

Invitation

JESUS CALLS PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM.

Matthew 4:12-25

12 When he heard that **John had been arrested**, **A** he withdrew into **Galilee**. **B** **13** He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by **the sea**, **C** in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. **14** This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: **15** Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, along the road by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. **16** The people who live **in darkness** **D** have seen a great light, and for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. **17** From then on Jesus began to preach, “**Repent**, **E** because the kingdom of heaven has come near.” **18** As he was walking along the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter), and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. **19** “Follow me,” he told them, “and I will make you **fish for people**.” **F** **20** Immediately they left their nets and followed him. **21** Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father, preparing their nets, and he called them. **22** Immediately they left the boat and their father and **followed him**. **G** **23** Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their **synagogues**, **H** preaching the good news of **the kingdom**, **I** and healing every disease and sickness among the people. **24** Then the news about him spread throughout Syria. So they brought to him all those who were afflicted, those suffering from various diseases and intense pains, the **demon-possessed**, **J** the **epileptics**, **K** and the paralytics. And he healed them. **25** Large crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

Exploring Key Words

- A** John the Baptist. For more on John’s arrest, see Matthew 14:1-12 and Mark 6:14-29.
- B** The region in northern Israel where Jesus began His public ministry. It was significant for its mixed Jewish-Gentile population (Isa. 9:1; Matt. 28:16; Luke 4:14-15).
- C** The Sea of Galilee (also, Lake Gennesaret or the Sea of Tiberias) is a freshwater lake that still serves as a fishing hub for the area.
- D** The Greek word (*skotia*) could mean a lack of physical light, but it was often used as a metaphor for spiritual darkness.
- E** Jesus began His ministry with the same message as John, emphasizing a complete transformation of one’s heart and mind.
- F** “Fishers of men” (KJV; ESV). A metaphor for evangelism, Jesus called His disciples to lead others toward God’s kingdom.
- G** Like Peter and Andrew (v. 20), James and John left everything to follow Jesus. In Jesus’s day, disciples literally followed behind their masters.
- H** Local Jewish house of worship. The synagogue likely originated during the Babylonian exile, serving as centers for study, prayer, and community gatherings.
- I** God’s rule and reign on earth, signified by the coming of Jesus as Messiah. The kingdom is a primary theme throughout Matthew’s Gospel.
- J** The Bible affirms the existence of demons aligned with Satan to oppose God (Eph. 6:12). Jesus often demonstrated His authority over these supernatural beings.
- K** Literally, “moon-struck.” Some ancients believed celestial bodies, particularly the moon, affected human health, including seizures.



NOTES

Starting Out (Matt. 4:12-17)

- Jesus began His ministry by leaving Nazareth and settling in Capernaum. This region of Galilee once belonged to the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun, and Jesus's ministry there fulfilled ancient prophecy about those tribes.
- His message was simple and clear. People needed to repent from their sins and recognize the arrival of God's kingdom through Him.

Calling Out (Matt. 4:18-22)

- By the Sea of Galilee, Jesus encountered two sets of brothers: Andrew and Peter, along with James and John. He invited these fishermen to join Him in His work, challenging them to fish for people.
- All four immediately left their nets and their families behind to follow Jesus.

Reaching Out (Matt. 4:23-25)

- As Jesus shared the message of God's kingdom around Galilee, He proved He was the Messiah through His preaching and His miracles.
- News of Him spread, and His popularity grew. Before long, people from surrounding regions were coming to hear Him speak.
- They also brought sick and demon-possessed people to Him for healing.

Summary Statements

Jesus calls people to follow Him.

- People must repent to enter the Kingdom of God.
- Following Jesus will require personal sacrifice.
- Jesus's call means following His example and ministering to others.

Memory Verse

Matthew 4:19-20

Key Doctrine

The Kingdom

The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. (See John 3:3; Colossians 1:13.)



For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at goExploreTheBible.com.

ENGAGE

What are some jobs today where you might find apprentices? What would be some advantages to becoming an apprentice in one of those jobs? (PSG, p. 20)

- An apprenticeship is a process for training others in a trade or a profession. Usually, it involves on-the-job training. The goal is that sometime down the road the apprentice can do the job with the same skill level the master teacher has.
- Christians are called to apprentice themselves to Jesus. It's called being a disciple. Each of us is called to apprentice ourselves to Jesus.

Bonus: What are some things you've learned in your walk with Jesus? How did you learn them?

EXPLORE

STARTING OUT (MATT. 4:12-17)

Bonus: Why would Matthew emphasize Old Testament prophecies?

- Jesus began His earthly ministry in Galilee. After being rejected in His hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30), He moved to Capernaum, an important city located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. In time, it became identified as Jesus's "own town" (Matt. 9:1).
- Matthew noted that Jesus's move fulfilled prophecy. Isaiah predicted a connection between the Messiah and the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali (Isa. 9:1-2). These were the closest of the twelve tribes to first-century Galilee.
- This would have been an important point for Matthew's Jewish audience as they considered whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. The prophecy also stated the Messiah would move Israel out of darkness into light.
- Jesus's message focused on repentance. He urged listeners to change their hearts and behavior because the kingdom of heaven had arrived in Him. This was the same message John the Baptist had been preaching.

How can believers point people to God's kingdom? (PSG, p. 24)

CALLING OUT (MATT. 4:18-22)

Bonus: In what ways do you feel "called" to something? How did you discern that calling?

- In the first century, a Jewish student would choose a rabbi he wanted to follow. But Jesus reversed the process by choosing His own disciples.
- In addition, these disciples were called to do more than just learn from Jesus. They were summoned to reach out to others and to teach them how to become disciples of Jesus. Jesus called His disciples to be disciple makers.

- Jesus's first four disciples were fishermen, starting with Simon (Peter) and Andrew. According to John's Gospel, Jesus had met these brothers before (John 1:35-41).
- Jesus's call to "follow me" kept with the tradition of rabbis and their pupils. It was a call to learn from Him and imitate Him. The call to "fish for people" was unique, though. It was an explicit command to bring others to the Messiah.
- Peter and Andrew did not hesitate. They "immediately left their nets"—the tools of their trade and their symbolic connection to the past. Another pair of brothers, James and John, also left everything to follow Jesus's call.

What does it look like to follow Jesus in our culture? (PSG, p. 26)

REACHING OUT (MATT. 4:23-25)

Bonus: When did you last share a piece of good news with someone else? How did they respond?

- As Jesus traveled, He carried out a three-fold ministry. His teaching focused on explaining truths from God's Word, while His preaching proclaimed the "good news" that God's kingdom had come. His healing ministry offered evidence of His deity and His "credentials" as Messiah.
- News of Jesus spread across the region and drew multitudes to Him. The crowds included both Jews and Gentiles, highlighting the inclusive nature of the gospel.

How can believers follow Jesus's example of sharing the message of God's kingdom? (PSG, p. 28)

CHALLENGE

Ask the group to discuss why it's important to have strength in numbers as followers of Jesus.

How can your group encourage and hold one another accountable as you seek to follow Jesus as His disciples? (PSG, p. 29)

Challenge individuals to examine their lives and to consider how they can become more like Jesus.

What are some areas in your life that you need to work on so that they reflect Jesus more? (PSG, p. 29)

FURTHER DISCUSSION



Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week's study.

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, P. 28)

Observe when and for what purpose a New Testament passage includes an Old Testament quotation.

Matthew quoted Isaiah 9:1-2 to describe how Jesus fulfilled prophecy as He lived and ministered in northern Galilee—the ancient land of Zebulun and Naphtali. Read Isaiah 7 and 8 to give context for Isaiah 9:1-2. ***How would the people of Isaiah’s day have been encouraged by the hope of the Messiah? What was similar about the people touched by Jesus’s ministry in Galilee?***

Write “prophecy” on the board. Lead a brief discussion on what adults think of when they see that word. Direct them complete the Bible Skill on page 28 of the PSG. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to respond to the questions from the activity. Remind adults that Matthew primarily wrote to a Jewish audience. Emphasize that the fulfillment of Scripture would help convince them that Jesus really was the Messiah.

OBJECT LESSON: FISHHOOK

Show adults a fishhook. If some adults like to fish, allow them to explain what they look for in a quality hook and why those characteristics are important. Point out that fishhooks are typically used with bait to lure a fish. Note that the barb ensures the fish cannot escape.

Ask: ***What are some things you’re “hooked” on?*** Affirm that these habits can be good or bad, depending on the context. Suggest that Jesus hooked His disciples with a compelling vision and mission. Say: *They found Jesus and His gospel so compelling they could not escape His grip.*

Draw attention to Jesus’s command for His disciples to “fish for people” in verse 19. Talk about why that would resonate with the early disciples and what it would look like in our contemporary culture. Encourage adults to consider the hooks they can use to help unbelievers connect with Jesus.

DIG DEEPER

THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

In the rabbinic tradition, a young man desiring to learn from a particular rabbi must gain his teacher’s approval beforehand. Only the most educated and committed were accepted. The disciple’s goal was to master the Torah as the rabbi interpreted it and to teach it to others according to his beliefs.

Jesus overturned this discipleship process. He approached unlikely candidates, inviting them to follow Him immediately and to learn about “fishing for people.” Instead of choosing the intellectual elite, Jesus transformed ordinary men for an extraordinary mission.

While rabbis sought the best and brightest students of the Torah, Jesus chose unremarkable individuals, such as fishermen, tax collectors, and even political zealots. He considered a willingness to follow more desirable than formal religious training. He sought disciples who would make themselves available and not look back (Luke 9:23; 14:26-27).

Once called, Jesus’s relationship with His disciples went beyond the intellectual and ethical focus of rabbinic discipleship. His disciples were called to learn from Him as the living embodiment of God’s Word.

This deep relationship compelled them to reflect His character and purpose.

The most significant difference with rabbinic discipleship lies in its purpose. For rabbis, disciples were trained to preserve and transmit Jewish traditions while functioning within the established religious framework. But Jesus redefined discipleship as a mission-centered relationship, empowered by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). His disciples are co-laborers with Him, bearing witness to the kingdom of God.

Jesus’s call to discipleship continues to challenge and inspire believers today. We share the common goal of making “disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Jesus urges us to respond to His call with the same willingness and dedication as these first disciples.

BONUS CONTENT



The Twelve Disciples

Who were Jesus’s disciples? Scan this QR code to discover the names and biblical lists of the twelve disciples.