

sample sermon

A CALL FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE

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Focal Passage:
Matthew 4:18-22

Introduction

An ordinary man named Aeschines once came to Socrates. "I am a poor man," Aeschines said. "I have nothing else, but I give you myself." "Do you not see," said Socrates, "that you are giving me the most precious thing of all?" What Jesus needs is ordinary folk who will give themselves to Him. He can do anything with people like that. (Barclay's Daily Study Bible - NT)

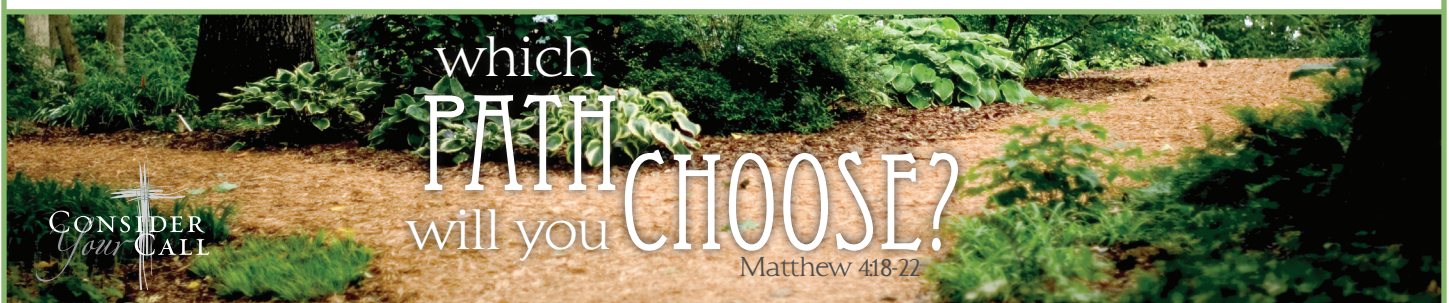
Ordinary people giving themselves. People just like me, just like you. As an older child, I trusted Jesus Christ to be my Savior. Over the next ten years or so, I didn't quite "take up my cross daily and follow" (Luke 9:23). Life was changing. My family moved from the city into the county. My friends changed. Sadly, I didn't always please God nor those around me with many decisions I made during those years.

Some ten years later, I finally allowed Jesus to be my Lord. I invested in Him as I had never done before and allowed Him to invest in me. I knew the importance of being in church and became regular. I knew the importance of reading my Bible, understanding responsible tithing, and involving myself in the life of the local church. I became involved in the youth group as a leader, all the while learning and growing in my walk with God. It was exciting to have this newfound relationship with God and the church.

I knew I was doing the right thing in my life. At a spiritual level, there was satisfaction I'd never known, peace that never before existed. I felt good about the decision to allow Jesus Christ to be not only my Savior, but my Lord, as well.

At the same time there was an unsettledness. Certainly not about the decision I'd made to "get right with God," but still, an unrest in my soul. Most scary was this glimmer of thought that I was to serve as a minister. I moved from that as quickly as it kept prodding my mind. Why would that be happening to me? I had a great job in the area of quality control, a job that would allow me to move up the ladder of success. My life's direction and career were set.

I could never see myself as a minister. If anything, being quiet and withdrawn, I never wished to stand out for any reason. I certainly could not see myself standing in front of a crowd. And yet, that glimmer of thought kept coming back. I suppose that was part of the struggle of wondering if God was calling me into ministry – as a career. Who, me? I'm just an ordinary person. Important people become ministers. Smart people become ministers. People who can stand up in front of others become ministers. People that want to do ministry become ministers.



Jesus Calls Ordinary People to Follow.

I like the fact that the men Jesus talked to were just ordinary. They were regular people, making a living as fishermen, living life one day at a time. There was nothing especially different about them, nothing that pointed them out above others. I bet they didn't even like to be around crowds. Why else would you spend your days on the water cramped up in a little boat with only one or two other persons around?

Think with me for a moment. These men were career fishermen. Their lives and livelihood were set. They had the good fortune of having direction for their lives. They probably grew up in the family business, so they were in familiar territory. They certainly do not appear to be the scholarly type, and there is nothing that speaks of their great influence or leadership in the community. There's nothing that speaks of great wealth, or even a particular level of social standing. These watermen were just simple people living simple lives, doing what they knew best, catching fish. They were people just like you, just like me. Ordinary.

There is something significant about those whom Jesus called to follow. He always seemed to use the most unlikely people to accomplish great things. For example, we know that five of the twelve were fishermen. We know that Matthew was a tax collector – one of the most despised occupations of that day. Matthew chose to abandon a corrupt and profitable way of life in order to follow Jesus. They were a variety of simple, everyday people that Jesus asked to follow him most closely.

That is what God uses. Ordinary people. Just like you. Just like me. In Acts 4:13, the Bible tells us that, "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (NIV).

Albert Einstein was just an ordinary person who went on to do extraordinary things in his life. He was born in 1879 to a poor Jewish merchant. As a young child, he was shy and slow in learning. He was even examined by specialists to see if he was normal. In school, math became a stumbling block. As a teenager, he failed an entrance exam at a school in Switzerland only to have to take the test again, this time with success. Einstein eventually went on to receive his doctorate from the University of Zurich, overcoming those learning disabilities as well as his shyness. We all know that he became one of the greatest minds of all time. Just an ordinary person who went on to do extraordinary things in life.

The Albert Einsteins of life do not come around too often. However, ordinary people are all around. In fact, you are exactly the kind of person that God uses to accomplish extraordinary things for Him.

Paul tells us about the ordinary becoming extraordinary: "Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were influential. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong" (1 Corinthians 1:26-27) (NIV). It makes sense then that Jesus would extend an invitation to these men. It seems that Paul describes them well. Paul describes you, too.

The Response to the Invitation to Follow.

Holly is a second-year college student. Over the last few years, she has been seeking God's specific direction in her life. Having finally responded to God's call on her life, she writes, "One thing I can say right now is that when God calls, you better listen whether you are scared or not. God has taught me that slowly. It is a slow process. I always looked up to strong courageous men and women in the Bible and said I want(ed) to be like them. I thought nothing scared them. I could never be like them. The more I study and hear about them, the more I saw they were no one special. *The only difference between me and them was that they responded (italics mine).*"

Peter and Andrew, James and John were already disciples of John the Baptist, as well as Jesus (John 1:35-42), but now they are called upon to specifically leave their business and follow Jesus in travel and in work. They promptly accepted the call and challenge.

They knew he could be trusted. They were willing to follow him immediately. They must have been thoroughly convinced that following him would change their lives forever. Following and trusting Jesus will change your life forever, too.

Jesus' call motivated these men to get up and leave their jobs – midstream. They didn't need a committee meeting to determine what to do. They didn't make excuses about why this wasn't a good time in their lives. They didn't blame their inability to speak, as Moses did. They didn't stumble and stutter and make excuses why they were not qualified. They left at once and followed.

I love the story of the three half-hearted followers in Luke 9:57-62, I guess because it reminds me so much of me. These men were confronted with the reality of following Jesus. The first man was ready and willing to follow Jesus wherever he went, but Jesus makes it clear that one must count the cost. The way can be difficult. Following obediently and remaining faithful is serious business. Jesus knew there will be some that do not take seriously the call, and the implication of the story is that this man did not follow. The third man tells Jesus that he is ready to follow but has some unfinished business back home – he needs to tell his family goodbye. Who knows where that distraction will lead? The security of home is a difficult thing to leave. The influence of others around us can often lead us to remain where we are in life. That will sometimes keep us from following as we should.

The second man, different from the other two, is asked specifically by Jesus to follow, just as with the disciples. This man also shares an excuse, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father" (Luke 9:59). There were other things to do. There were other things on his mind, distractions that resulted in no response to follow.

Jesus calls each of us who are believers to follow him, daily (Mark 8:34). That becomes the universal call for believers. There is that call to belong to God; that is, to become people who have as our identity children of God belonging to the family of God. We also have the call to be God's people who exist to praise and worship God, called to live a life that is set apart and holy.

Others, however, are called to a different level beyond the everyday Christian responsibility. There are those who are called specifically to enter into God's work through God's church and in God's world. Career ministries, if you will. Missionaries serve around the globe because God called them to serve, not just daily, but as a career. Pastors serve around the world because God moved in such a way in their lives that through God's Holy Spirit, they were called to step up and step out in a new way.

What makes Peter, Andrew, James, and John extraordinary is that they left a planned career and in obedience followed Jesus into a whole new adventure. They gave up what they knew in exchange for something of which they probably had very limited knowledge. They gave up the known for the unknown.

In the case of James and John, they gave up perhaps even more than Peter and Andrew in order to respond to Jesus' invitation to follow. They left behind their father, perhaps an entire family, as well as the family business.

To be obedient to, work alongside, and even provide for our parents' care must be the highest honor we can owe. The fifth commandment clearly directs us to honor our fathers and mothers (Exodus 20:12). But when God reaches out to us to call us into the work of Kingdom ministry, even father and mother must be left behind. Is it that we no longer care about them? No! Does it mean that we will abandon them? Absolutely not! It is that we are following obediently the call that God has put upon us first and foremost. We trust that God will provide for us and for them, even when God calls us into another work or to another state or even another country. God will provide for them if and when we cannot.

What an honor and delight this new career must have been for James and John, one that old Zebedee their father would certainly be proud of! His boys have been called to step out and follow the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

When Peter, Andrew, James, and John responded, they left their nets, their boats, their means of income. But that obedience was a clear indication of sincerity and trust. They became willing to forsake everything for the sake of Jesus and follow him wherever he would lead them. The business of fishing for fish literally became fishing for men. Off they went into a great unknown, a life which, for them, would become one of persecution and death, all for the sake of Jesus. But they did this for the honor and privilege of helping others find God. Little did they know they were helping to establish God's church that would continue into this present day and even to the end of all time.

Your Response

I read a story about a scuba diver who said that when you're deep underwater you're surrounded by such an aura of light, it becomes difficult to tell which way is up. Not only that, but also having that sense of weightlessness, you lose

your sense of gravity. It becomes easy to get disoriented and lose your sense of direction. Even your air bubbles look as if they are going sideways.

The danger comes when you feel so strongly that your perception of up is correct that you ignore your air bubbles and go the way you think is up. Because of that danger, the scuba-diver is taught to always trust and follow his bubbles. No matter what you think or feel, the bubbles are always correct – bubbles always go up!

Sadly, many people become disillusioned. They become disoriented and lose their way because they ignore what is right. They continue going the way they think or feel is right. They choose to live life as they please, focused on their direction.

When the call to step out is upon us, Jesus is always right, and he will see you through. He can be trusted with all that you are. No matter how you feel, no matter what you think. It is as someone has said, "We can't improve on God's plan. The best thing to do is to get in on it." And just like the scuba diver who ignores his bubbles, when we disregard God's call to follow and God's specific plan for our lives, we do so to our own peril.

Just ask Reed. I will never forget our conversation. Reed was in his 70s when he called one day out of the blue. He had a relationship with our church many years ago, but was no longer attending anywhere because he was drawn away by other interests. Now Reed sat in my office, with tears flowing down his cheeks recounting a difficult life as an adult. He spoke of a crumbling marriage relationship that had been tolerated for decades and appeared now headed for divorce. The most telling words he spoke, though, were when he shared about his call to ministry. "Steve," he said, "God called me into ministry as a young adult. I am certain of that. But I ignored that call. And my life has not been right ever since."

I believe we all want to be obedient, we really do. We want to be found faithful. We all want to be followers of Jesus, and do it well. But when it gets down to brass tacks, we sometimes stutter and stumble. When there is the sense that Jesus is calling us to step up and step out in order to follow him most closely, we yield to all the reasons why we should not. There are other things on our minds. What is our family going to say? What will my friends think? We do make excuses, don't we?

In his book *None of These Diseases*, S. I. McMillen tells a story of a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application that asked, "Are you a leader?" She wanted to be honest and so she wrote, "No," and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received this letter from the college: "Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower." (S. I. McMillen, <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/ff/follower.htm>)

It is imperative that Jesus have followers. Not just believers, but followers who will wrestle through that specific calling to shape their lives around his call to step out, just as it was for Andrew, Peter, James, and John.

Jennifer wondered why God was calling her into women's ministry. She writes, "Have I ever asked, 'why me?' Only a million times! I don't think I will ever fully grasp the reality of it all! I am definitely not a theologian. I did not attend seminary. I deal with self issues, insecurities, and fear. To think that God wants to use me in this kind of way just blows my mind! When I say I stand in awe of Him...I truly stand in AWE of Him!"

She continues, "Just know that this has been a process. It did not happen fast or easy. God had to do some major work within me and a lot of healing to allow forgiveness to take place. Then and only then was my heart prepared to hear Him clearly. The time had come to give my life to serving Him. I was READY!"

Because Jennifer was ready, she was more readily able to respond. Because of her time spent in God's Word and in prayer, she has come to understand that God's hand was indeed upon her, gingerly calling her out. Oh, and did I mention that Jennifer is just an ordinary lady?

Joe's response was similar. On several occasions I have told Joe that God had called him into ministry. Just a few years ago, Joe was enjoying Sundays playing golf. After retirement, Joe worked for a local golf course, so he could play all the golf he wanted. Church was not a part of his life's plan. But Jesus was calling Joe to follow.

About the time he came back into church, he went to work at a local elementary school. All the while, God was working to place Joe in exactly the right place so he could step out and into God's work. Joe writes of his experience at the school, "After a few years, it became apparent to me, from talking to the staff and parents, that there seemed to be a need for a church during the week. Some people could not attend on Sunday, and wanted to know if there was any church they could attend during the week." Joe went on to start a weeknight church for faculty and staff, meeting in the very school where he worked.

The call to follow didn't stop there. A few years ago, a little 9-year-old Honduran girl named Yossi was staying with one of our church families while recovering from surgery. Several times Joe vowed to me that he would never go on a mission trip – ever. Yet God used that little girl to capture Joe's heart. He went with our mission team to Honduras to build that little girl a new home, and while Joe was there, he led Yossi's father, two sisters and brother, and a neighbor to faith in Christ. Just an ordinary man doing extraordinary things because he was responding to the call to follow.

I think ordinary people can have the greatest impact. They are the ones who surprise everyone. They come out of the blue, from out of nowhere, with a deep level of humility and conviction and change the world around them.

Your calling simply means that your life is so lived at the invitation of Christ that the expression of your personality and the exercise of your spiritual gifts and talents are given direction and power. Not because they are done for themselves, your family, your business, or even mankind, but for Jesus, who will hold us accountable.

What is it that God is needing you to do in order to fully and faithfully respond to Him? What decision is it that you are wrestling with right now? Might your calling be to specifically follow God in service and devotion? Your call to follow is one that you have the opportunity to accept – or decline. Careers are chosen; a calling is accepted.

"With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of His calling, and that by His power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith" (2 Thessalonians 1:11) (NIV).