



Study Series

Follow Me: Week One

Follow, not believe: Marc Rader

Bible

Matthew 4:18-22 (NIV)

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. **19** "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." **20** At once they left their nets and followed him.

21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, **22** and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Sermon Summary

The call of the first disciples (Matthew 4:18-22) is curious on many counts. To begin with, it is curious who Jesus invites to follow Him. In Matthew 4:17 we are told that Jesus has begun his public ministry based on a call to repent because the kingdom of heaven – the reign and rule of God on earth as it is in heaven – is near. This is a global declaration with universal implications and, you'd expect, that Jesus would invite the movers and shakers of His world to join him; the priest, the influential teachers, the nobility and others in Jerusalem. Instead, He begins His ministry in Capernaum, a long way from the centre of the Jewish world, and with fishermen, certainly not movers and shakers who are well placed to change the world. Furthermore, discipleship in the first century began with the initiative of the disciple. They would find a teacher who they wanted to follow and apply to follow them. Jesus invites men, who have expressed no desire or initiative, to follow Him. This is curious.

It is not, however, the only curious thing in this narrative. The nature of the call is also curious. What does it mean to "fish for people"? Jesus never clarifies this in his teaching and, when you think about it, it is more of an image of judgement than salvation. When a fish is caught it isn't saved, it dies. On top of this ambiguity is the simple fact that Jesus has done nothing to prove Himself to the disciples. He hasn't healed anyone, cast out any demons, calmed any storms, nothing apart from beginning to preach. All of this makes it utterly remarkable that these men would drop everything and begin to follow Him. Curiouser and curiouser.

Finally, the invitation to follow Jesus has no conditions placed upon it apart from a willingness to begin to follow. Jesus makes no demands on belief, knowledge, or righteousness. In fact, when you read the gospels it is striking how long it takes the disciples to really understand who Jesus is and what that really means.

This curious fact is critical for it demonstrates that following Jesus is prior to belief. This makes sense of some of the other curious aspects of this text. Jesus didn't need to prove Himself immediately since they would learn about Him as they followed. He didn't need to give a clear, seven-point outline of what it meant to follow Him as this would become clear as they followed. He didn't need to find the "right" people because knowledge, righteousness, and faith would come. All they were called to do initially was follow, and that is all we are called to as well.

Now, it is important to state up front that following Jesus will bring about a crisis of faith. As we'll see in this series, His claims (e.g., to forgive sins) bring us to the point of asking

whether we believe this or not, but we do not need to believe in order to begin to follow. And even when we come to a point of belief we are not done following. Jesus wants followers, not mere believers. Belief modifies how we follow, but does not for an instant remove the call to continue to follow Jesus.

This is the basis of all that we will examine in this series; that anyone can begin to follow Jesus and that belief doesn't absolve us from continuing to follow.

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

Have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: Understanding following as learning life from someone or something, what is the difference between following, and belief in that same person or thing? Feel free to think more broadly than the context of faith. Share your reflections with the group.
2. Read Matthew 4:18-22 aloud. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that seemed to stand out. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain **why** they stood out – this is about creating space for often familiar passages to say something new to us, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to a word or phrase, take time, and share what you've been lead to.
3. What do you think "fishing for people" might mean? (See Matthew 13:47-50; Ezekiel 29:4; Amos 4:2 for other uses of this metaphor in the context of judgment)
4. What are some reasons we might identify as disqualifying us from following Jesus? What are the reasons we might disqualify others?
5. Doubt and belief (or faith), are two sides of the same coin. Doubt often provides us with an opportunity to exercise faith. In the light of this, how might we respond to those who have doubts, in their journey following Jesus?
6. As a church we want to invite everyone to follow Jesus. If some "fishermen" of our day begin to follow Jesus and spend time with us, what sorts of patterns, behaviours, language, and practices will they find among us? Are there things we need to do to be more consistent as followers ourselves?

7. At some point the claims of Jesus will bring us to a point of crisis, where we have to decide what we believe about Him. Have you experienced this crisis of faith and what did it look like?

Prayer

Jesus invites us to learn life from Him, to follow Him. Belief modifies the course this following takes, but the following never stops. Take some time to pray for each other, perhaps in renewing your commitment to follow Jesus, or in leading you through a crisis of faith. Ask God to lead you by His Holy Spirit, who is our guide as we seek to follow Jesus.