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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**

*Jr High (Ages 12-14)*

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Free curriculum for small and rural churches

## Lesson Overview

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"The Call That Changed Everything" Imagine you're fishing with your dad on a lake, just trying to make a living, when suddenly, Jesus walks up and says, "Come follow me!" For Peter and Andrew, that wasn't just a suggestion; it was the start of a life they never would've planned. Jesus doesn't call the perfect, the famous, or the already "mission-ready", He calls the tired, the unsure, and the ones who thought they had nothing left to offer (like Simon, who got his nickname "Rock" later because he doubted for a minute!). His invitation isn't for us to change who we are, it's to let Him change what we do with it. Life Application: Just like those first disciples, we're not called to fix ourselves before following, we're called to step out when God nudges us. Maybe that's answering a call to serve, trusting God with a dream, or saying "Yes" to something bigger than us. The question isn't "Am I ready?", it's "Will I answer?" (Bonus truth: Even when we mess up, like Peter did later, tripping, denying, falling down, God doesn't take His call back. His love for us is stronger than our doubts!) 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

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Jesus Calls His First Disciples (A Junior High Bible Story)

The first thing you'd notice about Jesus wasn't his big speeches or miracles, it was how he looked at people. He didn't just pass by them; he called them. For Andrew and Peter, that moment changed everything.

One day, Jesus was teaching near the Sea of Galilee when he spotted Simon and Andrew fishing. Instead of ignoring them or scolding them for failing, he walked right up to them. "Come with me," he said simply. Andrew didn't hesitate, he left his nets and followed. Peter, who had probably spent his whole life hauling in fish, had to ask, "What's in it for me?" Jesus didn't answer right away; he just kept walking, leaving the answer open-ended. Andrew grabbed his

brother and said, "We've found the Messiah!" (John 1:41). The word messiah sounded like magic, like someone had found the secret to making life perfect. But Jesus never promised ease or success; he promised himself.

A few days later, Jesus was teaching a crowd near Capernaum when Philip (who was a student of Andrew) spotted Bartholomew sitting nearby. Like the others, Philip wasn't sure why he'd follow. "Where will this guy take us?" he probably wondered. Jesus didn't answer either, but he didn't need to. Philip did what he always did: he told Andrew. And Andrew told Peter. "We found the one we've been waiting for!" (John 1:45). These guys had heard rumors about Jesus, some said he was a prophet, others a miracle worker, but now they had proof. But here's the kicker: Jesus didn't call them to be famous or rich. He called them to be with him, to learn, to serve, and to grow, no matter what happened next.

Jesus didn't ask them to give up everything in a single moment. He called them now. Like Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Bartholomew, you might be wondering, "What's in it for me?" But the truth is, Jesus didn't call them for the future; he called them today. He called you to step out, not because the outcome is guaranteed, but because he's faithful to finish what he starts. His first followers didn't get a guarantee of comfort, but they got him, the one who would never abandon them, even when life got hard. And that's the real lesson: Following Jesus isn't about getting everything we want; it's about learning to trust him with what he's asking us to do, even when it's scary.

Why This Story Matters Today: Jesus didn't call these guys to make them perfect; he called them to become perfect. That's a lifelong journey, but it starts with today. You might feel unsure about what following Jesus looks like in your life, like whether you're enough, or if you'll ever "get it right." But the truth is, Jesus doesn't ask us to have all the answers. He asks us to trust him with the next step. His first disciples didn't know where they'd end up, but they followed anyway, because they knew Jesus wouldn't lead them astray. That's the same promise he offers you: I'll guide you, even if you don't see the whole path yet. Will you take the first step today?

## Key Verse

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

Here's a heartfelt and easy-to-understand explanation of Matthew 4:19 for junior high students, with real-life questions and practical takeaways: --- "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I'll teach you how to help others find their way to God." This verse isn't just about following Jesus, it's a call to serve others in a way that matters. Jesus doesn't just want us to watch; He wants us to step out, just like a fisherman tosses a net into the water to catch fish. His mission? To "fish for people," meaning to lead others to Him. That's your job too, whether it's through kindness, helping friends, sharing God's love, or even just being a positive example. Life isn't just about me; it's about you helping others find the same peace and purpose Jesus gives. Real Question: What if I feel scared or unsure? Jesus doesn't ask us to do this alone, He says, "I'll be with you" (Matthew 28:20). That means He'll guide you, give you strength, and show you how to start. Even small acts (like sharing a smile, listening, or praying for someone) count. What if you try something new today? Life Application: Think of a friend who feels lost, lonely, or confused. How could you fish for them, even in small ways? Jesus doesn't wait for perfection; He just says, "Start here." Your heart might be the first net to catch their attention. --- Bonus: This isn't just about missions trips or big things, it's about every day. You're called to be a light, not just a spectator. What will you do today to help someone else find their way?

## Activities

### Activity 1:

Students work in small groups to analyze how Jesus calls people into ministry, then apply the lesson to their own lives by "casting their nets" (reaching out to others) in a safe, fun way.

1. Divide & Discuss (3 min):
2. Split students into groups of 3, 5. Assign each group a question:
3. "How do you think Jesus saw these disciples' 'nets' (lives) when he called them? What did he notice?"

4. (Hint: Look at John 1:42, Jesus said, "You will catch people for God!")
5. Create Their "Net" (5 min):
6. Give each group a circle of paper. Have them brainstorm:
7. What makes them feel like a "net full of potential" for God?
8. What's one "fish" (person) they could "cast their net" for this week?
9. Decorate their net with symbols (e.g., a heart for kindness, a cross for faith).
10. Share & Pray (2 min):
11. Groups present their nets to the class. Ask: "How could we pray for each other to be more like Jesus' call?"
12. End with a prayer for courage to "cast their nets" (reach out to someone).
13. Life Application: Students learn Jesus sees potential in everyone, just like he saw in the fishermen. Encourage them to trust God with their next step, even if it feels scary.

## Activity 2:

Students act out key moments from Jesus' call to the disciples, then role-play how they'd respond if invited to follow Him. This highlights the boldness and humility of the disciples.

1. Script Snippets (4 min):
2. Play short excerpts from Matthew 4:19 ("Follow me") or John 1:38 ("Rabbi, where are you staying?").
3. Pause after each line and ask: "What would you say? How would you feel?"
4. Role-Play Scenes (5 min):
5. Split students into pairs:
6. Partner A: Plays Jesus (or a disciple). Gives a line like, "Follow me!"
7. Partner B: Reacts naturally, does it feel scary? Exciting? Ask them to explain.
8. Swap roles and repeat.
9. Apply to Today (2 min):
10. Ask: "Jesus didn't ask for their permission to change their lives. How can we be bold like the disciples, and say 'yes' to God's call, even if it's messy?"
11. Example: Sharing their faith with a friend, volunteering, or studying the Bible.
12. Life Application: Jesus calls us to trust Him, even when our plans feel small. Challenge students to think: "If I were one of those fishermen, what's the first 'net' I'd cast for God this week?"
13. Why These Work:

## Discussion Questions

- Here are four engaging, open-ended discussion questions based on Jesus Calling His First Disciples (Matthew 4:18-22, John 1:35-51) that encourage critical thinking, reflection, and real-life application. Each question invites students to explore what the story teaches them about following Jesus, making choices, and growing in faith.
- 1. The Call to Leave Everything
  - Imagine you're standing on the shore of a lake, watching fishermen casting their nets into the water. They've worked long hours, maybe even sacrificed their last bit of money for food, and now they're ready to rest. Jesus suddenly calls them to follow Him, not because they're perfect, but because they're willing to leave behind what they know to trust Him instead.
  - Discussion:
    - Jesus didn't just ask the disciples to come with Him, He asked them to leave behind everything else. Think about a time when you've had to make a big decision that involved giving up something you valued, maybe a hobby, a friend, or even just the comfort of routine. How did you feel when you had to leave something behind? What did

that decision teach you about trust, sacrifice, or growth?

- For the disciples, leaving meant leaving their nets, their livelihood, and even their family's expectations. What does it mean to truly trust God when it feels like we have to walk away from something familiar or safe? Where in your own life do you feel called to step out in faith, even if it's scary?

## • 2. The Challenge of Following Jesus (and Not Just Watching)

- The disciples didn't just observe Jesus, they followed Him. After their first encounter, they didn't wait for Him to call them again; they immediately left their fishing boats and followed Him. That's a radical commitment! But here's the thing: following Jesus isn't always about grand gestures or dramatic decisions. Sometimes, it's about daily choices, like choosing to pray before you eat, choosing kindness over anger, or choosing to listen to God's voice in your heart instead of the noise of the world.

### • Discussion:

- If you could ask Jesus one question right now about what it means to actually follow Him in your everyday life, what would it be? Some of you might feel like you've made the "right" decisions (like being good to others), but Jesus isn't just about doing nice things, He's about loving Him and letting Him change how you live.

- For example, do you ever struggle with things like:

- Waiting for God's guidance instead of making decisions on your own?

- Saying "yes" when you'd rather say "no" to something that feels safe but isn't right?

- Choosing to trust God even when you don't fully understand why He's asking you to do something?

- Where do you see an opportunity right now to follow Jesus in the small things, like choosing Him over distractions, or letting Him lead in a decision that doesn't feel exciting?

## • 3. Why Do You Think Jesus Chose These People?

- Jesus didn't pick perfect disciples, He chose men who were tired, flawed, and just ready. Simon (later Peter) had a rough reputation (he was a fisherman, not a religious leader!). Andrew was probably just a regular guy who heard the call and acted on it. The truth is, Jesus doesn't look for people who are already "all in", He looks for people who are willing to be in the process with Him.

### • Discussion:

- If you could describe yourself in one word, what would it be? Strong? Lazy? Reckless? Shy? Somewhere in between? Jesus didn't reject someone like you, He invited you into His mission because He knows you have something to offer.

- Here's the question: What's one thing about you, maybe your struggles, your personality, or even your mistakes, that you think might hold you back from fully trusting Jesus? Or, if you're struggling with something, how can you ask Him to help you see it differently?

- For example:

- If you're nervous about asking for help, how can you start trusting Jesus in a small way this week?

- If you feel like you're not "good enough," what's one thing you can do today to remind yourself that God sees you as His child, not a failure?

- If you're tempted to compare yourself to others, how can you focus on what God is calling you to do?

## • 4. What Does It Mean to Be a Disciple Today?

- The disciples didn't just follow Jesus for a while, they became part of His movement. They learned to fish for people (literally and figuratively), to love others unconditionally, and to share the story of Jesus with the world. But discipleship isn't just about being a follower, it's about living like one. That means:

- Learning from Jesus (not just reading about Him).

- Serving others in ways that make Him proud.

- Sharing the story of His love with those who don't know Him yet.
- Discussion:
  - If you could spend a day with one of the disciples from that story (Peter, Andrew, John, etc.), what would you want to ask them? Some of you might feel brave enough to ask, "What's the hardest part about following Jesus?" Others might wonder, "How did you learn to trust Him more?"
  - For today, let's think about how you can be a disciple. Where do you see an opportunity to:
    - Share the love of Jesus with someone who might not know Him?
    - Practice what it means to trust Him in a small way (like praying for someone who's hurting)?
    - Learn something new from His Word or from others who love Him?
  - Jesus didn't just call the disciples, He called you to be part of His story. The question is: Are you ready to start walking with Him today?
- Closing Thought:
  - These questions encourage students to reflect on faith in a way that feels real and relatable. They help them see that following Jesus isn't about being perfect, it's about being willing to trust Him, learn from Him, and grow in Him, one step at a time. Would you like any of these questions adjusted to fit a specific teaching style (e.g., more creative, more scripture-based, etc.)?

## Prayer Focus

*Prayer Focus: "What If God Called You Too?" "Dear Heavenly Father, You're not just calling fishermen or teachers, You're calling us. You see the kids in this room who feel lost, who wonder if they're good enough or if they even belong. Like those first disciples, some of us might feel scared or like we're not ready, but Jesus doesn't ask us to be perfect, He asks us to respond. Help us trust that Your invitation is worth answering, even if we mess up along the way. Give us courage to say 'yes' like Simon and Andrew, and wisdom to know when to follow, even if the path isn't clear. And when we doubt, remind us that You call the ones You need, today, me. In Jesus' name, Amen." ---*

*Life Application Tip for the Class: "What if today, you're the one God is calling to share His love, lead a group, or just be someone's friend? Jesus didn't just choose the obvious, He chose people who would do something with their lives. Who is God asking you to be?"*

### >> 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).