

REACH COMMUNITY CHURCH

Teacher Background & Preparation Sheet | For Teacher Study Only, Not Read Aloud

Week #	39	Date	September 27, 2026
Lesson Title	Jesus Calls His Disciples	Primary Scripture	Matthew 4:12-25
Timeline	Early in Jesus' public ministry	Primary Focus	Matthew 4:18-22

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON

There is something wonderfully simple about the moment Matthew describes beside the Sea of Galilee. Jesus walks along the shore, sees ordinary working men going about an ordinary day, and calls them to follow Him.

They were fishermen. They had nets, boats, families, responsibilities, strengths, weaknesses, and much still to learn. Jesus did not call them because they already understood everything or because they had somehow made themselves worthy. Jesus called them because He chose to bring them near, teach them, change them, and eventually send them to tell others about Him.

That distinction matters for this lesson.

The disciples are not the heroes. Jesus is.

If we turn this passage into nothing more than, "Peter and Andrew obeyed quickly, so you should obey quickly too," we will miss something much larger. The wonder of Matthew 4 is not simply that these men followed Jesus. The wonder is who was calling them.

Jesus is the promised King. He is God the Son. He has come announcing that God's kingdom is near, and He calls ordinary people into a relationship with Himself.

Children should learn that following Jesus means more than knowing facts about Him, attending church, or trying to behave like good Christians. A disciple is a person who belongs to Jesus, learns from Jesus, trusts Jesus, and follows Jesus.

Jesus also tells these fishermen that He will make them "fishers of men." The work of changing them and preparing them belongs to Him.

That gives this lesson its central truth:

Jesus calls ordinary people to follow Him, and He changes His followers so they can help others know Him.

BOOK & PASSAGE BACKGROUND

Book Name: Matthew

Traditional Author: Matthew, also called Levi, one of Jesus' twelve apostles.

Approximate Date Written: Scripture does not tell us exactly when Matthew was written. Scholars propose different dates within the first century, so teachers should avoid presenting a debated date as certain.

Original Audience: Matthew was written for Christians and places particular emphasis on Jesus as the promised Messiah and King who fulfills God's promises in the Old Testament.

Purpose of the Book: Matthew introduces Jesus as "Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" in Matthew 1:1. Throughout the Gospel, Matthew shows that Jesus is the promised King and Savior and records His teaching about the kingdom of heaven.

The immediate setting of Matthew 4 is important. Jesus has been baptized, and the Father has identified Him as His beloved Son in Matthew 3:17. Jesus has then faced temptation in the wilderness and remained perfectly obedient to God.

After John the Baptist is imprisoned, Jesus begins preaching publicly in Galilee.

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Matthew 4:17

Then Jesus begins calling disciples.

The order matters.

Jesus does not begin by presenting people with a program. He presents Himself.

"Follow me."

HISTORICAL & CULTURAL CONTEXT

Matthew places this event beside the **Sea of Galilee**, a freshwater lake in northern Israel. It is also called the Lake of Gennesaret and, elsewhere in Scripture, the Sea of Tiberias.

Fishing was an important part of life and business around the lake.

"They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen." Matthew 4:18

This was their work.

Fishing in the first century was not a relaxing afternoon hobby. Fishermen worked with nets, boats, partners, and family businesses. Nets required maintenance and repair, and the work could be physically demanding.

"They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets." Matthew 4:21

This small detail helps us see that Jesus was calling real people in the middle of real responsibilities.

We should also understand the word **disciple**.

A disciple was a learner or follower. In the Jewish world of Jesus' day, students could attach themselves to respected teachers and learn from them.

Jesus' disciples certainly learned His teaching, but following Jesus became far more than attending lessons from a rabbi. Jesus called people to Himself with remarkable personal authority.

He did not merely say, "Learn these ideas."

"Come, follow me." Matthew 4:19

Jesus Himself stood at the center of the call.

IMMEDIATE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Immediately before Jesus calls these fishermen, Matthew describes the beginning of His public ministry in Galilee.

Matthew connects Jesus' arrival in this region with Isaiah's prophecy about light coming to people living in darkness. Matthew 4:16 says:

"The people living in darkness have seen a great light."

The light is connected with the arrival and ministry of Jesus.

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Matthew 4:17

After calling Peter, Andrew, James, and John, Jesus travels throughout Galilee.

"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people." Matthew 4:23

The disciples therefore begin following Jesus into a ministry where they will hear His teaching, witness His authority, watch His compassion toward suffering people, and gradually discover more fully who He is.

Matthew 5 then begins the Sermon on the Mount.

The men Jesus calls in Matthew 4 are about to become students of the King.

CORE TRUTH #1: JESUS HAS THE AUTHORITY TO CALL PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM

"Come, follow me." Matthew 4:19

Those words are striking because Jesus places Himself at the center.

He does not merely invite them to accept a religious philosophy. He calls them to follow **Him**.

That fits the larger testimony of Scripture concerning Jesus. He is not simply one spiritual teacher among many. John 14:6 records Jesus saying:

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Following Jesus therefore begins with recognizing who Jesus is.

He is God the Son, the promised Messiah and Savior.

For children, we can explain discipleship simply:

A disciple is someone who trusts Jesus, belongs to Jesus, learns from Jesus, and follows Jesus.

CORE TRUTH #2: JESUS CALLS ORDINARY PEOPLE

Peter and Andrew were fishing.

James and John were repairing nets with their father.

Matthew does not tell us that Jesus chose them because they were the smartest, strongest, richest, or most religious men in Galilee.

They were ordinary working people.

Later, the New Testament will show us their weaknesses quite openly. Peter will sometimes misunderstand Jesus, speak before thinking, become frightened, and eventually deny knowing Jesus.

Yet Jesus already knows the kind of man Peter is when He calls him.

That is encouraging because Jesus does not save people after they have repaired themselves.

"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

Children can easily begin thinking Christianity is about becoming good enough so that Jesus will accept them.

The gospel says something better.

Jesus saves sinners by grace.

We come to Him because we need Him.

CORE TRUTH #3: JESUS CHANGES THE PEOPLE WHO FOLLOW HIM

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

Older English translations often use the familiar phrase "fishers of men." The meaning is that Jesus will prepare His followers to help bring other people the good news about Him.

Notice who does the changing.

Jesus says, **"I will."**

The disciples do follow Him, learn from Him, obey Him, and eventually serve Him, but Jesus is the One who forms them.

This fits beautifully with the biblical truth of sanctification. Sanctification means God continues working in believers, helping us grow in holiness and become more like Jesus.

"For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." Philippians 2:13

Children should not hear, "Try really hard to turn yourself into a good disciple."

They should hear something more hopeful:

Stay close to Jesus. Trust Him. Listen to His Word. The Holy Spirit works in those who belong to Christ and helps us grow.

CORE TRUTH #4: FOLLOWING JESUS IS A REAL RESPONSE, NOT JUST A FEELING

"At once they left their nets and followed him." Matthew 4:20

"Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him." Matthew 4:22

Their response is concrete.

They follow Jesus.

This does not mean every Christian must abandon a job or leave a family in order to prove devotion to Christ. Scripture does not command children to copy the exact circumstances of these fishermen.

It does mean that trusting Jesus changes who has the highest authority in our lives.

"If you love me, keep my commands." John 14:15

Obedience does not purchase salvation. We obey because we belong to Christ.

For children, following Jesus may become visible through telling the truth when lying would be easier, apologizing after hurting someone, showing kindness to someone left out, praying when frightened, forgiving because Jesus has forgiven us, and choosing what Jesus says is right when friends encourage something wrong.

Those actions do not make Jesus love us.

They are ways a life belonging to Jesus begins to show.

CORE TRUTH #5: JESUS CALLS HIS FOLLOWERS TO HELP OTHERS KNOW HIM

"I will send you out to fish for people." Matthew 4:19

This is not about tricking, trapping, pressuring, or arguing people into Christianity.

Jesus is beginning to prepare disciples who will eventually carry the good news about Him to others.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." Matthew 28:19

The call beside the Sea of Galilee eventually opens outward toward the world.

Peter and the others first need to be with Jesus. They need to hear Him, watch Him, learn from Him, fail, be corrected, see the cross, encounter the risen Christ, and receive the Holy Spirit.

Then they will carry His message.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance continues to emphasize this same Christ centered mission: knowing Jesus and making Him known.

The order is worth remembering.

We do not merely recruit children for a mission.

We lead children to **Jesus**, and people who know Jesus begin wanting others to know Him too.

CORE TRUTH #6: JESUS IS THE SAVIOR, NOT THE DISCIPLES

Peter will become important in the early church, but Peter cannot save anyone.

Andrew cannot save anyone.

James cannot save anyone.

John cannot save anyone.

Only Jesus saves.

"Salvation is found in no one else." Acts 4:12

This protects the lesson from becoming a moral lesson about courageous fishermen.

The disciples will stumble repeatedly.

Jesus will remain faithful.

The disciples will need forgiveness.

Jesus will provide it.

The disciples will eventually die.

Jesus will rise from the dead.

The disciples matter because of the One they follow.

GOD REVEALED AS TRINITY

Matthew 4 does not display Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together as visibly as the baptism passage did in Matthew 3, so we should not force a Trinity lesson into details that are not present.

Still, this event belongs directly after Scripture's clear revelation at Jesus' baptism.

The One calling the fishermen is **God the Son**.

"This is my Son, whom I love." Matthew 3:17

Matthew 4:1 also tells us that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness before beginning His Galilean ministry.

The larger biblical picture shows that discipleship is thoroughly connected to the triune God.

The Father sends the Son. The Son saves and calls His people. The Holy Spirit lives in believers and empowers them to follow Christ and bear witness to Him.

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:19

The simple truth remains:

God is one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE CONNECTION

This passage has an especially natural connection with the missionary heart of the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

The Alliance describes itself as Christ centered because everything begins and ends with Jesus. It also emphasizes the Great Commission, Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations.

Matthew 4 shows that pattern beginning on a small scale.

Jesus calls people to Himself.

Jesus changes them.

Jesus prepares them.

Jesus sends them.

Jesus our Savior: We cannot become disciples by saving ourselves. Jesus died and rose again to rescue sinners.

Jesus our Sanctifier: Jesus continues changing His followers through the Holy Spirit, helping us become more like Him.

Jesus our Healer: The verses immediately following the disciples' call show Jesus compassionately healing the sick. We pray because Jesus remains compassionate and powerful, while never teaching children that sufficient faith guarantees the earthly outcome they want.

Jesus our Coming King: The One calling disciples beside Galilee is the King whose kingdom will finally prevail. Following Jesus has a destination. Our King is coming again.

The Fourfold Gospel keeps Jesus at the center:

Savior. Sanctifier. Healer. Coming King.

One Jesus.

Our hope is in Him.

RELIABILITY OF SCRIPTURE

The setting of this passage belongs firmly within the known geography and culture of first century Galilee.

The Sea of Galilee is a real body of water, and fishing was an important industry in the region. The Gospel accounts consistently place Jesus' early Galilean ministry around recognizable towns and locations surrounding the lake.

Historical and archaeological research can help us understand fishing, boats, settlements, synagogues, and daily life in Galilee.

That evidence is useful, but teachers should understand what it does and does not establish.

Archaeology can support the historical setting. It cannot excavate the moment Jesus said, "Follow me."

Our primary reason for teaching this event as true is that Scripture records it as history.

We should also notice that the Gospels do not hide the later failures of these disciples. Peter's denial of Jesus is preserved openly in Matthew 26:69-75. That is not what we would expect if the writers were simply trying to make the movement's leaders appear impressive.

Scripture gives us real people with real failures whose hope rests in a faithful Savior.

APOLOGETICS FOUNDATION

A thoughtful child may ask:

"Did these men really just meet Jesus and immediately leave everything?"

Matthew gives us a brief account focused on Jesus' authoritative call and their response.

The Gospel of John also records earlier encounters involving Andrew, Simon Peter, and Jesus in John 1:35-42. This means we should be cautious about assuming Matthew 4 describes the first second these men had ever seen or heard of Jesus.

The Gospel writers often select and arrange events according to what they are emphasizing.

That is not a contradiction.

One account may give information another does not mention.

A helpful example for children is that two people can describe the same school day truthfully while choosing different events to tell. One may talk about lunch and another about math class. Different details do not automatically mean someone is wrong.

The important apologetics pattern remains:

What does the Bible really say?

Matthew says Jesus called them, and they followed Him.

What do we know?

Other Gospel passages provide additional information about some disciples encountering Jesus.

What are we guessing about?

Scripture does not tell us every conversation, every previous meeting, or everything these men already knew when Matthew 4 occurred.

We should not invent what Scripture leaves unstated.

ANTICIPATED CHILD QUESTIONS

What is a disciple?

A disciple is a follower and learner. Jesus' disciples belonged to Him, learned from Him, trusted Him, and followed Him.

Why did the fishermen leave so quickly?

Matthew emphasizes that they responded immediately to Jesus' call. John 1 also records earlier contact between Jesus and some of these men, so we should not assume Matthew 4 was necessarily the first moment they had ever encountered Him.

Did they never see their families again?

No. Scripture later mentions Peter's home and mother in law in Matthew 8:14. Following Jesus did not mean that the disciples stopped caring about their families.

Does Jesus want me to leave my parents to follow Him?

No. Children are repeatedly taught in Scripture to honor and obey their parents. Ephesians 6:1 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Following Jesus as a child includes honoring the good authority God has placed over you.

If any adult ever tells a child that "following Jesus" means keeping dangerous secrets, accepting abuse, or leaving safe caregivers without help, that is not what this passage teaches. Children should tell a trusted safe adult.

What does "fish for people" mean?

Jesus was using words fishermen could understand. He would prepare them to help other people hear the good news and become His disciples.

Do I have to become a missionary in another country to follow Jesus?

Jesus calls every believer to belong to Him and participate in His mission, but people serve Him in many places and different ways. A child can begin by loving Jesus, living truthfully, praying for others, showing Christ's love, and telling people what Jesus has done.

What if I am afraid to talk about Jesus?

Fear does not mean Jesus has abandoned you. Even the disciples became afraid at times. We can pray for courage, depend on the Holy Spirit, and speak about Jesus with kindness rather than pressure.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Misunderstanding: The disciples were chosen because they were unusually good people.

Correction: Scripture does not say that. The Gospels openly reveal their weaknesses and failures. Jesus' grace and authority are the focus.

Misunderstanding: Following Jesus means earning His love by obeying enough.

Correction: Salvation is a gift of grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 teaches that we are saved through faith, not by our works. Obedience grows from belonging to Jesus.

Misunderstanding: "Fishing for people" means pressuring people to become Christians.

Correction: Jesus calls His followers to share the gospel truthfully and lovingly. First Peter 3:15 tells believers to

answer with "gentleness and respect."

Misunderstanding: Every Christian must leave a career or family exactly as these fishermen did.

Correction: This passage records Jesus' particular call of these men into their apostolic ministry. All Christians follow Christ, but Scripture gives believers different responsibilities and places of service.

Misunderstanding: The disciples are the heroes because they were brave enough to follow.

Correction: Jesus is the Hero. He calls them, teaches them, corrects them, forgives them, dies for them, rises from the dead, and empowers them for His mission.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

There is a sentence in this passage worth holding onto:

"Come, follow me." Matthew 4:19

Eventually the men who heard those words would discover what following Jesus truly meant.

They would watch Him welcome sinners.

They would hear Him teach with authority.

They would see His compassion.

They would watch Him do what no ordinary man could do.

They would also discover something painful about themselves.

They were sinners too.

Peter, who left his nets to follow Jesus, would later become frightened and deny even knowing Him.

And Jesus would still go to the cross for Peter.

That is the gospel.

God is holy and good, and we have sinned against Him. We cannot repair our guilt by becoming better people.

Jesus is God the Son. He lived without sin.

He died for our sins.

He rose again.

Everyone who turns from sin and trusts Him receives forgiveness and new life.

Following Jesus therefore does not begin with our strength.

It begins with His grace.

And the same Savior who forgives us begins changing us through the Holy Spirit so that our lives increasingly belong to Him.

The fishermen did not know everything that morning beside the water.

They simply knew enough to begin following Jesus.

In time, they would learn that the One who called them was also the One who would die for them, rise for them, forgive them, remain with them, and send them into the world with the best news anyone could ever hear.

TEACHER HEART PREPARATION

There is a temptation when teaching this passage to make the fishermen impressive.

They left their nets immediately. They followed Jesus. They eventually carried the gospel into the world.

All of that matters, but I think the lesson becomes more beautiful when our eyes stay on Jesus.

He knew Peter before Peter understood himself.

He knew Peter would make bold promises and later collapse under fear.

He knew these men would misunderstand Him, argue about greatness, fall asleep when He asked them to pray, and scatter when He was arrested.

And He called them anyway.

That should give us patience with the children sitting in front of us.

Some will understand quickly. Some will not.

One may ask a question that seems to take the lesson sideways. Another may struggle to sit still. Someone may know almost nothing about Jesus, while another has heard these verses since preschool.

Jesus is not asking us to manufacture impressive little disciples during one Sunday school hour.

We get to place children near Jesus through His Word.

We can show them who He is.

We can tell them the truth about sin without crushing them under shame, because the Savior of sinners is standing at the center of the lesson.

We can invite their questions without being frightened by them.

And we can trust the Holy Spirit to do what no teacher can do inside a human heart.

The words Jesus spoke beside Galilee still deserve our attention:

"Come, follow me."

Before we ask what these children should do for Jesus, it may help us remember what Jesus has already done for them.

He came.

He lived without sin.

He carried our sins to the cross.

He rose from the grave.

He calls sinners to Himself.

And He does not merely tell His people to change themselves.

He stays with us and changes us.

Teacher Prayer Focus: Father, thank You for sending Your Son. Help me keep Jesus at the center as I teach. Jesus, help these children see that following You begins with trusting who You are and what You have done for us. Holy Spirit, work in their hearts and in mine, helping us know Jesus, become more like Him, and share His good news with gentleness and love. Give me patience with questions, wisdom with difficult moments, and confidence in Your Word. Amen.