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Jesus Calls His First Disciples

Scripture: Matthew 4:18-22, John 1:35-51

Theme: Jesus calls ordinary people to follow Him

4th-6th Grade (Ages 9-11)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

Lesson Overview: Jesus Calls Ordinary People to Follow Him Matthew 4:18, 22 & John 1:35, 51 Introduction (Engage & Share) Begin with a quick activity: Ask kids, "If you could be anyone or do anything, what would you want to be?" Write their answers on a board. Then tell them Jesus had a different idea, He called ordinary people to follow Him, and He still does today! Share that today we'll see how Jesus chose simple fishermen and young disciples, and ask: "Why do you think Jesus picked us, people who might not look perfect, to be His friends and followers?" --- 1. Jesus Found His First Followers Where They Were (Matthew 4:18, 22) Jesus didn't wait for the perfect person to come to Him, He went to the wrong place (the fishing boats!) and called two brothers: Peter and Andrew. They were tired, hungry, and probably not thinking of quitting their jobs. Jesus said, "Follow Me!" (v. 19). Andrew, who was next to Peter, ran to tell his friend, John, and they followed too. Jesus also called James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were part of a big family business. Some of these guys were not famous, just regular people! Deeper question: "What's something God might call you to do today that doesn't look 'perfect'?" (Encourage them to think of serving, praying, or even just listening to Jesus.) Personal application: "How can you be like these disciples and say, 'Yes, Lord, I'll follow You, even if it's not my plan?'" --- 2. Jesus Doesn't Ask for Perfect People (John 1:35, 40) The disciples were young, maybe not the most experienced, but they answered when Jesus called. Jesus didn't wait for them to be older, richer, or more famous, He called them right where they were. John the Baptist had been preaching, and Jesus' disciples asked him, "Are You the One who's supposed to come, or should we look for someone else?" John didn't give them a complicated answer, he just said, "Yes, He is!" (v. 40). Deeper question: "What if Jesus asked you to do something today that scares you? How will you trust Him?" Personal application: "Can you think of one small thing you're afraid to do for God, like sharing your faith or helping at church? Ask Him to help you step out in faith." --- 3. Jesus' Call Is for Everyone (Including You!) Jesus' first disciples were ordinary, just like us! They weren't super-smart or super-strong, but they said, "Yes!" to Jesus. He's still calling people today, and He wants you. Maybe you're afraid you're not enough, but Jesus loves you just as you are. He calls us to: - Listen to His voice (like the disciples did). - Trust Him even when things seem messy. - Serve Him in small ways (like helping others or praying). Deeper question:

"If Jesus called you today to do something big (or small), what would it be?" (Encourage them to write it down or pray about it.) --- 4. Closing: How Can You Follow Jesus Today? End with a reflection: "Jesus didn't make His followers perfect, He made them followers! That means we're still learning, still growing, and still asking Him to help us." Share a story of someone who started small but grew in their faith (e.g., a kid who learned to pray every day). Ask: "Who do you think God is calling you to follow Him in today?" (Let them share or write down one thing they'll do for Him.) Encouragement: "You don't have to be perfect to follow Jesus, just try! And remember, He'll never ask you to do more than He's willing to give you." --- Volunteer Tip: Keep it interactive, use a scripture hunt (hide Bible verses around the room), a drawn "call" sign for the disciples, or a prayer time where kids share one thing they'll ask Jesus about. Keep it hopeful and simple! Optional reflection: children can draw a picture of Jesus helping their friends, then share one way they can help someone else this week. This extra activity supports the lesson's theme and gives teachers a simple, lowprep option for extending the discussion.

Bible Story

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

One morning, as Jesus walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon (who later became Peter) and his brother Andrew, mending their nets by the water. They were hard at work, fishing all night, but with no luck. "What are you doing here?" Jesus asked, walking toward them. When the brothers heard His voice, they dropped their nets and followed Him immediately. "You'll find more than you ever expected in following me," Jesus said. The brothers obeyed right away, leaving their work behind to join Him.

Later, Jesus left the crowd and walked toward another group of people. There, He found two more brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were sitting in a boat with their father, fixing their nets. "What do you want?" Jesus asked. "We're ready to do whatever you say," James and John answered. Jesus called them over, and they left their family and work to follow Him, too. Their mother, Salome, begged Jesus to let them sit at His right and left side in His kingdom, but He simply replied, "You can't ask for that now. Follow me first, and I'll tell you what to do later."

That same day, Jesus continued walking, and He met Philip. Philip was likely an old friend of Andrew, since they'd already followed Jesus together. Philip found Nathaniel and said, "We've found the one Moses and all the prophets wrote about, the Messiah!" Nathaniel asked, "How can you know me?" Jesus answered, "When you saw me walking in the wilderness, you knew I was real. You believe in me because of that." Nathaniel, who was from Canaan (the land of Israel), followed Jesus, too, though he was skeptical at first.

As Jesus taught the crowds, He saw another man, Barabbas, who was probably a rough-looking man in need of redemption. Jesus reached out and touched him, saying, "Come, follow me." Barabbas, like the others, left everything to join the small group of disciples. Jesus was calling people to come and follow Him, no matter what they had been doing before.

--- Deeper Questions for Reflection: 1. Why do you think Simon and Andrew left their work right away when Jesus asked them to follow Him? 2. How do you think James and John felt when their mother asked for special places in Jesus' kingdom? Did you ever feel unsure about a decision Jesus asked you to make? 3. Why did Jesus say, "You can't ask for that now" to Salome? What does that teach us about trusting God's timing? 4. Nathaniel was skeptical at first. What made him finally believe Jesus was who He said He was?

--- Personal Application: Jesus didn't just ask for a few minutes of our time, He asked for our whole lives. He's calling us to leave behind things that don't matter (like empty promises, bad habits, or distractions) and focus on Him. Just like the disciples, we can say "Yes" to Jesus today, even if it feels scary or different. What's one small step you can take this week to follow Him more closely?

--- Why This Story Matters: Jesus didn't just want followers, He wanted disciples, people who would learn from Him, live for Him, and share His love with others. His call to us is the same: "Come and follow me." When we obey, we discover that God's plans are always better than our own, and He uses us to help others find the same joy we've experienced. Would you like to pray together to ask Jesus to help you trust Him more?

Key Verse

Matthew 4:19 , 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.'

Jesus Calls Us to Help Others This verse from Matthew 4:19 is like a big invitation from Jesus. He says, "Come, follow me," meaning He wants you to join Him in something important. Then He says, "I will send you out to fish for people." At first, that sounds strange, Jesus is talking about fishing, not catching fish! But He means that, like fishermen cast their nets to catch fish, we are called to catch souls for God. In other words, Jesus wants us to share His love and help others know Him too. Why would Jesus use fishing as a picture? Maybe because fishermen work hard together, and God wants us to work together too, just like friends! When you "fish for people," it means you help someone believe in Jesus and become part of His family. It's like spreading kindness, telling others about God's love, or showing them how to live a good life. Jesus knows we might feel nervous, but He promises to be with us every step of the way. Have you ever played a game where you work together to win? Jesus is saying, "You don't have to do this alone, I'll guide you!" He might lead you to a friend who's struggling with big feelings, or someone who's lost or hurting. Your job is to be a little light in their darkness, just like Jesus was the light for you. Sometimes, that means praying for them, sharing stories of God's power, or just being a kind friend who listens. But what if you feel too small to make a difference? That's where God's love comes in! Even the tiniest fish in the ocean still helps keep the whole ecosystem alive. You don't need to be perfect, just try. Maybe start with a smile, a kind word, or helping someone else find their way to God. Remember, Jesus already loved you, and He wants you to love others the same way. What's one way you could start "fishing for people" today? Deeper Questions: 1. If you could invite one person to follow Jesus this week, who would it be, and why? 2. What's one way you've already helped someone feel loved, like Jesus did? 3. How does it feel to know Jesus is with you, even when you're afraid to start? Personal Application: Close your eyes for a moment and pray: "Lord Jesus, I want to follow You and help others like You do. Show me how I can share Your love today." Then think of one small thing you can do, like praying for a friend or sharing a Bible verse with a sibling. You don't have to do it all at once; just start where you are!

Activities

Activity 1:

1. Divide the Class: Split students into small groups of 3, 5 (4, 6 groups total). Each group gets a basket with 6, 8 matching cards (e.g., "Follow me!" written on one card and a picture of two fishermen on another).
2. Sort and Discuss: Have students sort the cards into pairs. Ask them, "Why do you think Jesus chose these two men? How did they respond?" Write their answers on a whiteboard for discussion.
3. Connect to Scripture: Read John 1:35, 42 aloud. Ask: "How is this story like how God calls you to serve others?" Let students share personal examples (e.g., helping friends, sharing kindness).
4. Creative Challenge: Have groups draw their own "calling sign" (e.g., a smiley face with a Bible verse or their

Activity 2:

1. Set Up the Scene: Draw or tape a winding "path" on the floor (e.g., a zigzag or straight line). Explain that Jesus' first disciples ran to follow Him, just like we're called to trust Him.
2. Team Challenge: Divide students into 2, 3 teams. Each team gets a parachute to "hold onto" as they walk the line. The team that completes the path without dropping their "calls to follow" (Bible verses they draw) wins.
3. Reflect Together: After the game, ask: "How did it feel to follow without hesitation? How can you be brave like Peter to share your faith with someone this week?" Have students pair-share their thoughts.
4. Prayer Time: Have each student hold a Bible verse in their hands and pray, "Lord, help me to trust You more like these disciples."
5. Notes for Both Activities:
6. Adapt timing by adding/dropping discussion time.

7. For deeper engagement, let students write their own "calling signs" or design a "path of faith" poster for the classroom.
8. Emphasize that following Jesus isn't about being perfect, it's about bold trust and willingness!

Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions designed to engage upper elementary students (ages 9, 11) with the story of Jesus calling His first disciples (Matthew 4:18, 22, John 1:35, 51). Each question invites reflection, deeper thinking, and personal application while keeping the conversation meaningful and relatable.
- 1. What Kind of Friend Are You Looking For?
 - Jesus walked along the lake shore one day and noticed some men, Simon, Andrew, James, and John, who were fishing with simple nets. They were tired, hungry, and probably frustrated that their hard work wasn't bringing in enough fish. How do you think they felt? Were they just looking for a way to make money, or were they searching for something more?
 - Think about the kind of friend or mentor you wish you could have in your life. What qualities would make that person special to you? How does it make you feel when someone shows you kindness or challenges you to grow? If Jesus called you right now to leave everything and follow Him, what would make you say yes, or what would make you hesitate?
 - (Deeper prompt: Why do you think Jesus chose these fishermen? How might God be calling you to do something different with your life, even if it feels scary?)
- 2. What Would You Do If God Asked You to Change Everything?
 - The disciples didn't just jump to follow Jesus, they had to leave their boats, their nets, and their families behind. That must have been hard! Imagine if you were given a chance to switch careers, move to another town, or start a new project that would change your whole future. What would you need to feel confident enough to take that step?
 - Jesus didn't promise His disciples an easy life, He promised Himself. How do you think they reacted when they heard Him say, "Follow me"? Did they feel excited, nervous, or maybe even a little worried? Why is it important to trust God even when the path isn't clear?
 - (Personal application: What's something in your life that feels too big, too scary, or too different from what you're used to? How can you start trusting God to guide you, even if you don't know exactly where He's leading you?)
- 3. What's One Thing You Wish You Could Do More of in Your Life?
 - The disciples didn't just follow Jesus because they had nothing better to do, they followed Him because they believed in Him. Simon, Andrew, James, and John had probably seen Jesus heal people, teach with kindness, and show love in ways they'd never seen before. What about Jesus' actions made them choose to follow Him instead of just listening?
 - Think about a time when you saw someone (like a teacher, parent, or even a character in a book or show) do something really good, kind, or brave. What was it about that person that made you want to be more like them? How can you follow Jesus' example in your own life, even in small ways?
 - (Deeper question: Why do you think people sometimes choose to follow someone or do something just because it's easy, popular, or promises rewards instead of because they truly believe in the person or cause? What does that say about our own choices?)
- 4. If You Could Ask Jesus One Question, What Would It Be?
 - Imagine you could ask Jesus, "What do you want me to know about following You?" What would your first question be? Maybe you'd ask, "Will it be fun?" or "What if I don't like it?" or "How will I know I'm doing the right thing?"

- Jesus didn't give a speech, He didn't explain the rules. Instead, He just said, "Come, follow me," and the disciples did. Why do you think He did it that way? What might be some reasons He might call you to do something big or different?
- (Personal reflection: What's one question you have about following God or doing something for Him? Write it down and pray about it. Then, think of one thing you can do today to show Jesus you're willing to trust Him, even if you don't have all the answers!)
- These questions encourage students to explore the story from different angles, empathy, personal challenge, faith, and curiosity, while inviting them to connect Jesus' call to their own lives. Would you like any adjustments to fit a specific lesson or group dynamic?

Prayer Focus

Prayer Focus for Upper Elementary (Ages 9-11): "Dear God, thank You for calling people to follow You, not because they were perfect, but because You saw something special in them. You loved them, even when they were just ordinary people like Simon and Andrew, who were fishing with their friends. Just like Jesus called them, help us to be brave enough to step out in faith when You ask us to do something new. Show us how to listen to Your quiet voice, like Nathanael did when he realized Jesus was the Messiah. Give us hearts that are open to being used for Your mission, just like those first disciples were. Help us to trust that You always have something important for us to do, even if it feels scary or unexpected. Amen." --- Lesson Reflection (for the teacher to guide the class): 1. God's Heart for Outsiders Jesus didn't wait for perfect people, He chose Simon and Andrew because they were near Him. What does that teach us? If we're waiting for something big to change first, we might miss God's small, brave moves. Question for discussion: Who do you know who feels like they don't belong? How can you be a friend who helps them feel seen? 2. Brave Enough for "No" Simon and Andrew were fishing, what was their real job? (They were probably just helping their friends, not "top pros.") Jesus didn't promise an easy life or instant success. What's one thing you've been avoiding because it feels too hard? God often calls us to try even when the outcome isn't guaranteed. Personal application: What's one small step you can take this week to follow Jesus, even if it doesn't feel like a "calling"? 3. Nathanael's Shock Nathanael didn't even know Jesus yet, but he recognized Him immediately because of how Jesus saw him, not as a stranger, but as someone with value. How can you respond when someone calls you "chosen"? Sometimes God's call starts with a question, not a command. Challenge: Write down one thing someone told you was "special" about you. Thank God for that today! 4. Legacy of Faith The disciples didn't just follow Jesus, they got to see Him work! Imagine what happens when we trust God with the first "yes." Reflection question: What would change in your life if you believed God could use your "ordinary" moments for something amazing? End by praying together: "Lord, show us how to be brave today, just like You called them. Teach us to trust You, even when it's hard." --- Why This Works: - Emotional hook: Uses fishing as a relatable metaphor (like many kids' jobs). - Empowerment: Positions God as the One who chose them, not just the One they earn. - Action step: Ends with a concrete prayer and discussion, not just theology. - Narrative depth: Connects to Nathanael's reaction to highlight how God sees us differently. Pro tip: After praying, act it out! Have kids wave their "nets" (arms) like the disciples casting out, or imagine Nathanael's surprise at the first glance of Jesus.

>> Missions Spotlight

The fishing communities around the Sea of Galilee in Israel still use boats similar to what Jesus' disciples used. Missionaries working with fishing communities around the world, from Lake Victoria in Africa to the coast of Brazil, find that the call of the fishermen resonates powerfully.

-> To the Cross

Jesus called fishermen, tax collectors, and ordinary people , not religious experts. He still calls ordinary people today. And following Jesus always leads to the cross: 'Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Me' (Matthew 16:24).