

## The Call to Discipleship

Matthew 4:19

As much as it hurts to admit, I truly believe the church has failed miserably in one vital area of ministry. Throughout the 80's and 90's there was a concerted effort to reach unbelievers with the Gospel, and the church rose to the call to evangelize. Numbers across the board rose: people made professions of faith, were baptized, and added to church roles. From all outward appearances, the church was strong and vibrant.

Now we have entered the new millennium and the church is in decline. In fact, some denominations are in free-fall and are desperately trying to formulate a plan for their survival. What happened? How did we go from what appeared to be a time of prosperity to what we have today? The answer for the problems we face is found within the church itself. Now, I know we face a determined adversary who seeks to hinder the growth of the church, but until we are willing to admit our need and take necessary steps to change it, the church will continue to decline.

Let's take a moment to consider the approach during the boom in church growth, just a few decades ago. Churches were doing a great job reaching those who needed Christ. They were being faithful to share the Gospel, but, for the most part, there was no plan to disciple those who had come to faith in Christ. Many of those who were added to church roles never grew in their faith. They were never grounded spiritually, and many of them have fallen by the wayside. Of those who remain, many of them were never disciplined themselves, and thus they are not engaged in discipleship efforts. The great harvest of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has failed to reproduce itself and we are reaping a meager harvest as a result. If we are to reach those who need Christ, stabilize the exodus from the church, and ensure spiritual health for the future, we must prepare our people to disciple others. When discipleship is weak or lacking, the church will face decline.

Over the next several weeks, I hope to examine the biblical approach to discipleship in an effort to equip Fellowship to effectively disciple others. Today I want to consider the [facets](#) of Jesus' invitation as we discuss: [The Call to Discipleship](#). This statement is not difficult to understand. In fact, it is very simple and yet very profound.

**I. The Presentation of the Call** – [And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.](#) Consider:

**A. The Invitation** – [Follow me.](#) Jesus offered a simple invitation to Simon Peter and Andrew, his brother. There was nothing special about these men. They were simple fishermen, and yet Jesus invited them to follow Him. He came to them and extended the call.

- This invitation is separate from salvation, and yet the Lord extends the invitation to all who have received Him in salvation. He comes to ordinary people, where they are, and invites them to follow Him. Many are saved and yet they have not surrendered themselves to follow Christ in obedience. If you are saved, you are invited to follow Jesus.

**B. The Expectation** – **Follow me**. As Jesus invited Peter and Andrew to follow Him, he fully expected them to do so. He did not expect them to debate the call or hesitate in following. They were not idle men; they were busy engaged in work of their own, but the Lord invited them to follow Him in pursuit of His divine plan.

- I fear that many today view the invitation of Jesus as something to consider or pursue at a later time. The call to discipleship is being extended today, and the Lord expects us to heed the call. He does not invite us to consider joining in His work, or delaying such pursuit to a more convenient time. He mentions nothing about taking the time to pray about the matter. He is calling today for us to follow Him, and He fully expects us to respond in obedience to His call. I am not advocating we shouldn't pray, but we don't have to pray about following the Lord.

**C. The Obligation** – **Follow me**. Again this call was not extended for their consideration. Jesus had spoken and they were obligated to follow. He would not have forced them if they were unwilling, but they were obligated to respond favorably to the call.

- Many likely feel the call is reserved for the pastor, deacons, Sunday school teachers, or others in leadership positions. Jesus is calling every believer to follow Him, and if we desire to live within the will of God, we must follow Him. This is the basis for our service to Christ. As believers, we have an obligation to follow the Lord wherever He leads!

**II. The Preparation in the Call** – **Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men**. This call involves particular preparation. Notice:

**A. The Authority** – Peter and Andrew had not received an invitation to follow an ordinary man. This would involve labor unlike any they had known. Jesus was not just another villager who desired assistance. He was the eternal God-Man. Their work would not be dependent upon the abilities or wisdom of a mere mortal. The Son of the living God had called them and He would equip them for the work that lay ahead.

- If we were to focus solely on the numbers and the statistics, the outlook for the church would appear very bleak. However, we must remember to whom we belong. We must recognize the Lord's plan to build His church. He ascended back to the Father and entrusted the work of the church to Spirit filled believers. We need not fear failure or resign to defeat. The Lord Himself has called us into the work of discipleship.

**B. The Dependency** – Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. As Peter and Andrew followed the Lord, He promised to make them fishers of men. I hope you see the significance here. In order to be effective in the work they were called to perform, they would have to depend upon Jesus. They did not currently possess the ability to be successful, and it would never happen apart from the working of the Lord. As He worked in their lives, making them fishers of men, they would be used of the Lord in great and mighty ways.

- This is likely one of the greatest hindrances among the church today. We are not dependent upon the Lord. This fundamental principle has not changed and it never will. We remain dependent upon the Lord for wisdom and strength. If our lives are to be effective in discipling others, we will be fruitful through the power of the Lord. He will make us as it pleases Him, using us for His glory and the good of others! (Becoming an effective disciple for Christ is natural for the believer. He desires to make each of us fishers of men.)

**C. The Maturity** – Mark 1:17 – And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. In a parallel passage, Mark reveals their becoming fishers of men was not immediate. As they obediently followed Jesus, walking with Him and learning of Him, they would become fishers of men. They did not currently possess the wisdom or ability to be fishers of men. This would require time and commitment.

- With salvation comes the obligation to follow Jesus and disciple others, but this is not an immediate transformation. In order to be an effective disciple, we must continue to follow Jesus, growing in our faith and maturing in Him. Our walk with the Lord, and service to Him, is a continual process. The longer we walk with Him, the more like Him we become. The more like Him we become, the more we desire to please Him. Through committed fellowship and obedience, we grow in our faith and become fishers of men. You don't have to be completely mature spiritually to disciple others, but if you are not growing in your faith, you will be unable to effectively disciple others in the faith. Discipleship is a continual, growing process in the lives of obedient believers.

**III. The Priority in the Call** – Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. Consider:

**A. The Employment** – **Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.** Jesus revealed that He would make them fishers of men. Peter and Andrew understood the concept of fishing. They made their living fishing on the Sea of Galilee. They would continue to fish, but they would now be fishing for men. They had been zealous and committed to the business of catching fish, and Jesus wanted them to possess the same zeal in service to Him.

- I would think it safe to assume that everyone here understands the concept of fishing. A net or line is cast into the water with the hope of catching fish. That is the purpose for the pursuit. I know some really enjoy being out in nature, but most hope to catch something if they are going to the trouble to fish. The net or line is cast, and once a fish is secured, it is brought to shore. As believers, we are to be about the business of fishing. That is what the Lord has called each of us to do as we serve Him.

**B. The Engagement** – **Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.** Peter and Andrew understood the importance of actually casting the net if fish were to be caught. Simply thinking of fishing or hoping to catch fish would not be profitable apart from putting forth the effort to fish. They were called to active service, fishing for men.

- I know it sounds elementary, but if we expect to be successful fishing, we must engage in fishing. You will never catch anything as long as the boat is in the shed, and you are merely contemplating fishing. You must get to the water, where the fish are, and actively pursue catching fish. The same is true in our work for the Lord. We will never reach the lost or disciple another believer apart from engaging their lives. Knowing how and where are not enough; we must actively engage in fishing!

**C. The Emphasis** – **Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.** Peter and Andrew were professional fishermen, but now their emphasis would change. They would continue to fish, but instead of seeking to catch fish, they would be fishing for men. Their pursuit would have similarities, but the emphasis would change. They would be used of the Lord to reach those who had yet to come to know Him. This would now be their priority in life.

- We need to grasp the significance of the call to follow Jesus. He has called us to a lifelong work. While we must engage in other pursuits in order to survive physically, our emphasis in life should be fishing for men. If those apart from Christ are to be reached, and those who are in Christ disciplined in the faith, we must be about the business of fishing. Each day we must seek opportunities to fish. This will require seeking out new places to fish, stepping out of the comfort of our favorite fishing spots at times, in order to be effective. One thing is certain, we will catch nothing if we aren't fishing!

**Conclusion:** The call is very simple and yet most never respond. Are you concerned with the current state of the church? Do you sense the need for action on our part? Are you willing to follow Jesus and allow Him to equip you to reach those in need? We need obedient disciples to reach the unsaved and invest in the lives of young believers.

You can't become a fisher of men apart from salvation. If you have never been saved, Jesus died for your sin and wants to save you today. He seeks those who realize their need for salvation, responding to Him by faith alone. If He has spoken to you, come to Him today!