WITHIN REACH · WEEK 1

Called to Follow, Sent to Fish

August 16, 2026 · Matthew 4:18–22 · Pastor Bart Denny

THE BIG IDEA

Before Jesus sends us toward people, He calls us to Himself, and as we follow Him, He turns our hearts toward the people He loves.

This guide works two ways. On your own, take one section a day through the week, or use the daily readings near the end. In a group, plan on about an hour: read the passage aloud, talk through the background, then choose the questions that fit your group. Nobody has to answer every one.

Read **Matthew 4:18–22** at least twice, once quietly and once aloud. If you have time, read **Matthew 4:12–25** to see what comes just before and after. This was the first week of Within Reach, a series about the people God has already placed around us. Over the coming weeks we kept asking one question, "Who's your ONE?" But this first Sunday started with a question that comes before it: Who am I following?

Where this passage sits

Matthew has just told us about Jesus' baptism (3:13–17) and His forty days of testing in the wilderness (4:1–11). After John the Baptist is put in prison, Jesus moves to Capernaum, a fishing town on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, and begins preaching: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (4:17).

The very next thing He does is call people to come with Him. Before the Sermon on the Mount, before a single healing in Matthew's account, Jesus gathers disciples. Matthew wants us to see that the kingdom Jesus announces isn't a set of ideas He hands out from a distance. It forms a people around Him.

Right after these calls, Matthew summarizes Jesus' ministry: teaching, proclaiming the good news and healing (4:23). He repeats almost the same words in 9:35, and then Jesus sends the Twelve out (10:1–5). The fishermen called here in chapter 4 are the same men He'll send in chapter 10.

A few words worth a closer look

"Sea of Galilee" (4:18)

A freshwater lake about 13 miles long, the center of a busy fishing industry. For Peter and Andrew this was an ordinary workday.

"Casting a net" (4:18)

A circular throw net, tossed by hand from the shore or a boat. James and John, a few verses later, are mending the larger nets used from boats (4:21).

"Come, follow Me" (4:19)

Literally, "Come after Me." Students in that day usually chose a rabbi to study under. Here the rabbi chooses them.

"I will send you out to fish for people" (4:19)

Older translations say, "I will make you fishers of men." Either way, Jesus promises to do something in them before He does anything through them.

"At once" (4:20, 22)

Matthew stresses how quickly they respond. James and John leave not only the boat but their father, Zebedee (4:22).

"Disciple."

The word means a learner or apprentice: someone who learns by staying close to a teacher, not just by studying what the teacher said.

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1 Jesus calls us first to Himself

READ Matthew 4:18–20, Mark 3:13–15 and John 15:4–5

Notice where Jesus starts. Before He tells Peter and Andrew what they'll do, He tells them whom they'll follow: "Come, follow Me." He doesn't hand them a program or a strategy. He calls them to Himself.

Pastor Bart admitted that he can get so focused on what Jesus wants him to do next that he moves too quickly past what Jesus asks of him first. He likes knowing the plan and the next step, so his attention naturally jumps to "I will send you out." But Jesus doesn't start there.

You see the same order when Jesus appoints the Twelve. Mark says He chose them "that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14). First, be with Him. Then, be sent by Him. And in John 15 Jesus says, "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. . . . Apart from me you can do nothing" (15:4–5). He never pictured disciples who would get their instructions and then go accomplish the mission on their own.

That's worth hearing, because the Christian life can gradually turn into a list: believe the right things, go to church, read your Bible, serve, give, live right, tell people about Jesus. All of those are good. But it's possible to do a surprising amount of religious activity while losing sight of the Person at the center of it. Being a disciple means more than believing true things about Jesus, though that matters, and more than trying to keep His teaching, though obedience is part of it. A disciple follows Jesus.

Pastor Bart compared it to learning golf from his high school coach. You can read about golf, watch it on TV, even study videos about your grip. But eventually somebody who knows the game stands beside you and says, "Move your feet a little. Hold the club this way. Watch what I do." You're not just learning information. You're learning from a person. That's closer to what Jesus means: stay close enough to watch Him, listen to Him, and let His priorities and His heart begin to shape yours.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. When you think about "following Jesus," what comes to mind first: things to believe, things to do, or a Person to be with? Why?

2. Pastor Bart admitted he tends to jump ahead to "what's next." Where do you see that tendency in yourself?

3. Read Mark 3:14. Why do you think "be with Him" comes before "be sent"?

4. Think of something you learned from a person rather than from a book. What made the difference?

5. What does it look like, practically, to "remain" in Jesus during an ordinary week?

6. Which items on the "list" (church, Bible reading, serving, giving) are easiest for you to do without really thinking about Jesus?

2 Jesus forms the people He calls

READ Matthew 4:19, Matthew 26:69–75, Acts 4:13–20 and 2 Corinthians 3:18

The promise inside Jesus' call is "I will make you." Jesus isn't just giving Peter and Andrew a job. He's telling them that following Him will change them.

And they needed changing. Peter will step out of a boat in faith and then panic at the wind (Matthew 14:28–31). He'll confess that Jesus is the Messiah and then rebuke Jesus for talking about the cross (16:16, 22). On the night Jesus is arrested, he'll promise never to leave Him and then, before morning, deny three times that he even knows Him, calling down curses to make the point (26:69–75). Jesus knew all of that when He said, "Follow Me." He didn't wait for Peter to become a finished product before calling him.

That's encouraging, because one of the easiest reasons to avoid conversations about Jesus is to tell ourselves, *I'm not ready. I don't know enough. What if somebody asks a question I can't answer? What if I say the wrong thing?* Jesus didn't stand beside the Sea of Galilee waiting for fully formed apostles to show up. He called fishermen, and then He formed them.

Look at where Peter ends up. The man who once denied knowing Jesus stands before the same kind of authorities and says, "As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). The leaders notice that he and John are "unschooled, ordinary men" and realize "that these men had been with Jesus" (4:13). Peter didn't get there overnight. Jesus formed him, and the Holy Spirit empowered him. Paul describes the same work in every believer: we "are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

So this series was never meant to be mainly about evangelism techniques. Pastor Bart is all for training: learning to listen, to explain the gospel clearly and to answer questions. If a tool like the Romans Road helps you remember how

to share the good news, use it. But the deeper question is whether Jesus is making us more like Himself. Spend enough time around someone and you start picking up their phrases and habits; parents see it in their kids all the time. As we follow Jesus, His compassion, His patience, His truthfulness and His concern for people should begin showing up in us. Not perfectly, as Peter's story makes clear, but honestly.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of Peter's failures do you relate to most? What does it mean to you that Jesus called him anyway?
2. What reasons do you give yourself for not talking about Jesus? Be honest.
3. Read Acts 4:13. What made the difference for Peter and John? What could that look like for you?
4. What's one way you've seen Jesus change you over the years, even slowly?
5. Why is technique alone not enough when it comes to sharing our faith?
6. What would you like people to "pick up" from you because you've been with Jesus?

3 Following Jesus turns us toward people

READ Matthew 4:19, Matthew 9:35–36, Matthew 28:18–20 and Romans 10:14

Jesus takes something Peter and Andrew already understood, fishing, and gives it a new direction. They knew nets, boats, water and weather. Now, Jesus says in effect, people will become their great concern.

We should be careful here. Peter and Andrew had a unique role as apostles. Jesus isn't asking every Christian to leave the farm, the factory, the classroom or the office. But the Gospels show that even when Jesus doesn't call people to leave home, He still sends them, often straight back home to tell their own people what God has done (Mark 5:18–20; John 4:28–30). And by the end of Matthew, the risen Jesus tells His disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations, . . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (28:19–20). The apostles' calling was unique, but their basic identity as followers of Jesus is the same as ours. We're disciples too.

Jesus doesn't teach us to think of people as catches, numbers or trophies. If we want to know what He means by fishing for people, we only have to watch Him. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them" (Matthew 9:36). He stops under a tree and calls Zacchaeus by name (Luke 19:5). He sits at a well and talks with a Samaritan woman others avoided (John 4). Jesus notices people, not just crowds.

Church language can label people quickly: "the lost," "the unchurched." Those words aren't wrong, but nobody you know thinks of himself as "the unchurched." He has a name. She has a story. And the closer we follow Jesus, the harder it becomes to pass people by without seeing them.

Most of our lives happen outside the church building, at work and school, with family and neighbors, in waiting rooms and on bleachers. Each of us knows people most of the congregation will never meet. We don't have to manufacture a mission field. We already live in one. The question is whether we see it, and whether we see people the way Jesus does instead of as projects. People can tell when they're being treated like a project. Jesus loved people, listened to them, told them the truth, sometimes challenged them and sometimes comforted them. Our part is simpler than we fear: pay attention, care, pray, and when God opens a door, be willing to speak. It's God who draws people and the Holy Spirit who opens their eyes. Jesus saves, not us.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Where does your life regularly put you in contact with people who don't know Jesus?
2. Why do you think Jesus sent some people straight home instead of asking them to travel with Him?
3. What's the difference between treating someone as a person and treating them as a project? How can people tell?
4. Which church words ("lost," "unchurched," "seekers") have you used? What do they help with, and what do they miss?
5. Read Romans 10:14. Who told you about Jesus? Were they a stranger or someone you already knew?
6. Pastor Bart said, "We don't have to manufacture a mission field." What does that mean for your ordinary week?

Who's your ONE?

READ Matthew 4:19 and Colossians 4:2–6

The assignment from this first Sunday was simple: identify your ONE. That's one person God has already placed within your reach who, as far as you know, isn't following Jesus. A friend, a neighbor, a coworker, a family member, someone you see regularly but haven't thought about this way before.

If a name came to mind while you read this guide, don't brush it aside. If no one came to mind, don't invent a name just to finish the assignment. Ask God: "Lord, who have You placed within my reach?" Then pay attention this week. We can see the same people so often that we almost stop seeing them, the way you can drive past a house a hundred times until someone riding with you points it out.

When God brings someone to mind, start praying for that person by name. Pray that God is already at work in their life. Pray for an open door. Ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom to know when to speak and when to listen, and ask God to work on your heart too. Before your ONE becomes someone you talk to about Jesus, they ought to become someone you regularly talk to Jesus about.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Did a name come to mind this week? What do you know about that person's story, and what don't you know?

2. What would change if you prayed for that person by name every day?

3. How can your group pray for one another's ONEs without making anyone a project?

Through the week

☐	**Monday**	Matthew 4:12–22. Notice what Jesus says first. Ask Him to help you follow Him more closely this week.
☐	**Tuesday**	Mark 3:13–15 and John 15:1–8. Spend a few minutes simply being with Jesus before asking Him for anything.
☐	**Wednesday**	Matthew 26:69–75 and John 21:15–19. Thank Jesus that He doesn't give up on the people He calls.
☐	**Thursday**	Acts 4:1–20 and 2 Corinthians 3:18. Ask God to make you more like Jesus in one specific way.
☐	**Friday**	Matthew 9:35–38 and Matthew 28:16–20. Ask God, "Who have You placed within my reach?" and write down the name He brings to mind.

Try this

Write the name of your ONE on a card or in your phone. Under it, write Jesus' words: "Come, follow Me, and I will send you out to fish for people." Each day this week, pray first that you'd follow Jesus closely, and then pray for that person by name.

Close in prayer

Father, thank You for calling us to Yourself. Thank You that Jesus doesn't wait for us to have everything figured out before He says, "Follow Me," and that as we follow, He keeps forming us. Help us stay close to Him, and shape our hearts, our priorities and the way we see the people around us. Holy Spirit, show each of us the person You've already placed within our reach. Keep us from treating people like projects. Teach us to love them as Jesus does, and give us courage to speak about the hope we have in Him when You open a door. Jesus, we want to follow You. Form us. Send us. In Your name, amen.

Notes

Watch the sermon online

Scan the code or visit **pathwaywes.com/sermons/called-to-follow-sent-to-fish** for the video and this guide.

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