

Session 1

THE CALL

Matthew 4:18-22; John 9:35-38; Acts 9:1-20

Memory Verse

*“Follow me,” he told them, “and I will make you fish for people.”
Immediately they left their nets and followed him.*

– MATTHEW 4:19-20, CSB



The Call

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Jesus changes lives. This is true in the stories we read in Scripture, and it's just as true today. When we answer His call, He transforms our lives for the better.

CALL TO ACTION: We fuel a disciple-making and church multiplication movement in Middle Tennessee and beyond. This movement will share the gospel with millions, engage community needs by the thousands, and build a network of 100+ healthy churches.


Did you know that Theodor Geisel (you might better know him as Dr. Seuss) was rejected by 27 publishers before he found one who would publish his first children's book, *And to Think that I Saw It on Mulberry Street*? In a world where so many of us grew up reading Dr. Seuss's books (or watching their movie or TV adaptations, new iterations of which are still being released decades later), this seems unfathomable. Luckily for Theodor, and us, a chance encounter got him that first contract.

The story goes like this. After being rejected for the twenty-seventh time, Dr. Seuss walked along the New York sidewalks, ready to give up, but on Madison Avenue, he happened to bump into an old friend from Dartmouth, Mike McClintock. That morning, Mike had started working at Vanguard Press as an editor in the children's section, and he helped Theodor land the contract that would result in his first published work.

Dr. Seuss would later say, "If I had been going down the other side of Madison Avenue, I'd be in the dry-cleaning business today." That chance encounter changed Dr. Seuss's life, launching a literary career that is still reverberating today.¹

Today we're going to look at some other life-changing encounters, except they weren't by chance. They were by divine design, and they were eternal life changing.

 When you think of life-changing moments, what comes to mind?

 Have you ever experienced a moment that changed the course of your life? What happened?

Session Summary

Today we're talking about the ultimate life-changing moment: an encounter with Jesus.


When Jesus encountered Peter, Andrew, James, and John working on the Sea of Galilee, they dropped everything and follow Him *immediately*.

When Saul the persecutor encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was struck blind for several days before God sent someone to revive him. When he recovered, he *immediately* began proclaiming truth publicly: Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah.

When a blind man encountered Jesus as He passed by, Jesus first healed his physical ailment (life-long blindness), and second, revealed Himself as the Messiah. Once the man learned who Jesus was, he immediately believed in Jesus and worshiped Him.

In every case, a life was changed forever, for the better.

1. The Disciples Encounter Jesus (Matthew 4:18-22)

 In this passage, Jesus called and the men responded. Why is it important that we recognize when Jesus calls and respond appropriately?



What stands out about how Peter, Andrew, James, and John reacted to Jesus?

Today we're talking about the ultimate life-changing moment: an encounter with Jesus. In our first passage, we're studying Matthew's account of Jesus calling His first disciples: Peter, Andrew, James, and John.


As Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee, two sets of brothers were hard at work fishing, Peter and Andrew and James and John. Jesus saw them and issued a command: Follow me. This type of command would have been understood as a call to follow a rabbi permanently.² When Jesus called out to them, they came *immediately*. They recognized Jesus's authority, left their trade and their family, and followed Jesus.

Luke's gospel records this story with a little more detail. In Luke's account, Jesus performed a miracle before calling Peter. Peter had been on the water fishing all night and caught nothing, but he obeyed when Jesus told him to head into deep water and try one more time for a catch. The result? An impossible number of fish. So many fish that the nets began to tear, and the boat began to sink. They had so many fish that they needed help bringing them in. Luke also recorded that they "left everything, and followed him" (Luke 5:11).

As with many things during His earthly ministry, Jesus turned the normal rabbi/disciple model upside down. Usually, a disciple would continue working in their trade, but Jesus knew His disciples needed full-time training for an even more important trade than their current one: fishing for people, the kingdom work He knew lay ahead for them, even after He ascended into heaven. A disciple also usually picked their rabbi, but, in this case, Jesus hand-picked His disciples, calling them to follow Him.³


What was it about Jesus that caused them to drop everything to follow Him? They followed immediately, and *their life was changed permanently*.

When we have an encounter with Jesus, our lives are changed permanently too. Just like Peter, Andrew, James, and John, when we say yes to God's call on our lives, that is the first step in an important and fulfilling journey with the Lord.

 **Application: Put yourselves in the shoes of the disciples. What hesitations do you have in responding when Jesus calls? Why is it always worth it?**

2. Saul Encounters Jesus (Acts 9:1-20)

 **What is unexpected about the encounter with Jesus recorded in this passage?**

 **What's significant about what the Lord said to and about Saul in this passage? Why is that important?**

This passage recounts the story of a life-changing encounter of another follower of Jesus, Saul. You may better know him as the apostle Paul, whose letters and life stories still inform and bless believers like you and me today. Just like Peter, Andrew, James, and John, Saul had an encounter with Jesus that changed his life forever.

At this time, Saul was ravaging the church (Acts 8:3), “still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (v. 1). Saul was actively persecuting followers of Jesus. He had his sights set on the church and they were in very real danger of being arrested and brought to prison in Jerusalem. “The Way” (v. 2) was a name for followers of Jesus. Not only was he on a mission root out and stop Jesus's followers, but Saul had the powerful backing of the high priest.

In the eyes of men, Saul might seem like the very last person God would have a use, but as always, God works in ways that seem unlikely to us, and God had big plans for Saul. As Saul was nearing Damascus on his mission to stop the spread of

Christianity, he had an encounter with the living God that would change the course of his life permanently (and the course of the church, as per God's plan). He was blinded by a "light from heaven" (v. 3), and, falling to the ground, heard Jesus's voice.

It was here, lying on the ground on the road to Damascus, that Saul was first confronted with the truth that Jesus was not, as he had previously thought, a blasphemer who must be stopped, but the Son of God. Stories like this still exist today. God in His divine goodness can (and does!) make Himself known to His people in undeniable ways, all for His glory. As with Saul, those powerful moments are an invitation to greater faith and purpose God has planned for us.

After Jesus spoke, Saul set about doing what Jesus had instructed. He got up and went into the city where he would be told what he must do (v. 6). When Saul got up, he couldn't see anything, so his companions led him into Damascus, where "He was unable to see for three days and did not eat or drink." (v.9)

This event marked a dramatic shift in Saul's world view. He had previously been so convinced that Jesus had been a blasphemer that he personally set out to do what he could to stop the spread of "The Way," and now, he was faced with the uncomfortable truth that he was wrong. This is a hard pill for anyone to swallow.

After three days of blindness, God had a plan to bring Saul out of the darkness, and into the light (and kingdom work) via Ananias. Ananias had a very relatable reaction when God told him he was to go and visit Saul (remember, Saul has been ravaging the church). When he hesitated, God confirmed that Saul was His "chosen instrument" (v. 15) to take the gospel to the "Gentiles, kings, and Israelites" (v. 15). Saul had previously caused the suffering of many believers, but he would be the one suffering for the sake of the gospel soon (v. 16).

Immediately, Saul set about proclaiming the good news (v. 20). After their encounter with Jesus, Peter, Andrew, James, and John immediately followed Him. After his encounter with Jesus, Saul did the same, immediately proclaiming the truth.

As with Saul, an encounter with Jesus changes your life forever. Peter, Andrew, James, and John's lives were all changed because they left life as they knew it to follow the Messiah. Saul's life took a 180-degree turn. After this encounter on the

road to Damascus, his whole life changed. He went from ravaging the church to proclaiming the message he previously thought was blasphemous. An encounter with Jesus has the power to completely shift our worldview.

? Application: How does Saul's story give you hope for those who seem "too far gone" to be used by God?

3. A Blind Man Encounters Jesus (John 9:35-38)

? What does this passage (and the preceding verses) tell us about the kind of people Jesus uses?

? Why is it important that we share how Jesus has impacted our lives with others as this man did?

The verses are an excerpt from a larger account of a miraculous healing Jesus performed. John recorded that Jesus passed by and saw a man who was blind from birth and then proceeded to heal him. Jesus saw this man, who had a need that it was within Jesus's power to meet, and Jesus met it. He made some mud, spread it on this man's eyes, and told him to "wash in the pool of Siloam" (v. 7). After the man obeyed, he came away healed. Jesus's healing changed the entire course of this man's life. Thanks to Jesus, he could see. His life was forever changed, but Jesus wasn't done yet.

When the Pharisees got wind of the healing Jesus had performed, they brought the blind man in for questioning. This was a particularly offensive event for them because the healing took place on the Sabbath, and the manner of healing Jesus chose to work through violated Sabbath laws according to tradition.

The healed man reported everything he knew, and when they still questioned him, had this wonderful response: "Whether or not he's a sinner, I don't know. One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I can see!" (John 9:25).

His brief encounter with Jesus had changed his entire life, and the man defended Jesus, suggesting that Jesus was from God (a point they were arguing against, reasoning that He could not be from God and also willingly break Sabbath laws). For his defense of Jesus, the Pharisees threw the man out.

This is where our passage picks up. Recently thrown out from the synagogue, Jesus sought him out again, a beautiful picture of the Good Shepherd, seeking out the one (Matthew 18:12-14). Except this time, He had an even greater gift for this man: the gospel message. The Messiah had come, and this man believed and worshiped Him. Jesus brought him out of physical darkness from blindness, but out of spiritual darkness too.

This account gives us a tangible way to model Jesus's behavior: when we see a need, and it is within our means to meet, we should do so. It also teaches us an important lesson about evangelism: when we meet the needs of those around us, we open the door wider to win hearts for the gospel. The adage is true: "People don't care what you know until they know how much you care." People generally don't want to hear the gospel from someone who doesn't show care to those they encounter.

This passage also gives us a beautiful example of the power of Jesus to change a life. Jesus still heals today, both through modern medicine and through modern miracles that confound physicians, but He also changes lives through healings of different kinds: emotional healing; the healing of broken relationships; healing from addiction. This is the type of impact Jesus can make on those who don't know Him yet, and He can (and wants!) use you to make that initial introduction.



Application: How could we be better attuned to needs in our community, and how might we use that to seek open doors to share the gospel?

Conclusion

❓ How did you first encounter Jesus? What happened? How has saying “yes” to following Jesus changed your life?

❓ How is our group and church meant to stir one another up toward greater faith and growth in following Jesus?

❓ How can we use stories of our encounters with Jesus to tell others about Him?

Memorize

“Follow me,” he told them, “and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

- Matthew 4:19-20, CSB

References

¹Christopher Klein, “10 Things You Might Not Know about Dr. Seuss,” <https://www.history.com/articles/9-things-you-may-not-know-about-dr-seuss>.

²Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Matthew: 2025 Edition,” <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/html/matthew/matthew.htm>.

³Ibid.