



#4 The First Followers | Pastor Joe Wittwer | July, 5 2009

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

Jesus' first followers were fishermen. He called them to follow Him and promised to make them fishers of men, as we see in **Mark 1:16-20**: *"As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.' At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him."* Simon (later known as Peter), Andrew, James, and John had formed a small but successful partnership running their own fishing business. These were ordinary guys, not particularly religious and certainly not rich, powerful, well-connected, or highly educated. And they ended up changing the world. Jesus loves to do extraordinary things with ordinary people.

1. The Call: Come, follow me.

"Come, follow me" is a call to a relationship. Rather than a chance encounter, it's likely that Jesus was looking for these men and called them to join His team. They weren't volunteers, they were called, and there is a difference. A volunteer takes the initiative. But in a calling, it's the caller who takes the initiative, and the called one must respond one way or the other. We don't volunteer to be Christians. God takes the initiative, and we respond. **Ephesians 2:8-9** says, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast."* Furthermore, in **John 15:16** Jesus says, *"You didn't choose me. I choose you."* These first followers of Jesus knew they had been chosen, but they had the choice whether to follow or not, and some chose not. Remember the rich young ruler? *Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth"* (**Mark 10:21-22**). When Jesus calls people, it always requires leaving something. Likewise, the church isn't a volunteer community; it's a called community. Read **Romans 1:1, 5-7** together. We see in this passage that Paul was called by Jesus to be an apostle, he called people to follow Jesus—specifically Gentiles, the Roman Christians in particular were called to belong to Jesus, and they were called to be saints. Why is this "calling" important? If we volunteer, we take the initiative and do someone else a favor by offering ourselves, and if it doesn't work out as we hoped, we can quit. But if we're called, someone else has chosen us. We respond to that favor by giving our best. But if things don't work out as we hoped, we can't "un-call" ourselves, because we didn't call our self in the first place. Jesus' call to follow Him is a call to relationship: to learn from Him, to follow His lead and His example. Then Jesus gives the promise:

2. The Promise: I will make you fishers of men.

Jesus promised to make these men fishers of men: men who would fish for and catch people for God. This is a commission: Jesus is describing their new purpose or mission. But it is also a promise. As they followed Jesus, He would transform them and make them something new. Jesus changes us and makes us new and different. We don't transform ourselves. Consider **2 Corinthians 5:17-18**: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."* Jesus doesn't teach, "Clean up your act, get your life

together, make yourself into better persons, and then follow me.” Many people approach God this way through religion. Religion is self-improvement. But the gospel is the opposite. Jesus changes us so that our lives become contagious. Look at **2 Corinthians 2:14-16**: *“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.” To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?”* When we follow Jesus, we begin to think like Him, talk like Him, act like Him; we start to “smell” like Jesus. The gospel makes all of us missionaries sent by Jesus into our world to catch people for God and spread the aroma of Christ. The call is to follow; the promise to make us fishers of men. The call and promise demand a response.

3. The Response: They left everything and followed Him.

The disciples left everything and followed Jesus. They left their boats and nets and their families and crews and followed Jesus. Now according to **Mark 1:29-30**, Simon still had a home and a wife. And three years later, all four of the men came back to the lake and fished again, so they still owned their boats and nets. They didn’t abandon their homes, families and businesses and just walk away never to return. It’s reasonable to assume they left Zebedee, James and John’s father, in charge of the business, and he continued to fish and provide for their families. So while their response wasn’t a sudden and irresponsible abandonment of their duties, it was a leaving of their present way of life. They left behind good-paying jobs and a lucrative business to follow Jesus. Jesus had a new job for them, and that was catching people instead of fish. When Jesus calls people, it always requires a response, and it usually involves leaving something. Jesus says that nothing is a higher priority than following Him; nothing is a higher priority than the kingdom of God. And if something else is keeping us from following, we should leave it behind. For these men to follow Jesus, they had to leave their business behind. They couldn’t drag their boats and nets across Israel!

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. How did you first hear Jesus’ call (or do you have yet to hear it)? Whom did God use or who is He using to “fish” for you? How did you respond then, and how are you responding now?
2. Was it hard for you to realize that Jesus wasn’t asking you to change before answering His call, that He was accepting you how and where you were? What temptations or habitual sins left your life like so much mist on a sunny day when you started following Christ?
3. How do we effectively reveal to others that Christianity isn’t a *religion* where we change ourselves to meet God’s standards, but it’s a relationship in which we accept God’s love and grace so He can change us from the inside out?
4. What has Jesus asked you to leave behind to follow Him in the past, and what might He be asking you to leave behind today? What is He calling you to?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

- As part of your PBJ this week, consider what God has called you, through Jesus, to do.
- In last week’s application, you may have thought of someone still living in the “kingdom of me.” Have you reached out to them, or what would be a next step in doing so?
- Continue or start the 40/40 challenge, spending 40 minutes in PBJ each day for 40 days in a row. If you have lapsed, just get up and start again. 😊

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God for reaching out to us, for calling us, right where we are.
- Pray that God keeps people on your mind whom you can “fish” for!
- Pray that God would help you be faithful in taking up or continuing the 40/40 Challenge, and that He would help His word reside in and on your mind and heart.
- Offer any other praises or requests that arose during your discussion.