



SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY



LESSON 1 / WEEK OF JANUARY 7, 2007

Key Scripture: Matthew 4:18-22

Memory Verse: "Come, Follow me," Jesus said, "And I will make you fishers of men." Matthew 4:19

COMMENTARY / This portion of the lesson is for the leader's personal study.

Context

Matthew 4:18-22 takes place at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry. In Matthew chapters 1-2 we have the birth of Christ. In chapter 3 we see the baptism of Jesus. At the opening of Matthew 4, Jesus is tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Then Jesus learns that John the Baptist has been imprisoned so He returns to Galilee (4:12) and begins to preach what John the Baptist had been preaching... "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." (Matthew 4:17).

This brings us to our key Scripture as Jesus is calling the first four of His twelve disciples (Andrew, Simon Peter, James and John). Note that one of the first things Jesus does is to call this small group of men to follow and learn from Him.

The Call

As we study this passage, it is important to examine exactly what Jesus meant when He invited these men to follow Him. We commonly hear the term *disciple* as it refers to the twelve men that Jesus called. But they were not His only followers. Several times in the New Testament we see the crowds that followed Jesus referred to as His disciples. Matthew 26:56 and John 6:66 both even say that many of the people who called themselves His disciples deserted, turned back, and no longer followed Him. A disciple was not a term reserved only for those who believed in Jesus. John 1 tells us that John the Baptist also had disciples. A disciple is simply a learner, an apprentice or understudy, a student. So what is a disciple of Christ and what makes him different?





Disciple: A lifetime learner and follower of Jesus Christ who surrenders his or her life to God's mission.

The Relationship

A disciple of Christ is someone who answers the call to follow Christ by surrendering his or her life to God's mission. The relationship that Jesus was calling these men to was different than the relationship He had with any others on earth. They were the first in a long line of Christ-followers, or disciples. It is in Jesus' relationship with these twelve men that we first see God's plan to reach all the peoples of the earth with His Gospel through reproducing disciples of His Son. It is in Christ's example with His twelve disciples that we learn how to truly impact the world for Him. It is here that God shows us the simple and effective method of multiplication.

Jesus invited these men to follow Him not just so they could know Him and go to heaven one day, but also so that He could transform them into His own image. This is how He knew His teaching would continue to spread after His resurrection and ascension. He called them, trained them, and loved them. Then they called others, trained others and loved others like He had to them—even to the point of death—so that the message would continue to go forth to the ends of the earth. Jesus “multiplied” Himself through building relationships with these twelve men.

Jesus said in Matthew 4:19, “*Come, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.*” The invitation was to follow Him, know Him intimately and learn from Him first-hand, then to go out and follow His example as they related to and trained others. Ultimately, this is the same invitation we have today.

Come, Follow Me...

Matthew 4:18 tells us that Simon (later called Peter) and his brother Andrew were casting fishing nets into the lake when Jesus saw them. He approaches them and says “**follow** Me and I will make you fishers of men.” The Greek word for *follow* in this verse is *deute*, which means “Come here! Come now!” Jesus is not saying, “Take some time to think about it and get back to me.” His call is to leave everything and come now. Further, the word *follow* is in the imperative mood in the Greek. That means that it is a command to the hearer to perform a certain action by the order and authority of the one commanding. The invitation is a command that, once accepted, requires full obedience.

Does that mean that Andrew, Simon Peter, James and John had no choice but to obey Christ? Did they *have to* follow Jesus and become fishers of men because it was a command? No, they chose to obey. But it's important to note that once they obeyed, *Jesus sets the conditions of being His disciple*. The one receiving the invitation doesn't decide what being a disciple will cost or require—the one issuing the invitation does.

Call of Christ: An invitation that once accepted requires full obedience and surrender to His conditions, as in response to a command.

Jesus' invitation to follow Him was an all-or-nothing invitation—*come here and come now!* There was a cost for the call. Additionally, Jesus determines the blessing that His disciples would receive for their obedience. There are blessings for answering the call. There is also a purpose in the call—and it is a God-given purpose.

A Promise to True Disciples

Remember we said that Jesus sets the conditions, but also promises a blessing for His disciples. John 8:12 contains an incredible promise: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” The Greek word for *follow* in this verse is *akoloutheo*, and it means “to join as an attendant, to become a disciple.” Those who become Christ’s disciples will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. This doesn’t mean the disciples would never face dark times or circumstances. But they would never face them apart from Christ Himself. He is the light of life that is promised to those who follow Him (John 1:4).

Set Apart from The Crowd

So what distinguishes a true disciple of Christ from the crowds who claim to follow Him? Jesus spent much of His time explaining and teaching the characteristics that would be evident in the life of a true disciple.

John 8:31 says that if you are really His disciple you will obey His Word. In John 13:35, Jesus says that all men will know who His disciples are by how they love one another. John 15:8 says that we show ourselves to truly be His disciples when we bear fruit with our lives. This is the God-given purpose of Christ’s disciples. John 15:16 goes on to say that He appointed us as His disciples “to go and bear fruit.” And this fruit will not just be good deeds, but “fruit that will last.”

The Result of the Call

In verse 19 Jesus not only calls these men to follow Him, He also tells them why He wants them to come. He says, “Come, follow Me, and **I will make you fishers of men.**” Verse 20 tells us that they immediately left their nets and followed Him. It is important to note that being Christ’s disciple requires giving up a former way of life completely in order to fully surrender to Christ’s mission. These four would no longer be ordinary fisher-men. Now they would be fishers of men. The phrase “fishers of men” may seem odd, but we must remember that all four of the men Jesus is calling in this passage are fishermen by trade, so He was speaking to them in terms they understood.

In John’s account of this event, Andrew even calls Jesus “Rabbi,” which means teacher (John 1:38). The natural result of these four following Jesus is that they will learn to be fishers of men. To use the fishing analogy, Jesus “caught” them so that He can now train them to “catch” others. The way that God planned for His Gospel to be shared is through this teacher-learner relationship. In this passage we see Jesus Himself begin to live out God’s plan. We call this simple method of learning and reproducing *disciple-making*.

Disciple-Making: The simple and life-long process of following Christ, becoming more like Him, and leading others to do the same.

Very Simple

How will they learn to be “fishers of men?” The answer is so simple that we often miss it. They will learn by just *being with* Christ. Jesus didn’t lay out a step-by-step process for disciple-making. He just did it. His life was the lesson. And because they chose to leave their fishing nets and follow Him, they had a front-row seat to the entire ministry of Jesus Christ. The natural result of answering the call to follow Christ and be His disciple is that we learn how to *make* disciples.

Don’t let the short passage in Scripture lead you to believe this was an overnight process. Being Jesus’ disciple for these men meant spending three





years literally following Jesus everywhere He went. They learned from Jesus as He taught the crowds, and there would be times when Jesus took the twelve aside and taught them privately. They saw first-hand how Jesus loved and met the needs of others as He healed them, and then Jesus gave them authority and sent them out to do the same (Matthew 10:1,5).

There would be times that Jesus questioned their faith (Luke 8:25), and times that He washed their feet (John 13:5). The result of them being in such close relationship with Christ would be a life forever changed, and a new perspective on their purpose in life. He is their Lord (master) and Savior, but He is also their Rabbi (teacher) and their friend. They would naturally begin to train and lead others because they had been shown how to do it by Christ Himself.

Notice too there is a difference between a process that is *simple*, and one that is *easy*. This process in our lives today will not effectively take place in the confines of a classroom, but is a lifestyle of modeling, training and reproducing Christ in the lives of those around us every day. Jesus poured His life into others—our surrender to disciple-making requires the same commitment.

Fruit That Lasts

Remember that John 15:16 says Jesus appoints us as His disciples to bear fruit that will last. Isn't this what we see Jesus doing by calling these four disciples in Matthew 4:18-22? He is appointing them to follow Him so that they can bear fruit (or, become fishers of men). The next three years leading up to the cross Jesus will be living His life with these disciples showing them "fruit that lasts". Jesus will teach them to be like Himself by living His life alongside them. He is inviting them to follow Him, learn from Him and see how He wants them to live and serve others by making disciples to the ends of the earth.

Fruit: The one true and eternal result of disciple-making—people.

Make the Connection

Fast forward 2,000 years and what was the fruit? We are Christ-followers today because eleven of these twelve men were obedient, and continued to live as Christ lived and train as He trained. The question now is ours to answer—will we answer the call to follow Him, so He can make us fishers of men? And if we have already answered the call, will we be faithful to extend the call to others? Will we connect the blessing of our salvation with the purpose for which we've been saved?

TEACHING / This portion of the lesson is for the entire small group.

Introduction / 5-10 minutes

Begin your time together by talking about the childhood game of "Follow the Leader." Ask the group if they remember how to play the game, the rules of the game, how you are eliminated from the game, the role of the "leader," the role of the "followers," what you must do to win the game, etc. If it will work in your small-group setting, you could even play the game for a few minutes as an illustration. Make sure to focus on the role of the leader and the role of the followers.

Ask questions such as:

- What would the game be like if everyone tried to lead?
- What would the game be like if everyone tried to follow?
- What lessons can children learn from this childhood game?

- In real life, why is it important to have leaders and followers?
- What qualities make an effective leader?
- What qualities make a good follower?

Have students open their Bibles to Matthew 4:18-22. Explain that today we will be studying Jesus' calling of the first four of His twelve disciples. Before you begin the study time in God's Word, pray that God would make every person present today receptive to what He wants to reveal to the group as you discuss His Word. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide the group into all truth (John 16:13) so that He will be glorified through the discussion. Pray that each person's life will be changed as a result of the truths you learn today (James 1:22).

Observation / What does the Scripture say?

Begin by reading (or having a student read) Matthew 4:18-22 aloud. Then, lead a discussion by using the following questions about the Scripture. This section is designed to help your students determine exactly what the Scripture says. Guide the discussion in such a way that the group doesn't jump ahead to trying to determine what the Scripture *means*, or how it *applies* to their lives. At this point we are simply observing. This will lay the groundwork for accurate interpretation and application later.

- What was Jesus' invitation to Andrew and Simon Peter in verse 19?
- What did Jesus tell them He would do if they followed Him?
- What does verse 20 tell us Andrew and Peter did?
- How quickly did they follow Him and what did they leave behind?
- What invitation did Jesus give James and John? Was it similar to what He said to Andrew and Simon Peter?
- According to verse 21, what were James and John doing when Jesus called them?
- Who and what did they leave behind?

Interpretation / What does the Scripture mean?

Using the commentary section at the beginning of the lesson that you read prior to your meeting time, explain the Greek definition and mood of *deute* (follow) in Matthew 4:19. Then ask the following questions.

- Based on this definition, what was the implication of answering Jesus' call to follow Him? Who set the conditions?
- Based on how quickly these four men answered the call, do you think they understood this?
- Why do you think Jesus used the term "fishers of men?"
- What did Jesus mean by this term? How would they "fish" for men?

Using the commentary portion again, talk about what a disciple is. Explain that Jesus was calling these men into a teacher/learner relationship with Him, and that His relationship with them would be different from His relationship with anyone else on earth.

Now, have students look up the following passages and read them aloud. As each person reads, list the characteristics or requirements of a disciple ("follower") on the whiteboard, or have someone keep a list.

- Luke 14:27
- Luke 5:27-28
- Mark 10:21
- Matthew 16:24
- John 12:26





Explain that *all* of these verses use the same Greek word for *follow*. It is the word *akoloutheo*. Give the definition of *akoloutheo* from the commentary section. Then, lead a discussion using the following questions:

- What similarities do you see in all of these verses regarding following Christ?
- What must one do to follow Christ?
- Who is establishing the dynamics of this relationship, the Caller or the one being called? How does this relate to the command word “follow” (*deute*) in Matthew 4:19?

It is true that being a disciple of Christ will require a complete and total surrender of our lives to His mission. But what we gain far outweighs what we sacrifice. Read John 8:12 aloud.

- What is Jesus’ promise to His followers in this verse?

Read John 1:4

- Based on this verse, what does this promise mean? What does it *not* mean?

Read John 15:16.

- According to this verse, why did Jesus appoint His disciples? What was their God-given purpose?
- What kind of fruit were they to bear according to this verse? Would it be temporary?

Lead a discussion to connect Jesus’ calling of these four men in Matthew 4:18-22 with His purpose in John 15:16. Talk about being “fishers of men” as a means to bear “lasting fruit.” Stress that this was not an overnight change, but a life-long process that resulted from being in relationship with Jesus. Using the commentary at the beginning of the lesson, explain what disciple-making is and that by reproducing ourselves through disciple-making we obey His command to bear fruit that lasts (John 15:16).

Application / How will this Truth change me?

- Read John 17:20 and explain that this is from Jesus’ prayer to God before His crucifixion. Who is Jesus praying for according to this verse?
- Does that include us today? Why?
- How did the message of Christ come to us?
- What would have happened if the disciples didn’t reproduce more disciples? What would have been the result 2,000 years later in your own life?
- What will be the result for those who still don’t know Christ if you don’t make disciples?

Remind the group that the first step to being a disciple-maker is to answer Jesus’ call to be His disciple. You can’t make disciples if you aren’t one. The question for Christ-followers is, how do we obey Jesus’ command in John 15:16 to “bear fruit that will last?” How will we join in the long line of believers who came before us to be “fishers of men?” The answer is so simple it is often missed.

Have someone read John 15:5-8.

- In these verses, how does Jesus tell us we will bear fruit?

Share with the students that the Greek meaning of the word *remain* in these verses is, “To continue to be present; to be held or kept continually; to last; endure; to wait.” It is very similar to the words *abide* or *communion*.

- How do you see this in the lives of Andrew, Simon Peter, James and John? Did they remain in Christ?
- What lasting fruit did they bear as a result of their relationship with Christ? Can we in this classroom be considered their fruit?

- How do Christ-followers remain in (abide; be with) Christ today?
- Can someone who doesn't remain in Christ truly be His disciple?
- What will be the fruit of our lives if we remain in Christ?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1.

- What bold statement does Paul make in this verse?
- Whose example is Paul following? How does that affect his ability to make this statement?
- Who is walking with Christ today as a result of your life?

Encourage the group to allow God to examine their hearts by asking the question, "Who am I following?" If we are following Christ, then we should also be modeling Christ to others with our lives, and be able to say with Paul, "follow my example as I follow Christ's example." We don't set the conditions of Jesus' call. When we choose to answer and accept eternal life, we give up our personal agenda to surrender to Christ's mission. Jesus is saying the same thing to us that He said to His disciples over 2,000 years ago. "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

A Song That Calls

There's an old hymn that speaks to the call of the disciples called "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus." If you have a moment at the close of your time together, you may want to reflect on these words, or sing the song together.

*I have decided, to follow Jesus,
I have decided, to follow Jesus,
I have decided, to follow Jesus,
No turning back, no turning back.*

*Though I may wonder, I still will follow,
Though I may wonder, I still will follow,
Though I may wonder, I still will follow,
No turning back, no turning back.*

*Though none go with me, still I will follow,
Though none go with me, still I will follow,
Though none go with me, still I will follow,
No turning back, no turning back!*

*The world behind me, the cross before me,
The world behind me, the cross before me,
The world behind me, the cross before me,
No turning back, no turning back!*

*Will you decide now, to follow Jesus,
Will you decide now, to follow Jesus,
Will you decide now, to follow Jesus,
No turning back, no turning back!*

For Further Examination

Jesus describes true disciples in the following verses:

- John 10:4
- John 8:31
- John 13:35





MESSAGE MERGE / Putting the sermon and the Small Group study together.

Lead-in Questions / If you meet together *before* worship these questions might be helpful at the end of your group time to prepare you to hear from Dr. Platt.

- What have you learned today that is new to you?
- What have you learned today that you can pass on to others?
- How can you apply what you have learned tomorrow at home/work/school?
- What areas of the lesson are still unclear to you?
- What will you be listening for today during the message?
- How can your classmates pray for you as you go into worship?
- What do you hope to learn today during the worship time?

Post-teaching Questions / If your group meets together *after* worship these questions might be helpful at the end of your group time to tie the sermon and the small-group lesson together.

- What have you learned today that is new to you?
- How can you apply what you have learned tomorrow at home/work/school?
- What portion of the message was most impacting for you?
- Were any areas of the message unclear or confusing? Which and why?
- What have you learned today that you can pass on to others?
- What Scripture is the most important for you today?
- What did you learn in Small Group that added to what you heard during the worship message?