



Invitation

JESUS CALLS PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 4:12-25 Memory Verse: Matthew 4:19-20

Many young people struggle with what they should do with their lives as they approach the end of high school or college. Determining a vocation and how to develop the skills necessary for it can challenge young adults with life-changing decisions—and some difficult sacrifices. Years later, as they approach middle-age, many of these same adults experience mid-life crises as their earlier dreams fail to materialize. Sometimes, they may even wonder what life might have been like if they'd chosen differently.

Life choices are best made in the context of knowing and doing God's will. Jesus calls people to follow Him. Answering Christ's invitation to discipleship positions us to continue in His will moving forward. Keeping His call firmly before us helps make daily decisions much easier. As you dig into this session, reflect on the men who answered Jesus's call and how they found purpose in Him. Consider what they gave up—and what God may be calling you to surrender. Ask God to help you know how to encourage adults to respond positively to Jesus's call to discipleship.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

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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. (PSG, p. 20)

What are some jobs today where you might find apprentices?

What would be some advantages to becoming an apprentice in one of those jobs?



Understand the Context (Matthew 4:12-25)

Jesus never did anything haphazardly. With the omniscience of His divine nature, Jesus knew exactly what He was doing and why He did it. Following His baptism and the wilderness testing, Jesus launched the next phase of His mission.

Still, Jesus's hometown did not readily receive His ministry or His message (Matt. 13:54-58). In fact, people in His hometown of Nazareth tried to kill Him (Luke 4:16-30). From there, Jesus moved to Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Though He traveled across Israel, Capernaum was His base of operations. His ministry in the region also fulfilled prophecies uttered approximately seven centuries earlier by Isaiah.

Matthew quoted Isaiah 9:1-2 (Matt. 4:15-16). In its original context, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had formed an alliance with Assyria against Judah. The invasion failed, and Assyria later turned on Israel (Ephraim), taking many people into exile. Although primarily focused on Judah, Isaiah offered hope to the North. The regions of Zebulun and Naphtali eventually would experience the light of the Messiah.

The Sea of Galilee was a large body of fresh water on the northeast corner of Israel. On its north shore, Capernaum and its surrounding villages were home to many fishermen, including two sets of brothers: Andrew and Peter, James and John. Jesus had met Andrew and Peter earlier. Andrew had heard John call Jesus the "Lamb of God." Convinced this was the Messiah, he

brought his brother, Simon, to meet the Christ (John 1:35-42).

Luke's Gospel records that Jesus later encountered Peter while He was teaching along the shore. Due to the crowd, He got into Peter's boat to speak. It was no coincidence that this was Simon's boat (Luke 5:1-11).

Matthew's account could be an abbreviated version of this encounter on Peter's boat, although some writers argue they represent two separate incidents. The primary point is that Jesus called Peter and Andrew, along with James and John, to follow Him and to "fish for people." They each left everything to accept the invitation.

These four disciples found themselves on a challenging adventure. They accompanied Jesus throughout Judea, Samaria, Galilee, and even beyond the Jordan River. They watched Jesus preach about God's kingdom, heal the sick, and perform incredible miracles. They became eyewitnesses that Jesus was the Son of God.

While thousands of people had brief encounters with Jesus, those who accepted His invitation to discipleship walked with Him daily for three years. Their lives were changed forever by their decision to follow Him. Jesus also calls you and me to come after Him.

Read Matthew 4:12-25 in your Bible. In a couple of sentences, summarize everything Jesus did in these verses, (PSG, p. 21)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*) and **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 4:18b-19*).

ASK:

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)

INTRODUCE:

Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 20 of the PSG. Lead a brief discussion about the goal of an apprentice. Emphasize that apprentices gain the skills needed to perform at the same level as the master.

SAY:

Believers are called to apprentice themselves to Jesus. A more common way of saying this is that we become His disciples. It's not a commitment to take lightly because it's a commitment that lasts a lifetime.

CONTEXT:

Explain that this session picks up Matthew's description of Jesus's early ministry. Briefly review Jesus's baptism and His temptation in Session 1.

OVERVIEW:

Use **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*) to locate Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Share that this city was an important economic hub on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and that Jesus's ministry in this area fulfilled prophecies spoken by Isaiah seven centuries earlier. Note that Galilee—including Capernaum—had a large Gentile population, highlighting Jesus's desire for the gospel to be shared with all people.

TRANSITION:

Galilee is also important because it was the home of Jesus's first followers. As we examine their lives, we can learn more about what it means to be Jesus's disciples.



Group Activity Option

Music

Share the lyrics of the first two verses of “Footsteps of Jesus” (*Baptist Hymnal 2008*, No. 550). Note that the lyricist, Mary Bridges Canedy Slade, was a minister's wife who helped slaves find freedom through the Underground Railroad. Point out that discipleship begins with Christ's call and requires disciples to follow Him closely. Lead the group to identify things that might hinder disciples from following Jesus as they should. Ask: **How can you overcome such obstacles?**

Starting Out (Matt. 4:12-17)

12 When he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. **13** He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, 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 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, because the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

(v. 12) New ventures often involve launching new opportunities. Sometime after Jesus’s baptism, King Herod grew angry because John the Baptist publicly denounced his illegal marriage to his brother’s wife (Mark 6:14-29). Once **John had been arrested**, Jesus **withdrew into Galilee**. The term “withdrew” indicates a deliberate move away from the site of John’s ministry. Traveling back to Galilee set the stage for several foundational elements of Jesus’s ministry.

(vv. 13-14) When Jesus visited His hometown of **•Nazareth**, people violently rejected Him (Luke 4:16-31). Logic might send the Messiah to Jerusalem, the center of religious and political life. Instead, He moved to **•Capernaum**, located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. This area once had been home to the tribes of **•Zebulun** and **•Naphtali**. These tribes had fought side-by-side during the conquest of Canaan and later under the leadership of the judges (Judg. 4:6).

Jesus’s move to this region fulfilled prophecy. More than seven hundred years earlier, **Isaiah** foresaw the Messiah bringing light into the area’s spiritual darkness. The prophet knew the sad history of these tribes, but God gave him insight into what would happen when the Messiah arrived. This fulfillment of Scripture helped confirm Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God.

(v. 15) Matthew quoted Isaiah 9:1-2 which called out the **land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali**. The **road by the sea** included the route travelers would take along the Sea of Galilee. The phrase **beyond the Jordan** referred to the area west and northwest of the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee.

This location made the people natural targets of Syria and, later, Assyria (2 Kings 15). Over time, many foreigners relocated in the region, making the designation **Galilee of the Gentiles** natural.

(v. 16) Isolation from the religious hub of Jerusalem resulted in these groups being tempted by Canaanite idolatries. Spiritual infidelity spread in the Northern Kingdom, leading to God’s wrath in the form of an invasion by Assyria. Israel’s subsequent capture and exile further changed the nature of the region’s population. Spiritual **darkness** aptly described the great need Isaiah foresaw as he warned the residents of the Northern Kingdom about God’s coming judgment (Isa. 7:1-9; 8:1-10, 18-22).

Within Isaiah’s warning was a message of hope. The day would come when these people would see **a great light**. Isaiah predicted the ministry of the Messiah, the “light of the world” (John 8:12). For people **living in the land of the shadow of death**, a new day offered the prospect of redemption. Although Isaiah wrote about events seven centuries in the future, he spoke as if it had already happened—**a light has dawned**.

(v. 17) That light was Jesus. **From then on** refers to the period starting with Jesus’s relocation to Capernaum. Initially, His ministry did not focus on healing or miracles. Instead, Jesus **began to preach**. He proclaimed the same two-fold message as John the Baptist: **Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near**. Repentance means more than feeling sorry for wrongdoing. It involves a change of mind and heart that leads to a change of behavior and direction.

An air of urgency surrounded Jesus’s message. With His arrival, the kingdom of heaven had come near. The kingdom was not the free geopolitical state the Jews hoped the Messiah would bring. Rather, it encompassed the lordship of Jesus over the hearts of people.

People must repent to enter God’s kingdom. This theme was not the end of the message, but the beginning. It would develop as the gospel came alive through Jesus’s life and teaching.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: People must repent to enter the Kingdom of God.

Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 4:12-17 aloud while the group listens to identify the specific action that Jesus took and why.

EXAMINE:

Direct adults to create an even number of teams. Each team should have 2-3 people. Direct the teams to complete the following assignments:

- *Direct half the teams to examine Luke 3:15-20 and identify why John the Baptist was arrested. Discuss the impact John's arrest had on Jesus moving to Capernaum.*
- *Direct half the teams to examine Luke 4:20-30 and identify how Jesus was received in His hometown of Nazareth. Discuss the impact Nazareth's rejection had on Jesus moving to Capernaum.*

RECAP:

After a few minutes, allow volunteers from each set of teams to share what they discovered. Lead a brief discussion on the role each event could have had on Jesus's move to Capernaum. Summarize this information from page 22 of the PSG:

"John the Baptist had made enemies of religious leaders . . . whom he denounced as hypocrites. Therefore, they would have looked upon Jesus, the One to whom John pointed, with suspicion. Jesus's withdrawal from the region certainly was not because Jesus was afraid of the Pharisees and other religious leaders. Instead, He desired to begin His ministry without any premature confrontation with these leaders. . . . Unlike Nazareth, which was small, insignificant, and rural, Capernaum was an important city in the region. It was strategically located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee along important trade routes passing through the region."

EXPLAIN:

Direct the group to **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*). Note that much of Jesus's ministry occurred in Galilee. Highlight the similarities between John's message and Jesus's message. Point out that Jesus's mission didn't focus initially on miracles and healings but on preaching that pointed people to the kingdom of God.

ASK:

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

Calling Out (Matt. 4:18-22)

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.” **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.

(v. 18) Jesus was intentional about choosing His disciples. The phrase *walking along the Sea of Galilee* does not mean Jesus was merely taking a stroll on the beach. We should recognize Jesus’s purpose in taking this particular route.

Jesus had met **Simon (who is called Peter)**, and his brother **Andrew** following His baptism. In fact, He had already started referring to Simon as “Peter” (John 1:42). The brothers grew up in Bethsaida, near Capernaum (1:44). Later, Peter married and lived in Capernaum (Luke 4:38).

Here, Simon and Andrew were *casting a net into the sea*. As professional *fishermen*, they made their living from the sea. While Peter owned a boat, the brothers were in shallower waters, allowing Jesus to see them and call to them.

(vv. 19-20) Jesus invited Peter and Andrew to *Follow me*. This term carries the sense of leaving what one is doing in the moment. Jesus had something much more important in mind. If they would heed His call, Jesus promised, *I will make you fish for people*.

Simon and Andrew did not need an explanation. They believed Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:41). As a result, they responded *immediately*. They did not worry about their boat or fishing gear. They simply *left their nets and followed him*. For commercial fishermen, abandoning the nets meant abandoning their livelihood. Following Jesus required total trust in Him.

(v. 21) Again, Jesus did not happen upon **James** and **John** by accident. He purposefully sought them out. They would become known as the “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). Here, they were simply identified as the sons of **Zebedee**.

Being named first, James was likely the older brother. He also would become the first of Jesus’s apostles to die as a martyr. Like all the disciples except John, answering Jesus’s call to follow Him would eventually cost James his life (Acts 12:1-2).

Notice several aspects of the brothers when Jesus *called them*. They were *in a boat*. This vessel was big enough for several men and their large nets. If this setting was the same as seen in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 5:2), the boat would have a shallow draft so they could anchor near the shore.

Second, they were with **Zebedee their father**. This second boat probably belonged to Zebedee, with James and John working with him in a family business. Third, they were busy *preparing their nets*. Jesus did not call idle men. He sought workers who would accept their tasks with diligence and commitment (Matt. 24:45-46).

(v. 22) Like Peter and Andrew, James and John did not hesitate to answer Jesus’s call. The term *immediately* means just that. Apparently, they did not even discuss their response with Zebedee. They *left the boat*, surrendering the safety of a secure job. More telling, they left *their father*. The text does not suggest that their decision created a rift in their relationship. They loved Zebedee, but Jesus presented a higher calling that surpassed loyalty to family or lifestyles.

None of these early disciples left simply to leave. They *followed* Jesus. This term implies accepting someone else as leader, submitting to a master’s will and direction. Following Jesus demands personal sacrifice. Being His disciple is not a hobby or part-time vocation. If we want to pursue Jesus, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross each day, and follow Him (Matt. 16:24).



The Twelve Disciples

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

**READ:**

APPLICATION POINT: Following Jesus will require personal sacrifice.

Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 4:18-22 aloud while the group identifies Jesus's expectations for the first disciples.

RECAP:

Invite the group to share the requirements they identified for Jesus's disciples. Direct attention to the "Did You Know?" feature (PSG, p. 25). Point out that a disciple is an "apprentice, pupil, or follower." Share this content from page 24 of the PSG to highlight how Jesus broke norms in choosing His disciples:

Typically, a promising Jewish student would choose a rabbi he wanted to attach himself to and would ask to become his disciple. . . . Jesus reversed the procedure by approaching those He wanted to be His disciples and calling them to follow Him. Also, these disciples were called to much more than to simply learn from Jesus. They were summoned to be actively involved in reaching others to become disciples of Jesus.

SHARE:

Point out that abandoning nets and boats was tantamount to abandoning their occupation, while leaving a father elevated Jesus above family.

ASK:

What does it look like to follow Jesus in our culture?

(PSG, p. 26) Allow volunteers to share personal stories of how following Jesus has radically changed their lives.

PROMPT:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 4** (Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 4:18b-19) and identify it as the memory verse. Encourage the group to work on memorizing these verses this week.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Fishhook

Show adults a fishhook. 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.* Encourage adults to consider the hooks they can use to help unbelievers connect with Jesus.

Reaching Out (Matt. 4:23-25)

23 Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, 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, the epileptics, and the paralytics. And he healed them. **25** Large crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

(v. 23) In the days that followed, Jesus traveled **all over Galilee**. Three participles describe distinct aspects of Jesus's ministry: **teaching**, **preaching**, and **healing**. The present active tense of these verb forms emphasizes their ongoing nature. This was Jesus's regular practice.

Jesus taught in **synagogues**. Most larger towns had such formal places of worship and instruction, and visiting rabbis often were asked to participate in services. The Bible emphasizes two characteristics of Jesus's teaching: He taught the Scriptures, not merely the interesting topics of the day; and He taught with authority, unlike other instructors of the day (Matt. 7:29).

While all of Jesus's preaching included aspects of teaching, it also included an element of persuasion. While His own words carried divine authority, He also pointed to the Old Testament Scriptures to affirm His role as Messiah and to challenge listeners' behaviors.

Jesus focused His sermons on **the kingdom**. Using tools like questions and parables, He emphasized a spiritual kingdom that was not of this world (John 18:36). Yet, He emphasized that God's kingdom was present among them through His life and ministry (Luke 17:20-21).

Jesus's ministry also involved healing **every disease and sickness**. His ministry was an expression of love and compassion (Matt. 14:14). While faith was important, Jesus also ministered to those who struggled with faith (cf. John 5:1-15). Sometimes Jesus healed with a touch; sometimes He healed with just a word (Matt. 8:3-15).

(v. 24) Good **news** travels fast, and word about Jesus reached as far as **•Syria**. In this case, Syria was not so much the nation we know today, but a region north of Capernaum. The word links reports of Jesus's healing with the actions taken by people who heard the news. Desperation moved them to action as they **brought to him all those who were afflicted**.

Matthew expanded on the term "afflicted" by describing various examples of problems. Many were **suffering from various diseases and intense pains**. He did not offer diagnoses; He simply healed whatever ailment He encountered. Anyone who has suffered intense, long-term pain can appreciate the relief Jesus provided.

People also brought the **demon-possessed** to Jesus. He had authority over evil spirits and cast them out by His Word (Matt. 8:28-32). Scripture makes a clear differentiation between physical illness and demonic possession. Jesus has power over both.

Concerned people also brought **epileptics** and **paralytics**. At the hand of Jesus, lepers were cleansed, the lame walked, the blind saw, the deaf heard, and the mute spoke. No wonder news about Him spread everywhere!

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.)

(v. 25) As one might expect, Jesus drew **large crowds**. Along with Jewish strongholds like **Jerusalem** and **Judea**, others from Gentile regions like the ten cities of **the •Decapolis** east of Galilee and **beyond the Jordan** also came. Jesus had compassion on them all because the message of the gospel is available to all. Similarly, we are called to show Jesus's love to all people so they might hear the good news of Christ and be saved.

**READ:**

APPLICATION POINT: Jesus's call means following His example and ministering to others.

Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 4:23-25 aloud while the group listens for the three primary components of His ministry.

RECAP:

Allow adults to share the three components of Jesus's ministry in these verses. Share that Matthew provided a summary of how Jesus carried out his work during the early days of His Galilean ministry. Summarize this content from pages 26-27 of the PSG to further define teaching, preaching, and healing:

"Teaching was a regular part of synagogue life as rabbis would give explanation of the Scriptures. Teaching focused on content and the discovery of truth in God's Word. . . . Preaching differed from teaching in that it was proclaiming or announcing a message. Teaching would explain the message. Preaching was making the message known. In this case, Jesus was proclaiming that God's Messiah had come to usher in the kingdom, that is, the rule and reign of the Messiah. . . . The third aspect of Jesus's ministry was healing. Jesus's miracles were important as they gave evidence to His deity and divine power. They were the 'credentials' of the Messiah."

EXPLAIN:

Use information for Matthew 4:24 in the Leader Guide (p. 36) to explain the different groups Jesus healed. Note that Jesus's works drew large crowds. Use **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee*) to identify the regions mentioned in the verses. Emphasize that Jesus's focus remained on revealing God's kingdom and that we should make that a priority in our lives as well.

ASK:

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

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Remind adults that 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?***

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 29 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *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.*

REFLECT:

Direct adults to consider which statement would be hardest to apply and why. Allow a few volunteers to share their responses.

DISCUSS:

Direct attention to the second set of questions on page 29 of the PSG. Facilitate a brief discussion on what a disciple of Jesus looks like in a contemporary context. Challenge adults to spend time during the week talking with God about what their lives say to others about their commitment to Him.

MEMORIZE:

Point back to **Pack Item 4** (Poster: Key Verse: Matthew 4:18b-19). Lead the group in reading the verses two or three times aloud together. Encourage them to continue memorizing the verses this week. Remind them to be alert for opportunities God provides to be a fisher of men in the coming days.

PRAY:

Read the session's focal statement: *Jesus calls people to follow Him*. Give adults a few minutes to pray silently about how He wants them to apply the truths of this session. Close in prayer, asking God to help each adult be the hands and feet of Jesus each day.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group to provide a short list of ways they can reflect Jesus to the world. (*Examples: sacrificing personal time or resources to perform ministry, visiting and praying with people who are ill, challenging an unbeliever to turn away from their sin*) Encourage adults to be intentional about choosing one way they can put their faith into action this week.

ADULT COMMENTARY



Want to go deeper in your study?
Explore the *Bible Adult Commentary* offers additional information and biblical insights related to the key passages.
(Available for purchase at **Lifeway.com**.)

EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.