lives,
by healing our wounds and guiding our walk of faith to go deeper,

so that grace increasingly guides and influences us,
so that we can reflect God's truth, compassion & love
out to a world that is lost, struggling and confused...

... for there is so very much more that the Lord desires for us,
if we will follow and submit **a little bit deeper into God's grace...**

... as in Psalm 42, and as Jesus said to Simon Peter,

*As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. You are my strength and shield, **to you alone may my spirit yield...** Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.*