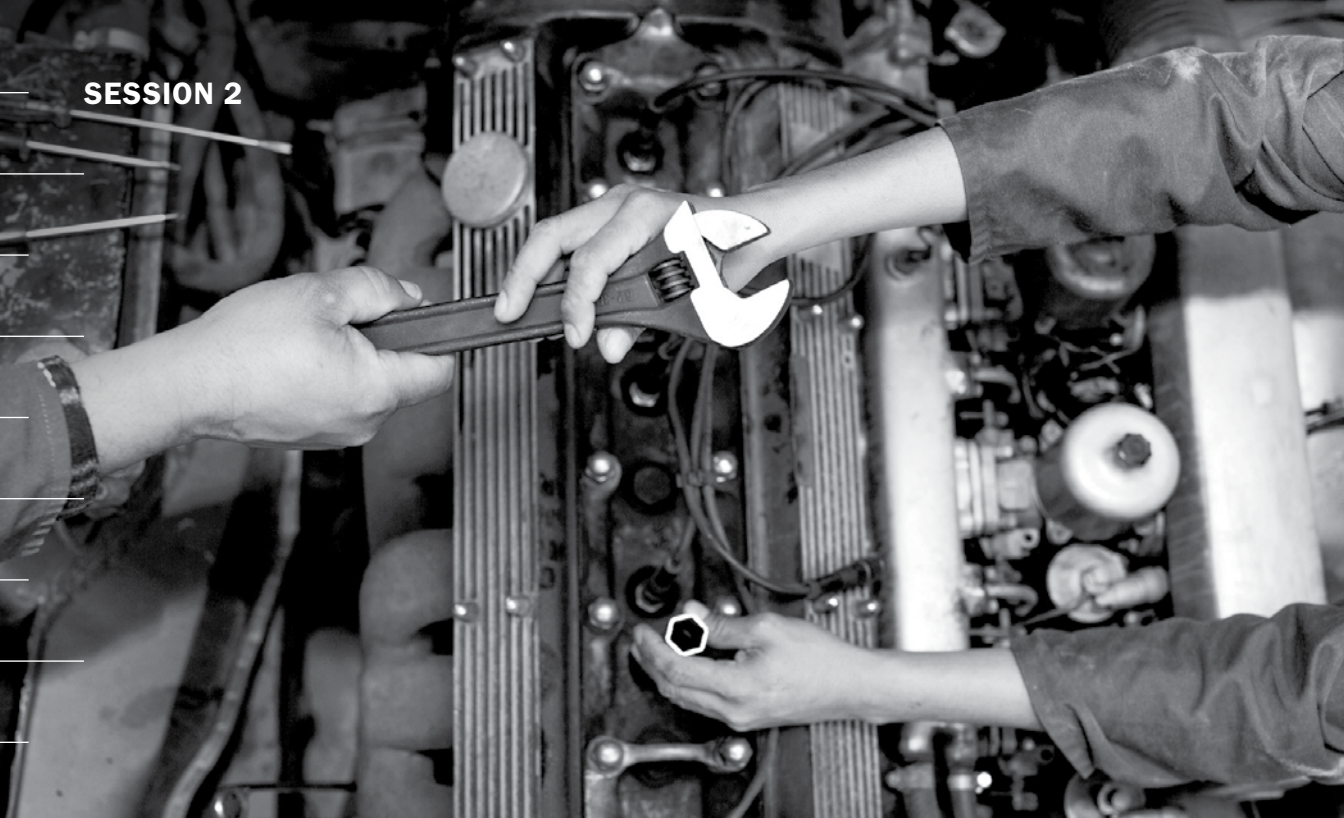




▶ *Invitation* ◀

JESUS CALLS PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM.

MATTHEW 4:12-25

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.

 **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’s baptism and temptation set the stage for His ministry of preaching and healing to officially begin. Two facts are set forth at the outset. First, a signal event took place that gives a time frame reference—John the Baptist had been arrested. Matthew does not give the details behind this arrest until chapter 14. Second, we learn of the geographic location of Jesus’s ministry—the northern region of Canaan called Galilee. This region was approximately 60 miles long from north to south and thirty miles wide from east to west. Galilee was divided into two sections: upper Galilee and lower Galilee. Nazareth, Jesus’s hometown was in the heart of the lower region.

The choice of Jesus to begin His earthly ministry in Galilee was not accidental. This was the region He grew up in, but the reasons go beyond that. First, Galilee was a melting pot of Jews and Gentiles. In addition, the area was less inclined toward the strict traditions of Pharisaical Judaism. Thus, the people would be more open to the gospel message. Also, for Jesus to begin His ministry in this environment would signal His offer of salvation as universal to all people.

Second, this area around the northern end of the Sea of Galilee was widely known for the presence of many rabbis and their students. As a result, there was a lot of curiosity concerning new teachers or teachings. Jesus and His disciples would have fit right in with the culture of religious training in the region.

Third, because of the open-mindedness of the people, Jesus initially would not have stirred up the kind of opposition He would meet when He went south to Judea and Jerusalem. The disciples could learn and observe without much distraction and confrontation. With these thoughts in mind, Jesus returned to the region following His journey into Judea.

 **Read Matthew 4:12-25 in your Bible. In a couple of sentences, summarize everything Jesus did in these verses.**

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

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.”

VERSE 12

Following His baptism and temptation by Satan, Jesus *withdrew into Galilee* to begin His earthly ministry. John the Baptist had made enemies of religious leaders, especially the Pharisees and Sadducees, 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.

VERSES 13-16

Initially, Jesus returned to His hometown of Nazareth. Here, He was rejected, and the people attempted to kill Him (Luke 4:16-30). After that incident, He left **•Nazareth** and moved **to •Capernaum** [kuh PUHR nay uhm]. 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. The name *Capernaum* means “village of Nahum,” and could refer to the Old Testament prophet Nahum. Nahum means “compassion,” and this may identify this city as the “village of compassion.”

Here, Jesus established His headquarters. The language of Matthew indicates Jesus moved permanently to this city. In Matthew 9:1, Capernaum is identified as “his own town.” Jesus would perform a number of miracles here, such as healing the Roman

centurion's servant (8:5-13), healing Peter's mother-in-law (8:14-15), raising the synagogue official's daughter back to life (9:23-25), and healing an official's son (John 4:46-53).

Matthew interpreted this move of Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, locating Capernaum in the region of •**Zebulun** [ZEB yoo luhn] and •**Naphtali** [NAF tuh ligh]. This quote is from Isaiah 9:1-2. Matthew sprinkled these prophecy fulfillment quotations throughout his Gospel to aid in proving Jesus was God's anticipated Messiah. Here, the prophecy concerns the ancient Israelite tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. These two tribes were the closest of the twelve tribal territories to first-century Galilee and the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. For centuries this area had a large Gentile population. Isaiah's prophecy contains references to this Gentile population.

In the prophecy, Isaiah recognized that these two northern tribes had been through great calamity at the hands of the Assyrians. Yet though the citizens of this region sat in the darkness of defeat, God spoke of a light breaking out on them. This light was God's coming Messiah.

Matthew saw the same truths in the first-century world. Those living in Galilee found themselves under a darkness of great oppression at the hands of the Romans. They also were under the darkness of their sinfulness. God's Messiah, Jesus, came as light shining into the darkness. He announced to those who followed Him, "I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

VERSE 17

The phrase *from then on Jesus began to . . .* parallels the same phrase in Matthew 16:21, "From that time on Jesus began to" These two phrases apparently bracket this section in Matthew dealing with Jesus's teaching and healing ministry. As we have seen, Matthew chapters 1 through the first part of chapter 4 form an introduction to the ministry of Jesus. Matthew 16:21 and following focus on the cross and the growing conflict with His enemies.

The content of Jesus's message may sound familiar. It is the same message that John the Baptist proclaimed (Mark 1:4). To **preach** was to proclaim or to publicly make a message known. Jesus's message was a call to repentance. That is, He urged His listeners to change their hearts, thinking, and behavior. The reason for the need for repentance was that the **kingdom of heaven** had arrived in the presence of God's Messiah.



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.

VERSE 18

Because this region was a hotbed of rabbis and pupils, for Jesus to walk along the lake shore calling for some to follow Him would not be unusual. There are, however, several differences. Typically, a promising Jewish student would choose a rabbi he wanted to attach himself to and would ask to become his disciple. If chosen, his primary role was that of a learner—learning the words and the ways of the rabbi with the goal in mind to teach others in the future.

Jesus reversed the procedure by approaching those He wanted to be His disciples and calling them to follow Him. Second, 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. Jesus called His disciples to be disciple makers.

Jesus called His disciples to be disciple makers.

The ***Sea of Galilee***—also called the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1) and Lake Gennesaret (Luke 5:1)—measures thirteen miles long and eight miles wide and is situated approximately 700 feet below sea level. For centuries it has supported commercial fishing. Jesus's first four disciples were commercial fishermen. The first of these were two brothers, ***Simon (who is called Peter)*** and ***Andrew***. Based on the Gospel of John, Jesus had encountered these two

brothers before (John 1:35-41). Not only that, Jesus had used Peter's boat as a platform for teaching the crowds standing on the shoreline (Luke 5:1-11).

DID YOU KNOW?

The Greek term for “disciple” is *mathetes* (math-ay-tes). It refers to an apprentice, learner, or follower. The word is most commonly used in the New Testament to describe the followers of Jesus, but there are also references to disciples of the Pharisees (Matt. 22:15-16), disciples of John the Baptist (Mark 2:18; Luke 11:1), and disciples of Moses (John 9:28).

VERSES 19-20

Jesus said to them, ***follow me***. This imperative is literally “come after me.” This was in keeping with the accepted pattern of rabbis and pupils in the first-century. Proper rabbinic etiquette called for the pupils, or disciples, to walk directly behind their teacher. Thus, this was a command from Jesus for Peter and Andrew to become His disciples. As disciples, they would develop a close companionship—serving Jesus, observing Him, learning His words, and imitating His ministry—all with the intent to one day expand what they learned to others who would be disciples.

In the Gospels, the term *disciple* is used in two different ways. It often referred to the Twelve whom Jesus specifically picked to be with Him continually. Other times, the word referred to a larger group of people, men and woman, who were devoted followers of Jesus (see Luke 6:13). Another group that followed would have been the crowd—more curious about Jesus than committed to Him.

Unlike the disciples of the various rabbis in the region who were simply learners, Jesus called Peter and Andrew (and later James and John) to a life of fishing ***for people***. Their calling as disciples was to gather other disciples to Jesus of Nazareth.

The word ***immediately*** (see also v. 22) points to the quickness of their response. There was no delay. They were all in, as demonstrated in the abandoning of ***their nets***, the tools of their occupation.

VERSES 21-22

James and ***John*** were the next disciples called. Jesus found them with their father, ***Zebedee***, mending their fishing nets. Like Peter

and Andrew, these brothers *immediately* left their fishing enterprise; they also left their father to follow Jesus. An initial belief that Jesus was God's Messiah impelled them to abandon their fishing business and even family ties to follow Him. They were beginning to realize that being obedient to Jesus supersedes everything.



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

Being obedient to Jesus supersedes everything.

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.**

VERSE 23

These verses summarize the Galilean ministry of Jesus in the first year after gathering His disciples. He traveled throughout the area of Galilee. As Jesus traveled, He carried out a three-fold ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing.

Jesus's *teaching* ministry took place in a variety of settings, including outdoor areas and *synagogues*. 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. As an itinerant rabbi, Jesus was welcomed in most synagogues and was asked to read and comment on Scripture (see Luke 4:16-21).

Synagogues emerged from the days of the exile in Babylon and became an essential part of Judaism. Here, children received biblical education and adults found opportunity for study

and worship. Synagogues also were centers for legal matters and social life of the members of the community.

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 term **good news** is the gospel message of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus the Messiah. The proclamation by Jesus was the good news concerning God's answer to the sins of humanity.

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. John's Gospel talked about Jesus performing "many other signs" so that people "may believe that Jesus is the Messiah" (John 20:30-31). Jesus healed every form and kind of **disease and sickness**.



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.)

VERSE 24

Jesus's miracles of healing and teaching soon became news that traveled widely. •**Syria** most likely is used in the broader sense of the Roman province that encompassed the region including Galilee.

As the news spread, people brought to Jesus those needing healing. Matthew said they were **suffering from various diseases and intense pains**. He elaborated by mentioning three examples of the conditions Jesus confronted. First were the **demon-possessed**. Second were **epileptics**. Literally, this word means "to be moonstruck" and reflected a primitive thought that somehow this malady was influenced by the moon with the result that the person suffered from seizures. Finally were the **paralytics**, those with crippling handicaps, either from birth or injury. Jesus was able to heal all who came to Him without exception and without limit.

VERSE 25

Jesus’s miracles attracted *large crowds*, some of whom came for healing or the healing of others. Others came to hear Him teach and preach. Some came out of curiosity.

Matthew gives a partial list of where all these people came from. The **•Decapolis** was a region of ten cities located east of the Sea of Galilee. The area *beyond the Jordan* was the region of Perea, on the east side of the Jordan River and south of the Decapolis.

Some of the people coming to see and hear Jesus would believe and become devoted followers. Others listened and watched but never surrendered to Him and became a part of His kingdom.

 **How can believers follow Jesus’s example of sharing the message of God’s kingdom?**



BIBLE SKILL: *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?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + 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.

 **There is 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?**

 **Jesus calls us to follow Him. Following Jesus as a disciple involves the desire to become more and more like Him. Is there a desire in your heart to be more like Jesus? What are some proofs of that desire in your life? What are some areas in your life that you need to work on so that they reflect Jesus more?**



Memorize Matthew 4:19-20.

Prayer Needs