

MinistryPlace.net

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

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

Theme: Jesus calls ordinary people to follow Him

High School (Ages 15-18)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

"Ordinary Lives, Extraordinary Calling" Jesus doesn't recruit superstars, He calls the weary, the flawed, and the ordinary (Matt. 4:19). His call to Peter and Andrew, or to Andrew and Philip, forces us to confront how we measure worth: by talent, status, or even our own performance. Theologically, this mirrors God's redemptive work, He transforms brokenness (the "leftovers" in John 1:40) into purpose. Real-world, this challenges us to ask: What am I too tired, too busy, or too afraid to follow? Jesus doesn't just ask us to join Him, He invites us to see our "no's" as His invitation to learn, grow, and serve. Volunteer, study, and pray: How might His call today look different from the disciples'? 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

Title: "The Call of the Unlikely: Following Jesus Beyond the Expected"

The call of Jesus to his first disciples was not to those with polished backgrounds or worldly ambitions, but to two ordinary men, Simon and Andrew, who were already working as fishermen in a crowded coastal town (Matthew 4:18, 19). Their response was immediate: they left their nets, their livelihood, and the familiar rhythm of life to follow Jesus. This moment invites us to reflect on how faith often demands more than comfort, it calls us to embrace the unfamiliar, even when the stakes seem high. Jesus didn't ask them to abandon everything without reason; their decision was part of a greater pattern in Scripture where God works through the weak and the overlooked (1 Corinthians 1:27). For high school students, this story challenges the temptation to measure success by status or prestige, instead asking: What would it look like to trust God with our future, even when the path is uncertain?

Jesus then found Philip, another disciple, after he had already begun following (John 1:43). Philip, though part of this early group, was soon joined by his friend Nathaniel, whose skeptical response, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?", mirrors the common hesitation many hold toward faith (John 1:44, 46). Nathaniel's question isn't an attack on Jesus but a reflection of human doubt, a reminder that doubt is not the opposite of faith but often a necessary part of the journey. Jesus' response, "Here is a true prophet" (John 1:47), reveals that true faith doesn't require blind acceptance; it requires openness to divine revelation in ways that challenge our assumptions. For teens, this moment is profound: faith isn't about eliminating questions but learning to engage them with curiosity and trust in God's ability to reveal truth in unexpected places.

The story of these disciples is one of radical inclusion, where Jesus didn't just recruit followers but transformed lives by meeting people where they were. Simon and Andrew were fishermen; Philip and Nathaniel were outsiders. Yet Jesus saw their potential and invited them into a mission that would change the world. This isn't just about the past; it's a call to the present. In a culture that often glorifies individualism and self-sufficiency, these disciples' response challenges us to ask: What am I willing to sacrifice for something greater than myself? Their commitment was rooted in belief that Jesus was more than a teacher, he was the Son of God (John 1:49), and their role in his mission was not merely secondary but essential.

The theological depth of this story lies in its intersection of God's sovereignty and human agency. Jesus didn't make these men disciples; he called them to a relationship that demanded trust. This isn't passive obedience but active participation, choosing to follow even when the future is uncertain. For high schoolers, this invites reflection on how we engage with faith. Do we see it as a personal choice or a communal calling? The disciples' response suggests that discipleship isn't about isolation but about being part of something larger, where our individuality is shaped by, and shapes, others. Their story also connects to real-world applications, like volunteering, leadership, or even creative pursuits, where we're called to contribute to something beyond ourselves.

This passage is deeply relevant today because it speaks to the human condition: we want to know what comes next, but sometimes we're afraid to step into it. The disciples didn't have a grand vision; they followed because they believed Jesus was worth following. That belief wasn't based on perfection but on encounter, a moment when God's presence became tangible enough to change everything. For students navigating identity, purpose, and faith, this story offers a challenge: If Jesus calls you to something today, even if it's small, will you answer? The call isn't always loud or clear, but it's always worth listening to.

Key Verse

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

This verse from Matthew 4:19 challenges you to step into a purpose bigger than yourself, Jesus doesn't call you to passively sit on the sidelines; He invites you to actively engage in mission, declaring that your role isn't just to observe or contemplate, but to participate. Theologically, it echoes themes of divine vocation: God doesn't send you to "fish for people" by accident, but to fulfill a call shaped by His purpose, where your labor isn't in vain. Real-worldly, this means embracing your role not as a spectator in others' lives, but as a bridge, someone who invites, guides, and equips others to discover faith or meaning, even in mundane or unexpected ways (e.g., through conversation, service, or simply listening). The core tension? You're called to action now, not later, not in some distant calling, but here, today. The risk is avoidance (procrastination, self-preservation), but the reward is growth that ripples into eternity. The question isn't "Will I succeed?" but "How will I engage?", and the answer lies in surrendering to His direction, even when it feels messy.

Activities

Activity 1:

1. Divide and Reflect (5 min):

2. Split students into groups of 3, 5. Assign one person to read aloud Matthew 4:18, 22 and John 1:35, 51 while others listen.
3. Ask: "What is the real call Jesus makes in these passages? Is it only about following Him, or something else?"
4. Discuss: Why might Andrew and Peter (or others in John 1) hesitate? What might they have been thinking? Write down their "hesitations" on index cards.
5. Creative Role-Play (7 min):
6. Each group takes one hesitation (e.g., "What if I'm not 'worthy'?", "What if it's too hard?") and acts it out dramatically, walking away, questioning, or resisting, while others guess the response Jesus might give.
7. Theological Hook: After each hesitation, ask: "How does the Gospel texts show Jesus meets this doubt with action (not just words)?" Reference Matthew's call of fishermen (who were already working) and John's direct encounter with Jesus.
8. Collage or Doodle (3 min):
9. Give each student a scrap of cloth (or paper) and markers. Ask: "How would you visually represent the 'weight' of Jesus' call? What symbols or colors would you use to show the tension between hesitation and commitment?"
10. Encourage students to write a short reflection (1, 2 sentences) on what their artwork conveys about discipleship.
11. Wrap-Up Discussion (2 min):
12. Share a few artworks aloud. Ask: "What real-world calls, career, faith, friendships, might feel like this hesitation? How can we trust that Jesus' call is not just for 'special' people?"

Activity 2:

1. Theological Prep (3 min):
2. Show students the Gospel texts side-by-side. Ask: "Why might Jesus call ordinary people (like fishermen) instead of 'leaders'? How does this challenge us to think about 'usefulness' in faith?"
3. Share: Jesus often worked with people who were marginalized (tax collectors, sinners) to show that all are part of His mission.
4. Design the "Net" (8 min):
5. Each group gets a large sheet of paper. Divide it into two columns:
6. Left side: Draw a "boat" or "net" (symbolizing Peter/Andrew's trade). Label it with their

Discussion Questions

- Here are four intellectually engaging, open-ended discussion questions designed to encourage deep reflection on the passage (Matthew 4:18, 22 and John 1:35, 51) while connecting theology, ethics, and real-world implications:
- 1. Inviting the Unlikely: Faith, Social Exclusion, and the Call to Follow
- "In Matthew 4:18, 22, Jesus doesn't call the learned or the powerful, He calls two fishermen, two 'ordinary' men. John 1:35, 51 shows Andrew and Philip following Jesus after witnessing His divine authority. How might Jesus' method of calling His first disciples challenge modern assumptions about what makes someone 'called' by God?"
- What does it say about God's kingdom when the first disciples are outsiders (e.g., fishermen, working-class men)?
- How could this principle, calling the unassuming, reshape how we think about vocation, ministry, or even everyday obedience?
- What 'unlikely' callings or callings of unqualified people in history (e.g., Martin Luther, Malala, a factory worker) resonate with you? Why?

- Theological Tie-In: Consider how this passage reflects themes of humility (Philippians 2:3) and divine election beyond merit (Ephesians 1:4, 6). How does this challenge the idea that God's call is only for the 'special' or 'prepared'?"
- 2. Witnessing and Discipleship: The Role of Firsthand Experience
 - "Andrew and Philip don't just hear about Jesus; they see His miracles (John 1:41) and His teaching (Matthew 4:22). The disciples are moved to immediately follow Him. What might it mean for discipleship today to require more than intellectual agreement, why might firsthand experience be crucial for genuine commitment?
 - Where do you think you've encountered God in a way that felt 'real' (e.g., a moment of grace, a testimony)? How did that change you?
 - If Jesus called you today without a visible miracle, how would you respond? Why?
 - How could we, as communities, create spaces where discipleship feels more like encounter than mere study?
 - Real-World Application: Discuss how this reflects the apostolic tradition, the belief that faith often grows from lived experiences (e.g., the early church's encounters with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2). How might this shape how we share the gospel today?"
- 3. Sacrifice and Ambition: What Did Jesus Cost the Disciples?
 - "The disciples left behind their nets, boats, and livelihoods to follow Jesus (Matthew 4:22). John 1:44 suggests they were familiar with His family, implying a personal relationship. What does this tell us about the cost of discipleship, both in the past and now?
 - What would it look like to leave 'everything' (Luke 14:33) for God's kingdom today? Name specific areas (career, friendships, family, hobbies) where you might struggle with this idea.
 - Jesus didn't just call them, He challenged them to trust Him. How do you think the disciples balanced their desire for security (e.g., fishing) with their faith in Jesus?
 - What 'nets' or 'boats' in your life are you afraid to cast away? Why?
 - Theological Tie-In: Compare this to Jesus' own words in Luke 9:57, 62 (e.g., "No one putting hand to plow and looking back"). How does this passage about calling the first disciples foreshadow His own radical call to surrender?"
- 4. The Call to Follow or the Call to Become?
 - "John 1:45, 48 shows Philip and Andrew asking Jesus questions after witnessing His authority. Some interpret this as 'faith-seeking' (e.g., 'Where are You going?'), while others see it as hesitation. How might the disciples' questions reflect a tension in faith today, between wonder and doubt?
 - If Jesus asked you the same question ('What do You want us to do?'), what would your response be?
 - Where in your own life have you felt pulled between curiosity about God and fear of commitment?
 - How could we, as believers, encourage one another to ask bold questions about faith without shying away from doubt?
 - Real-World Connection: Explore how this mirrors the early church's struggle with persecution and identity (e.g., Acts 2:42, 47). How might Jesus' call to His first disciples inspire us to embrace the uncertainty of discipleship in a world that often demands instant answers?"
 - Why These Work for High Schoolers:
 - Theological Depth: Each question ties to broader biblical themes (election, sacrifice, faith vs. doubt).
 - Personal Application: Encourages students to reflect on their own lives, struggles, and commitments.
 - Real-World Links: Connects to modern challenges (social media, vocation, persecution, etc.).
 - Would you like any of these tailored further to a specific faith tradition (e.g., Catholic, Protestant, etc.) or cultural context?

Prayer Focus

"Father, as we reflect on the boldness of the first disciples, those who left stability for a call to follow Jesus (Matthew 4:19), teach us to confront our own hesitancy: fear of failure, doubt of purpose, or the weight of expectations. Grant us the wisdom to hear Your invitation in the midst of life's chaos, and the courage to answer it not with empty idealism, but with disciplined faith, studying, discerning, and acting in love, just as You called Your disciples to do. May we learn that true discipleship begins in the tension between what we know and what we're called to trust, and that Your grace transforms our hesitation into obedience, your silence into a voice, and our limits into the foundation for greater things. Amen."

>> 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).