

Text:

Matthew 4.18-25

Big Picture:

The call of Jesus to his first disciples—and to us—was simple and direct: follow me. And they did.

Preparing for the Lesson:

In some ways, our lesson really begins in 4.17. There are a couple of times (see also 16.21) this phrase, “From that time on...”, is used. Both point to a shift in the direction of Matthew’s story. Here, it marks the beginning of Jesus earthly ministry. The content of this preaching matches what we are told John preaches in the previous chapter.

A couple of things stand out to me in this passage. The first is the manner in which Jesus as teacher and his followers as disciples form their relationship. In most cases during the time of Jesus, someone who wanted to be a disciple (the word means learner) of a teacher, the learner would approach the teacher and ask to be allowed to follow him. Pertinent to our passage today, there was an expectation that the learner would follow, literally, the one from whom they were learning. The impetus was on the learner, however, to request time with the teacher, who was not obligated to actually lead this learner through the discipling process. Here, we see it just the opposite. Jesus goes to those whom will follow him. The teacher chooses, not the student.

The second part of this is that when this teacher calls these men, he does not leave it up to them whether they will follow him, at least not in a sense of an invitation that asks the followers to consider following him. He simply says follow me. Amazingly enough, they do. Matthew tells us that “at once” (v. 20) and “immediately” (v. 22) the disciples leave everything to follow Jesus. Both of these phrases are actually the same word in the Greek, so there is no difference between the response of Peter/Andrew and James/John. They both left everything at once.

I do not think Matthew was using the presence of a boat to create a comparison between the wealth of these two sets of brothers, as some have suggested. I think rather it is an attempt to underline the willingness for these men to leave everything they had: their business, their familial relationships, and their assets.

What is so compelling about the call of Jesus that people are moved to abandon their stations in life to follow this teacher? Perhaps this is an unfair question, but if you have ever been frustrated about your or the church’s lack of ability at times to bring people to follow Jesus, it is a question you have wrestled with. I do not think there is a simple formula or strategy to be found here other than the recognition that the call of Jesus is compelling. Our job, rather than trying to recreate the “moment,” is to continue to point to Jesus as the one who is worthy of following and who is beyond anything we ourselves can do.

Finally, some commentators will try to point out the ways in which fishing is a good analogy for what the disciples would be doing with their life. At times they try to press the analogy into what types of fishing people did during this time period and apply this to how disciple making would happen based on the types of nets being used, etc. It is pressing the point beyond where it needs to be. I believe, because he does it often, Jesus is using the moment at hand to impress upon people a greater reality. Had these men been

plumbers, I have a sneaky suspicion that our metaphor for reaching out would have involved digging ditches or the like.

Possible Lesson Outline:

If you have not spent time determining the purpose of your group and forming some form of covenant, whether it be a formal written document or simply an informal conversation, please spend some time doing this. A covenant is simply the guidelines your group agrees to follow as you live together as a group. It will include some specifics as to location, meetings times, content of lessons and the like, but it may also include dreams you have for you group, such as “We want to be a group that serves others at least once a month.” The purpose is to consistently point your group to where you want to head or cast a vision, if you will.

Let me suggest a couple of ways you can begin your group this week. The first is to think about starting a new business. If you were going to be starting a business with the group of people within your group, what are some of the first steps you would go about? Obviously, some in your group may have experience doing this and their input is valuable as you contrast the start of this “business” with the start of Jesus’ earthly ministry.

The second way you might consider to start out your group is to ask people to share their stories about how they came to faith. Who were the teachers they followed? How did that process happen? Quickly? Over a period of weeks or months? In what ways is it possible to recreate that process of coming to faith in others?

Ask discussion questions.

Consider using the “This Week” section for the upcoming week.

Close with a time of prayer.

For the Kids:

To introduce the idea of “following,” lead (or perhaps have one of your children lead) everyone in a game of “Simon Says.” Yes, this includes the adults. Another possible way of introducing this would be for the entire group to play “Follow the Leader,” and if you don’t follow, you are out. See if you can eliminate everyone. NOTE: If you do this, I want pictures! You can even text them to me: 806.317.4778.

The point we are trying to make for our children—and for the adults—is that at times, following can be hard work and we resist doing it. It is easier to do our own thing than to rearrange our lives or even give up things for Jesus.

You might ask your children the following:

- Jesus asks his disciples to give up everything they have to follow him. Why would that be hard to do? What would be hard for you to give up?
- Can you think of an example when you have had to make a choice to follow God instead of do whatever you wanted to do? Was it hard? Why or why not?

Discussion Questions:

1. How purposeful does Jesus seem to be in calling his disciples in the book of Matthew? Compare this to Luke’s account (Luke 4.42-5.11). What is different and why? Do you think this is significant?

2. Many have commented on the unlikely choice of fisherman as the first disciples selected. In what ways are fishermen the perfect people with whom to start?
3. Think back to the process by which you came to the place you are now in your faith journey. How does your story compare to Jesus' simple command to "Follow me"?
4. What would it take for you to completely give up everything—car, house, job, stuff—to follow someone?
5. What is it about Jesus and his call that enables him to be "successful" with just asking people to follow him?
6. How do your thoughts and answers about the previous questions impact how we grow disciples at South Plains? How *should* it impact us?
7. In what ways is "fishing for people" different than going to church? In what ways do they overlap? What do we at South Plains and we in this group need to be doing to focus more on following Jesus and fishing for people?

This Week:

Jesus calls his disciples—and us—to give up everything. Make a list this week of the things you would have difficulty giving up if Jesus came to Lubbock and asked you to literally follow him. One way to do this is to keep a piece of paper, perhaps an index card, on you at all times. The Notes app on your phone would also work. Then, as you go through your week, think about the things you spend most of your time doing. Our time can often indicate where our heart is, and in this, you might find those things most difficult for you to give up. Think about ways you can ensure you are giving up everything to follow Jesus, including the things that made your list.

Prayer Ideas:

Your prayer time today is probably best focused on asking God to help us follow him more and more every day. You might also pray that God would show you ways you can be sure you are giving up everything to follow him, perhaps even asking that if something you have or do is getting in the way of following God, you have it taken away.

What's Next:

Next week's section is Matthew 5.1-6.18. One Groups will be looking at 5.1-16.