

The Essentials of Disciple-Making
Session Seven: The How-To's of Disciple-Making
Commentary

Matthew 4:18-22

4:18–22. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were fishermen (all involved in a family business) living in Capernaum or nearby Bethsaida (see John 1:44). This was apparently also the home of Matthew at the time of his calling (9:1, 9), and of Philip and possibly Nathanael (John 1:43–45). The fishing profession in that day probably carried with it the same kind of social stigma that “common laborer” does today. Three of the four (Peter, James, and John) would become Jesus’ closest earthly friends. And Andrew played a significant role in his ministry more than once (Mark 13:3; John 1:40; 6:8; 12:22).

Matthew left his readers with the impression that this was Jesus’ first encounter with these four men. However, John recorded that some of the Twelve (at least Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael) had been with Jesus during his earlier ministry (John 1:35–51; 2:2, 12, 17; 3:22; 4:1–2, 27–33). Jesus had known his disciples for some time and had even seen them in ministry situations. Thus, their decision to follow him was not hastily made.

However, this does not decrease the significance of their commitment. In fact, quite the opposite. These men, in well-reasoned decisions, left both career and family to follow Jesus. And their confidence in him was such that, when he called, they all came at once (4:20) or immediately (4:22). They literally dropped their nets and left the boats in which they were standing. James and John left their father standing with his boats.

When Jesus said, Come, follow me (4:19), he was calling these men to a new career. In keeping with his skill as a teacher, he used terminology that would inspire them because of its relationship to their life experience. These men knew how to fish—for fish. So they had some concept of the task to which he was calling them. However, even though they had some familiarity with the concept of fishing, Jesus would still need to transform them into fishers of men. And that is the point of most of the teaching that follows, including the Sermon on the Mount—Jesus taught his disciples! He trained the Twelve whose names would one day mark the foundation “stones” (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14) of the New Jerusalem!

You will notice as Matthew’s Gospel unfolds that, while Jesus did not ignore the crowds, he was primarily engaged in teaching the Twelve. Even when he ministered to the thousands, it was in the context of teaching the Twelve. For example, the feeding of the five thousand, while compassionately providing food for thousands, was about his attempt to impact the Twelve (Mark 6:30–44).

The one condition necessary to their becoming fishers of men was to follow me. Packed into this two-word command are many implications. Jesus was saying, “Live with me and learn by

watching me. Own my values and priorities. Learn to become passionate for the things I live for. And follow my example by doing the ministry I have come to do.”¹

Luke 9:1-6

9:1–2. Again Luke gives no details about the time or place of this significant event in Jesus’ ministry. One day Jesus called the twelve disciples and sent them on the most important part of their ministry training. (Note the continuation of such training and commissioning in 10:1–11; 22:35–38; 24:48–49; Acts 1:6–8.) They had seen him at work ministering to people. Now it was their turn. Just as he had come preaching the kingdom of God (see 4:43; cf. 6:20; 7:28; 8:1, 10), so they would go preaching the same message. As he had so often healed the sick (see 4:18–19, 38–40; 5:12–13, 15, 17–25; 6:6–10, 19; 7:1–10; 8:43–55), so would they; and as he had cast out demons and evil spirits (4:41; 7:21; 8:2, 27–36), they would also.

What a task they faced! They knew the response that Jesus’ preaching and healing had received, bringing curious crowds and indignant religious leaders. Could they expect any different treatment? And how could they heal and exorcise? They were simple lay people with no formal training. Simple yes, but without training? Oh, no. They had been with the Rabbi, with Jesus the Master Teacher and Healer. And now he gave them the same authority he had to carry out his mission to points he would never reach.

9:3. They went as he did—without material provisions (see 8:3; 9:58). As they trusted God for authority and power to heal and exorcise, so they must trust him for daily strength and provisions. As the kingdom of God belonged to the poor (6:20), so they must display their own poverty.

9:4. Each town offered different circumstances. Again they were to accept what they got, not searching around for the best house or the kindest, most generous host. The first place they found to stay in a town was to be their residence until they left.

9:5. Rejection awaited the disciples—the same kind of rejection Jesus experienced. Entire villages would refuse to accept the visiting disciples. Jesus made provision for this, too. The disciples were not to see or feel this as personal rejection or as personal failure. They were to see people rejecting God’s kingdom. When this happened, they were to symbolize God’s rejection of the village. Shaking the dust off their feet showed that they separated themselves entirely from every particle that had to do with the village.

9:6. What Jesus said, the disciples did. Healing undoubtedly included casting out demons as well. Here is the mission God’s people are to follow from Christ’s first earthly appearance until his last. Christ’s followers hit the highway with the good news of the kingdom. They invite people to accept the good news and become part of the kingdom. Christ’s disciples are interested in far more than simple evangelistic success. They are concerned for the people who are lost. They show such concern in a concrete manner, curing physical illnesses. Such curing

¹ Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).

powers show the world the power of God to heal the physically sick and the spiritually destitute.²

John 4:13-15

4:13–15. The water that the woman had come to draw had to be obtained with hard labor in the sun. If the refreshing water of which this stranger spoke could be made available without all that effort, so much the better. And even that dimension of comparison is important in these verses. Jesus pointed out that the spiritual water of which he spoke is not something for which one strives in difficulty and struggle. Rather, a person receives it as it bubbles up from within.

People who depend only on physical water will be continuously thirsty. Either ignorant or resentful of their God-implanted need for spiritual water, they will always look in the wrong direction for satisfaction. Jeremiah had proclaimed this truth centuries earlier: “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jer. 2:13).

What could the woman have meant by her request in verse 15? Deliberate sarcasm? “If you’re better than Jacob, make my life easier by producing this amazing water of which you speak.” Sincere confusion? “I have no idea what you’re talking about, but if you can channel a stream into our village so I don’t have to come out here and get the water, I’m all for it.” Caustic selfishness? “I have no idea what you’re talking about, but if you can produce some kind of water in some magical way, let’s see it.”

Perhaps we can best see here a sincere but confused appeal from one whose life must have been filled with social suffering. I would link her response with Nicodemus’s words in John 3:9: “How can this be?”³

² Trent C. Butler, *Luke*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).

³ Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).