
 UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: THE LIFE OF PETER
 Matthew 4:12-22

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Some of you know how hooked I am on discipleship. I have said more than once that my passion is to lead a dynamic congregation of growing disciples who give their lives to make a difference in the world. I can't say that I have always thought in those terms about my ministry. I pastored many years without any clear sense of what it means to be a disciple or how to make disciples.

Over that past two years, all that has been changing for me. For the past several months, I have been sharing with others my 5 D's of Discipleship. I call it the Lifecycle of a Disciple. Remember this?



I showed it to you for the first time back in October. I have shared it with others and gotten some interesting comments. Like the minister who said I need to add a sixth "d" word, "Die". I think he meant that becoming a disciple means dying to ourselves, dying with Christ. Good point! My model isn't in the Bible as such, but I believe it contains the elements of what it means to become and grow as a disciple of Jesus. It always begins with deciding to follow Jesus and always leads to deploying in mission and service.

For the next several Sundays, we are going to look at each element of this model from the perspective of the life of Peter. In today's reading, Matthew 4:12-22, we see Peter beginning his journey of discipleship by making a fundamental decision to follow Jesus.

Now I believe there is nothing more important for me or for you than deciding to become and intentionally growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is the biggest decision we will ever make. It is the most important decision in the relatively short time God gives us on earth. Furthermore, I am coming to see that it is a decision that can unlock a world of potential just waiting to burst out of us. Discipleship is not just about joining a church or performing

religious duties. It is about joining up with Jesus to make an eternal difference in other's lives and in the world.

Peter made that decision one day that started out for him just like any other day. He owned a fishing business with his brother Andrew. We know they had a boat. Probably like this one. [Slide] This one was found back in 1986 sticking out of the mud in the Sea of Galilee. It now draws thousands of visitors to see it in a museum.

Imagine Peter and Andrew in this boat.
Imagine Jesus riding in it with them and using it as a floating pulpit.
Imagine it as a symbol of discipleship, of life.

Now some of you know that I am a sailor. I get excited about boats. What we all know about a boat is that it is not of much use until we decide the direction we want it to go. It is not of much use without someone to guide it and steer it. At some point, every sailor has to decide which direction to point it, and the destination tells him where that is and how to get there.

For example, I used to get asked lots of times how a sailboat can sail from point A to point B when point B is where the wind is coming from. Everyone assumes that you can only sail in the direction the wind is blowing. Not true. A sailboat can actually sail to point B by tacking back and forth across the wind. The wind actually pulls the boat forward with the sail acting like a wing on an airplane. It is called lift. The destination determines where to point the boat and how to set the sails.

The question in life is, What is my destination, but also who will steer my boat?

I have learned in a lot of ways the importance of deciding who is going to steer my boat. On a trip to the Bahamas, a group of guys including my brother-in-law had to cross the bay in West Palm Beach, Fl., to get to the ocean. My brother-in-law took the helm and I was the navigator. Now to cross a bay you have to follow the channel markers. You keep the red on the right and green on the left. I made sure my brother-in-law knew that and kept the charts in front of me to make sure we were in the right place.

Well, my brother-in-law had different ideas. It looked to him like the channel had a crook in it and we could make better time if we sort of cut the corner. I warned him of the danger and then held on tight. Four hours later, we finally flagged down a motor boat that threw us a line and dragged us off the bottom so we could continue our journey.

In this business of life, you cannot cut corners without running aground. Fortunately, God is like that motor boat. He graciously throws us a lifeline to drag us off bottom. How much easier it is when we decide that God will be our pilot, our helmsman, to begin with!

Discipleship is about making that decision of direction for our lives. It is about deciding to let someone else who knows a lot more than we do to steer it, someone who knows the way to heaven on earth and to eternity with God.

Back to Peter. I doubt that Peter was thinking about these things as he hauled his net time and again into his boat, standing ankle deep in the slime of the flopping fish. He was probably thinking about the money he hoped to make at the market. He couldn't wait to get ashore and back home to toss one with the boys or to sink down into the comfort of his bed. You wouldn't call him a seeker. As far as he knew, life was what it was. You work, you get married, you have children, you hope to save some, you hope to have some good times along with the bad, and then you die.

In other words when Jesus came walking along the shore in Matthew 4, I believe his heart went out to these two brothers who never dreamed of the potential God had put inside them. They saw themselves as hard working men, doing a fair day's work to provide for the needs of their families. Jesus saw so much more. Jesus saw the future. He saw them shaping the future, shaping the world as no one could have imagined it.

And I wonder if that is how we see ourselves and other people. Jesus always saw people in a way that challenges me. He never looked at an individual without seeing that person's potential. *I have big plans for your life. I know what you can do and what you can become if you follow me.*

I have trouble seeing a lot of people that way, don't you? I don't think about their potential. When someone cuts me off in traffic, or gives me a hard time in the check-out line, I wonder what's wrong with them. Or, and this is more usual, I don't care whether they have any potential or not. I ignore them. It gives me pause to wonder how many Peters and Andrews I have simply walked past without giving them a second thought. What about those people in your office who drive you crazy or the boss who thinks he or she is god? What about the person cleaning the toilets in your office building or carrying out your groceries? What about the snob you play tennis with?

You see, I think our biggest sin is ignoring or doubting the potential that God has put in each of us, in every one of us, in every person we meet. What if we were to begin thinking of faith-sharing, not as an awkward attempt to tell someone what they should believe about Jesus or where they should go to church, but as a genuine attempt to lead others to see the potential in their lives that only Jesus can unlock.

Do you want to be all that you can be? Do you want to go on the most exciting journey you could ever imagine and achieve more earth-shaking results that have eternal consequences?

“Peter, Andrew, follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”
Immediately they left their nets and followed him. (Matthew 4:22)

Discipleship begins with decision. Whom will I follow?

Will I follow Jesus? Or will I follow Dr. Phil? Or will I blindly follow my impulses and desires? Or will I become a disciple of my drug using friends or of my particular brand of religion or of the bottle that numbs my worries and masks my emptiness? All of us make this decision. All of us are disciples of something, of someone. Something or someone steers our boats, or at least points us in a direction that we might even give our lives for. But whatever that is, it is nothing compared to Jesus.

For Peter and Andrew it was big time fishing, disciples of the trade, you might say. Until Jesus crooked his finger at them and called them ashore. And they made a new decision to follow him to fish for people. And they began a movement that literally changed the world.

Now here is an important question. Do you think they understood what Jesus meant? I believe they followed him at first mostly out of curiosity. It was Jesus’ marketing strategy. You catch fish. How would you like to catch people? What on earth does that mean? They didn’t know, couldn’t have known, but it sure sounded interesting, enough to go to a meeting or two to see what this is all about.

Today, we know more about what it means because of people like Peter. It means following the One who came with a boatload of love for people, enough love to die for them, for every one of them regardless of their sin or failure. It means following the One whose passion is people and for unlocking the potential they have for God-blessing life on earth. Jesus came to catch the hearts of people and makes disciples who believe there is nothing more important nor more fulfilling in all of human creation than making more disciples whose hearts are caught in the net of God’s eternal love.

Now let me tell you what I learn from Peter about making this decision to follow Jesus. He had to make this decision over and over throughout his life. There were times when he had to decide if he was going to keep following Jesus. He had to decide if he was going to turn over all parts of his life to Jesus. For example, Jesus once invited Peter to step out of a boat to see if he could walk on water. Decision time! When Jesus told his disciples he must die on the cross and that real disciples will take up their own cross, Peter had to decide if he would keep going with Jesus. When Jesus was arrested, Peter had to decide if he was going to stand up for Jesus and failed three times by denying Jesus.

You see, discipleship is not a one time decision. It is a lifetime of decision making. Will I be a disciple of Jesus in the matter of my chosen

career? Will I be a disciple of Jesus when tempted by sexual allurements? Will I be a disciple of Jesus with regard to my money? Will I be a disciple of Jesus when peer pressure exerts its power over me? Will I be a disciple of Jesus when I see people dying of AIDS? Will I be a disciple of Jesus in my marriage? Will I be a disciple of Jesus even when my world goes to hell? Will I be a disciple of Jesus when I hear the call to mission? Will I be a disciple of Jesus in a world of terrorism and fear?

Let me tell you what excites me today. I can see God unlocking the potential in many of you. I am hearing stories of God's work in your lives. I hear more and more of you talking about discipleship as the thing we must be about. As a congregation we have made some decisions that could only happen in a group that is committed to the mission of making and growing disciples. I kind of feel sorry for people who will not decide to follow Jesus, not because I feel superior to them, but because they are missing so much.

But deciding is only the first step. Next Sunday, we are going to see from Peter's perspective the importance of the second D in the 5 D's of Discipleship, Discover. Deciding to follow Jesus is only the beginning point. To be successful in following Jesus, we must discover who he is, what he wants, where he wants us to go.