

Called to Discipleship by Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 4:18–22; 5:46; 9:10, 11; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:1–11; 18:10, 11; John 1:35–51.*

Memory Text: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (*Hebrews 11:1*).

When Garibaldi published that famous proclamation to his soldiers after the storming of Rome, ‘Soldiers! I have nothing to offer you but hunger, thirst, hardship, death. Let all who love their country follow me!’ he knew many a gallant youth would follow him, accepting hunger, and thirst, and death.”—A. Gordon Nasby, ed., *Treasury of the Christian World* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 92. Unlike Garibaldi’s, Jesus’ call was not for love of country but for love of God, a call that—though possibly involving hunger, thirst, hardship, and death—also offers the promise of eternal life. Thus, people then and now accept His call to follow and to commit their lives to Him, and by so doing make a difference in this world now and for eternity.

This week we will take another look at the earliest calls to discipleship and seek to glean from them lessons for ourselves.

The Week at a Glance: What were the first calls to discipleship like? What role did Scripture have in those calls? What can we learn from the call of Levi Matthew? Despite many differences, what are some of the common elements found in the call to discipleship? What advantages do we have today over the early disciples?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 19.

The First Calls

Read John 1:35–51 and then answer the following questions:

1. How did John the Baptist help set the stage for the call of these first disciples? From what John did, what can we learn for ourselves and for our mission as a people?

2. How central were the Scriptures to the people's willingness to follow Jesus? What message is there for us?

3. What role do we see for the disciples in calling others to follow Jesus? What does that tell us about our own calling?

After Andrew spent a little time with Jesus, he not only believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but he immediately did what the Master expects every disciple to do: Spread the joy of discipleship. Andrew seemed to have understood a vital principle of discipleship: It is neither for private use nor does it belong to a gated community or an exclusive club. Rather, it is an experience that must be shared with others.

From Andrew's response to discipleship, a pattern emerges. Andrew heard John speak and followed Jesus. Next, he told his brother Peter of his experience and brought him to Jesus, and Peter became a follower, as well.

In the same way, we hear the truth about Jesus, make a commitment to follow Him, and then tell others about Jesus. This is repeated day by day, all over the world.

If you were to tell someone about Jesus, what would you say? How deep is your experience with the Lord? What would you say about Jesus that could make someone be interested in following Him?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Luke 5:1–11*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Comprehend what Jesus expects from His disciples and what we can expect from Him.

Feel: Sense a desire to abide in God's presence.

Do: Choose to put Jesus first.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Call

A What does fishing suggest about the work Jesus intends disciples to do?

B How does the response of the first disciples to their calling show that the Lord requires a complete commitment?

C What assurance does Jesus give Peter in the miraculous catch of fish?

D Why did Peter tell Jesus to leave if he intended to forsake everything to follow Him? What was this a recognition of?

II. Feel: The Calling

A How does Jesus call us to leave our old lives behind? What challenges might we face?

B What makes it possible for us, who like Peter are fallen, to abide in the Divine Presence?

C Peter's nets were so heavy that he called for backup to keep from sinking. How does this illustrate the importance of teamwork in the gospel?

III. Do: Respond

A Peter went from a boatload of nothing to a boat so heavy with fish that it started to sink. How do we as disciples keep from sinking under the weight of success?

B Why would Jesus give Peter such success only to ask him to leave it? Why is willingness to drop everything for Jesus necessary? What is the secret to doing that?

▶ **Summary:** Just as Jesus gave Himself entirely to us, He accepts nothing less than our entire self for Him.

The First Call in Matthew and Mark

In Matthew 4:18–22 and Mark 1:16–20, we are given other perspectives on this first call. In both examples, those He called dropped their nets and followed Him. What does that mean?

This is not the only time and place this principle is found in the Bible.

Look up the following texts. How do we see the same principle being manifested here, however different the circumstances?

Gen. 12:1 (see also Heb. 11:8)

1 Kings 19:19–21

Phil. 3:8

Heb. 11:24

The point cannot be repeated enough: The Lord demands the whole heart. That which we do not surrender to Him, that which we cling to, refusing to give up, becomes an idol, something we deem more important than the Lord. What is worse, those things we cling to become the hooks the devil uses to wean us away from the Lord completely. That is why we must be willing to forsake anything and everything the Lord asks us to. We cannot, as He said, “serve two masters” (*Matt. 6:24*).

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

Key Concept: **The call to discipleship involves a commitment of the entire life to Jesus and the desire to share Him with others.**

Have you ever committed everything to a cause when all hope of a favorable outcome seemed lost? Defying insurmountable odds requires a heroic commitment to faith that few achieve. And when they do, we remember them.

The year was 1570, on the fifteenth of March. Two mighty armies clashed on the field of Jarnac. The army of Catherine de Medici butchered the Huguenot regiments. The Huguenot commander, the Prince of Condé, fell. Wounded and unhorsed, he fought on his knees until he was slain. The Huguenot army retreated from the carnage, beaten in battle and in spirit.


Soon after, a woman entered their ranks. On her one side rode her son. On her other rode her nephew, the son of the fallen prince. The eyes of the soldiers watched in silence as Jeanne d’Albret, Queen of Navarre, rode down their defeated ranks. In 1560, she had openly professed the Protestant faith. In 1563, she proclaimed an edict abolishing papal services in Bearn. Her husband forsook her. The pope thundered his excommunications against her, while the powerful kings of Spain and France plotted to rip her tiny kingdom off the map of Europe. But she did not turn away from her faith. Now riding among the battered remnants of the army, her voice rang out, “I offer you everything I have to give—my dominions, my treasures, my life, and what is dearer to me than all, my children. I swear to defend to my last breath the holy cause that now unites us!” In the hour of defeat when the hearts of men failed for courage, her commitment gave them hope.—Adapted, J. A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism*, vol. 3, p. 1333.

Consider This: Based on the what and how much the Queen of Navarre was willing to sacrifice, how would you define *commitment*? How did her commitment give her a powerful truth to share with these men who lost everything? What does her willingness to sacrifice everything to the Reformed cause tell us about what discipleship means?

► **STEP 2—Explore!**

Bible Commentary

I. “Come and See” (Review with your class *John 1:35–51*.)

CONTINUED 

The Call in Luke

Luke 5:1–11 contains Luke’s version of the disciples’ call. As with the other Gospel accounts, it brings in elements not found in other Gospels, while omitting elements found in others. Some claim that the accounts are, therefore, contradictory. Instead, careful scrutiny usually resolves any issues, showing simply that despite the different details or emphasis, the accounts harmonize, especially on the crucial points.

Read Luke 5:1–11. What indications are there that Peter already had some faith in Jesus?

Think about it. They had fished all night, when fishing was the best, and caught nothing. Jesus then comes along and tells them to let the net into the water. *Is He joking? If we did not catch anything all night, how are we going to in the day?* Yet for some reason, Peter listens. Did he already have reasons to trust in Jesus?

What was Peter’s response? How does that response, in many ways, capture the essence of discipleship and the everlasting gospel? *Isa. 53:6, Rom. 5:16–21, 1 John 1:7–9.*

Despite our fallen natures, despite our faults and our weaknesses, despite the fact that we, like Peter, are sinful, God does not abandon us. How natural it would be for any of us, in the presence of the Divine, to say, “Depart from me.” Under the blood of the Cross, we can abide in the presence of God. Under the blood of the Cross, we can be His disciples.

Dwell on what Jesus did for us at Calvary. Dwell on the promises of acceptance, forgiveness, and reconciliation with God because of the Cross. Claim the promises made to you, not because you feel worthy of them (was Peter?) but because God has promised them, and you want to take Him at His Word.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

A delegation of Pharisees had come to John the Baptist to ask point blank if he was Moses come back from the dead. John stunned the crowd by announcing that there was One standing in the crowd who was greater than all the prophets dead or living. Heads must have turned left and right, trying to spot the One he spoke of. But they saw only poor workers—fishermen, farmers like themselves. Maybe John was suffering heatstroke from all that time in the desert, some may have wondered. That or his strict diet of locusts and honey had impaired his judgment.

Two days later, John again saw in the crowd the One greater than all. This time he pointed Him out directly. “Look, there’s the Lamb of God.” Surely the time was ripe for the promised Deliverer to free Israel from bondage, so John’s announcement shouldn’t have come as a shock. After all, weren’t the seventy weeks of Daniel almost up? But as those in the crowd slid their eyes over to the Man John pointed to, hopes probably flared then turned to disbelief. *That* Man was supposed to break the Roman yoke? Perhaps, they had in mind someone who looked a little more *kingly* like Herod or who was as muscled as a Roman gladiator. Perhaps that explains why no one rushed over to Jesus as the Magi or shepherds had and showered Him with gifts or bowed down at His feet—even though God Himself descended on Him like a dove and declared in a voice of thunder that this was His Son. It’s a wonder at all that two followed after Him from that crowd.

Jesus did not at first turn to them. He let them follow a little way, perhaps to test their resolve. And when He did turn to them, He asked them a simple question. “What do you seek?” It was one that required of them to state what was in their hearts. But because it was a question, it also allowed Andrew and John to turn away if they chose. So it is always with all who come to Jesus. He never forces those He draws. But at some point He asks us for a response to His drawing—“What do you seek?”

Consider This: What did Andrew and John’s response reveal about their hearts? Why did they make such good candidates for disciples?

Jesus’ response to their question about where He dwelled was answered with the invitation, “Come and see.” How does Jesus still invite us to “Come and see” where He dwells today? What does it mean to “abide” with Him?

II. Levi Matthew *(Review with your class Luke 5:27, 28.)*

When Matthew got dressed to go to work at the tax office in Capernaum, it seemed like just another typical day doing the most

The Call of Levi Matthew

Read Matthew 9:9, Mark 2:14, and Luke 5:27, 28. Compare the call of Levi Matthew with that of the other early disciples. What are the similarities and the differences between the call of Levi Matthew and the other disciples so far?

Up to this point, those Jesus called to discipleship were apparently devout Jews, as John 1:44, 45 implies. The call to Levi Matthew, however, comes to one on the fringes of society. He was a publican and, as such, was deemed among the worst of society by the Jews.

Read Matthew 5:46; 9:10, 11; Mark 2:16; and Luke 18:10, 11. What do these texts tell us about how people such as Matthew were viewed in that society?

Matthew was the most unlikely candidate for a call to discipleship. First, he was called from the tax collector's booth. Roman writers linked these people with brothel keepers; the rabbis classed them with robbers. They were seen as extortionists (*Luke 3:12, 13*), notoriously dishonest and universally hated, especially since they were Jews who defrauded their countrymen for the enemy and also swindled the government.

How unlikely that one with such a character and a reputation should have been called to discipleship by Jesus! Yet, that is precisely what happened. Christ's call here speaks to the universality of the salvation He brought, the inclusiveness of His kingdom, and His willingness to give all a chance at salvation.

Who are some in your own society that are deemed outcasts, socially and morally unacceptable? What kind of attitude do you have toward those people? What can we learn, from the story of Levi Matthew's call, about not being too quick to pass judgment upon others?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

despised job in Judea. Luckily for him, there was finally Someone in town more hated by some than he—with this new Teacher named Jesus. But what was it that made tax collectors so universally despised?


First, there was a poll tax and a land tax. The poll tax had to be paid by males (ages 14–65) and females (ages 12–65) simply for breathing. It reminded the Jews they were slaves to Roman rule. The land tax was an abomination to the Jews, who saw God as the Owner of land. And let's not forget the income tax.

But the money the Romans extracted from the Jews didn't end there. There were also duties that had to be paid. Need to use the main road? Not until you pay the road tax. Traveling through the harbor? There was a tax for that too. And one for the market. Carts were taxed. And there was a tax for each wheel and the beast that pulled the cart. These duties left a lot of room for abuses and extortion.

A tax collector could stop a traveler, make him unpack his goods, and charge him whatever he liked. Revolts against the Romans resulted, such as the one that the Roman governor Quirinius quelled with ferocity. Romans “farmed out” to contractors the right to collect the taxes. As long as the contractor collected the assessed figure by the end of the year and turned it over to the Roman government, he was free to keep whatever else he extorted beyond that. And because this happened all too frequently, tax collectors were universally execrated. They were outcasts—social lepers—from society. The only thing worse than a tax collector was a Jewish tax collector. Being a member of this profession was seen as the greatest betrayal to the Jewish nation. A tax collector was seen as an apostate—someone cut off from God beyond saving.

Now, when we look at Jesus' calling of Matthew, we understand the outrage—not just of the scribes but the common people. Was Jesus out of His mind? Not only does He ask Matthew to join Him, He eats food bought with taxpayer money at Matthew's house. Jesus didn't have to raise the dead to get tongues wagging; He just had to accept dinner invitations from “untouchables” like Matthew.

Consider This: Matthew had been watching Jesus. We can assume this from Matthew's response. He left a lucrative business to follow Him. He wouldn't have done this if Jesus had been unknown to him. But Jesus had also been watching Matthew. The Bible says that Jesus “saw” Matthew. The word *saw* comes from the Greek word *theaomai*, “to behold” or “to view attentively.” Jesus looked beneath the exterior into the heart of the man himself. What does this teach us about the way

CONTINUED 

The Calling

Based on what we have looked at this week (and in previous weeks) about the call to discipleship, what special message can we find for ourselves in Hebrews 11:1?

The amazing thing about the response of these disciples to Christ's call was how little they must have known about what was coming, about what they were getting into by leaving everything and following the Master.

Though, as we saw this week, they had some biblical evidence at that time for believing that Jesus was the Messiah (*John 1:45*), a study of the Gospels reveals how much of the work and ministry of Jesus was still unknown to them, especially the most important part of His work: His death on the cross. As we know, right up until the end, and even after, they had grave misconceptions about what was to come.

Read Mark 10:35–40, John 18:10, and Acts 1:6. How do these texts help us grasp just how little they really understood?

Think about the advantages that we, as modern-day disciples, have over those early disciples, especially right at the time they were first called. Sure, they got to witness many incredible miracles, but at the same time they did not know what we know about the work, the mission, and the ultimate triumph of what Christ was to accomplish. And yet, despite this, they moved ahead in faith, the kind of faith revealed in Hebrews 11:1.

Are you weak in faith? Could it be the things you are watching, the things you are thinking about, the things you are devoting your time to? What proactive steps can you take, right now, that will help your faith grow?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Jesus views us?

■ *How does Jesus' calling of Levi Matthew reveal the all-inclusiveness of the gospel? What does this teach us about not judging others?*

► **STEP 3—Practice!**

Thought Questions:

- ❶ The first thing Andrew did after he spent time with Jesus was tell his brother that he had found Jesus. What principle is here for us about discipleship? Why is telling others one of the first things a disciple does?
- ❷ Jesus was in the crowd, and no one saw Him but John. Why did no one discern Him?
- ❸ Andrew brings his brother to Jesus, and Jesus “beheld” him. Why is this more than merely looking at something but a *looking within* the soul? What did Jesus see there? Three cock crows and three denials? And yet, He still told Peter to follow Him? What does this say to us about Jesus' acceptance of us?

Application Questions:

- ❶ Before asking them to leave their nets, Jesus gave them the assurance that God would supply all their needs. What promise is here for us in committing ourselves to the cause of Jesus as His disciples?
- ❷ Peter gave Jesus the use of his boat to preach the gospel. Jesus returned the gift by filling it with fish. What does this tell us about how Jesus rewards any sacrifice made for the gospel?

► **STEP 4—Apply!**

Discipleship Activity

Just as Andrew called Peter to come and see, Matthew responds to Jesus' calling by inviting tax collectors, and presumably other social outcasts, to come and see Jesus at a feast given in His honor. What does this reveal to us about discipleship and our task as disciples? Hold your own agape feast at your church. Invite those you know who don't know Jesus to come. Have each person invite a nonmember.

Further Study: Read Luke 5:1–11; Ellen G. White, “We Have Found the Messiah,” pp. 132–143; “The Call by the Sea,” pp. 244–252, in *The Desire of Ages*; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 352, 739, 909–911.

“Here were the four partners, in possession of the largest catch of fish they had ever brought to shore. At the moment of their greatest material success they abandoned their business. . . . Even in view of the higher significance of the miracle it must have taken a real measure of faith to leave their chosen occupation for an uncertain livelihood as followers of an itinerant teacher who, up to this time, had apparently had small success. . . . On the part of the disciples there was not the least hesitancy. The decision to dissolve their successful partnership as fishermen for a higher partnership with Jesus as fishers of men was made instantly and intelligently. They needed no time to think things over, no time to provide for the needs of their families. . . . They had launched out into the deep as ordinary fishermen; when they returned to shore they launched out by faith into the ‘deep’ to which Christ now called them, to fish for men.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 739.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** In what ways do you need to rearrange your priorities so that you can glorify God more effectively and be more consistent in your discipleship?
- 2** In reference to Thursday’s lesson, what are the advantages that we today have over the disciples? What are the things that we know about that they did not? Make a list of these things and bring them to class. Discuss what you each find and then ask yourselves: What are we doing with these advantages to help us grow in grace ourselves? How can these advantages help us go out and make disciples?
- 3** Dwell more on the question regarding the call of Levi Matthew. In class discuss the question of prejudice against certain groups. What about your church as a whole? What groups of people are deemed outcasts in your society? How can you minister to them? So often churches reflect the culture around them, including the prejudices of that culture. How open are you to the Matthews of your own society? What can you do to help your own church overcome this terrible symptom of fallen human nature?