

“First Call” (First Things First Pt. 2)
(Matt. 4:18-22)

- **“Follow Me”**

- *When Jesus calls...lives change.* Think of *all that comes* from those two simple words from Christ: *FOLLOW ME*. Do you remember when you first heard the Lord say that to you? Somehow, some way, some time, you knew He was talking to *you*, saying, “*Follow me.*” Some of you know what I’m talking about. Some of you are still searching, trying to figure out what this is all about. Some have heard Him calling, but you’re still wrestling with *how you’re going to respond*. Wherever you’re at, you better believe *Jesus is still calling today*.
 - You know, the Bible is full of “call stories.” When you think about it, almost every great story in Scripture starts with God calling someone. You could look at Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, the Judges like Gideon and Deborah, Hannah and Samuel, David, the Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. *They all have call stories!* But the wonderful thing is, once Jesus comes on the scene, this calling from God becomes an open invitation to *anyone who would believe*. All of us have a *calling in Christ*—the question is, how will you respond?
- Connection Family, we’re looking at “First Things First”—what are the *primary things* to keep our focus on as we enter new territory together? Last week was “First Steps,” today it’s “First Call.” The key questions today are: **What is our first call?** And **How do we go from living for survival to living for the calling?** We’ll look at lots of different Scriptures that speak to our call but the key story is when Jesus called His first disciples. We just saw how “The Chosen” brought that story to life. They portrayed it according to Luke’s Gospel, which gives a little more detail with that miraculous catch of fish—but I’m going to read the shorter version in Matthew’s Gospel.
 - **“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. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’ At once they left their nets and followed him. 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, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.” (Matt. 4:18-22)** I love this story. Could there be anything more exhilarating than responding to Jesus’ call to *follow Him*?

- **The Workplace**

- It’s interesting where this story begins: it’s not in a Synagogue or Church or seminary—a religious place. It’s not in a house or meeting place. Jesus finds them *in the workplace*. What’s your relationship with “the workplace”—what comes to mind, how do you feel? At some point as you grow up, life becomes about *work*. It doesn’t matter if you make a paycheck in your work, or your work is to care for the home, or to be a student, or you’re retired—life is...work. Maybe you’re blessed to say, *I like my work, it has meaning, it’s rewarding*. But for lots of people, for much of the world, work is, well...work. When I think of the “feeling” and “place” of our day-to-day world, I go to the “morning commute.” Picture that rush-hour traffic on the highway: everyone is trying to get where they’re going, everyone’s a little tired, a little rushed, a little stressed—or a lot. And there’s this *feeling* of being caught up in the “rat race,” of...*we’re all doing this thing we have to do because we’ve got to find a way to survive, and someone, somewhere, is counting on me to do something to make this whole thing...work*. So, we keep getting up, going out, and pushing these boulders up these hills by the sweat of our brows, and get up tomorrow *and do it again*.
- The Bible says that in the beginning, before sin entered the story, work was a *good* part of God’s creation, part of humanity’s calling. But the consequence of the fall, when humanity decided to go our own way, reject our Creator, become our own boss, was that *work* became *toil*. **“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (Gen. 3:17-19)**

- Work becomes toil, *life becomes toil*, when you're doing it apart from God—living *just for yourself*, instead of *His calling*. I get the sense that Peter and Andrew were out there with Adam working “in the fields” with the thorns and thistles, in that rat-race, rush-hour, “workplace” when Jesus came walking up that day. Luke paints that picture in his account of the story—Peter says, “*Master, we’ve toiled all night and caught nothing...*” (Luke 5:5 NKJV) It’s that defeated, exhausted sense of *futility*. We’ve all felt this, even if we’re blessed with *great work*—at some point in our parenting, our jobs, our ministries, it’s like, *I’ve done all this work and do I really have anything to show for it? What’s the point? Will I ever get ahead?* Do you know the feeling? Have you struggled to find *purpose* as a student, a parent, a worker, a retiree?
- **The Calling**
 - I have good news for you, wherever your story has you today. *You were made for more*. The Bible says that every single person *has a greater calling*. No matter who you are, where you come from, what you do, the size of your paycheck, whether you’re married or single, your intellect, your body type, your gender, race, creed—*simply by virtue of being human*, your life has intrinsic worth and purpose. *We all have a calling*, whether we know it or not. It’s on pg. 1: **“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” (Gen. 1:27-28)**
 - According to God’s Word, this is what’s really true about you: *you are an unrepeatable masterpiece created to be a reflection of Almighty God in this world, called to rule and reign over His creation*. Our sinful nature, our fallen world, and the lies of the Devil, have led us to internalize all kinds of falsehoods about our worth and our work—to toil and struggle to measure up, to make false comparisons, to live under the crushing weight of performance, perfectionism, complacency, addiction, selfishness, or all of the above. The image of God gets tarnished by sin and our true calling gets lost. But from the moment we fell, God has been *working to redeem and restore*. The whole Bible tells the Story of how God calls ordinary people like you and me to participate in His unfolding work of salvation. Jesus, the Son of God, took on flesh, lived, died, rose again, and reigns, *in order to restore our true identity and calling as children of God*.
 - Two of the great teachers of early Church—“Church Fathers”—spoke to this. Athanasius said, Jesus became one of us in order to restore the image of God in us (d. 373 AD). And Irenaeus said, “*The glory of God is man fully alive.*” (d. 202 AD)
 - The New Testament says so much about this calling. Peter wrote: “*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*” (1 Pet. 2:9) Paul wrote, “*For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do,*” (Eph.2:8-10) and, “*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.*” (Eph. 4:1)
 - Friends, I want you to see that *no matter what life in this world has taught you to believe about your work, your worth, or your purpose, every single one of us has been given a high and holy calling by our Creator and Savior! When we turned away and forfeited the Call, Jesus shed His blood to buy it back*. Could there be anything more wonderful to live for? When Jesus comes walking along and says, “*Follow Me,*” He meets us right where we are, in the struggle of everyday life, and He calls us to *a whole new life*.
 - You can be a religious person, and still live for a lot of other things besides *the first call*: you can live for yourself, to earn the most and get the most, to achieve your own version of greatness. You can live for pleasure, entertainment, comfort, survival. There are *all kinds of callings* you can pursue on your own—but with Jesus, there’s only one call: **Follow Me**. When you say “Yes” to God’s gift of salvation, “Yes” to follow Jesus, you’re stepping into the same great adventure that Peter, Andrew, James and John stepped into that day by the water. The biblical term for this is “Disciple.” The best definition I’ve heard is from John Mark Comer: **“Discipleship is: being with Jesus, to become like Jesus, to learn to do the things that Jesus did.”**

- The beautiful thing is, this is a calling that *takes your entire life*, all the way into eternity. And this is a calling you can live out *anytime, anywhere, in any season*, no matter what “work” you do. Disciples of Jesus are called to every sector of life. Disciples of Jesus work as stay-at-home parents, students, gas station attendants, public servants, school administrators, coffee baristas, small business owners, manual laborers, medical professionals, artists, waste managers, caretakers, retired grandparents, first responders—yes, even pastors! Your first call is not simply about “what work you do,” it’s about *being a disciple of Jesus wherever you are*.
- Do you know what happens when you begin to live with *this* as your primary purpose—to be with Jesus, and become like Jesus, and do the things Jesus did? What happens is, your everyday life becomes less about the futile rat-race of competition and survival, and more about living *for Jesus!* The most challenging, mundane work can become a place where God’s glory shows up, if you live out of your *first call*. The most passionate, fulfilled person you meet could be the one who hands you your coffee at the drive-thru or collects your trash in the dark hours of the morning or cleans the bathrooms at your office—if *they’re doing it with and for Jesus*.
- Romans 12 in the Message translation puts it like this: “*So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.*” (Rom. 12:1 MSG) Can you imagine a whole community of people living this out? God calls that “Church”! This is what Jesus saved us for, this is His calling! Are you living for your First Call?
 - 6 months before his assassination, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to a group of students at Barrett Jr. High School in Philadelphia, where he famously said: “*...when you discover what you will be in your life, set to do it as if God Almighty has called you at this particular moment in history to do it...If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music...Sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well.*”
- **The Story**
 - Because of Jesus, *all of us* can freely respond to God’s call, *all of us* can follow Christ, *all of us* can be disciples who make disciples, wherever God places us. And as we do, we discover the unique purposes God created us for. Each of us will have a testimony, a story to tell. So, as we finish, this morning, Emily and I want to take a moment to share *our* “call stories” with you—how we came into this life of ministry, and how we came to serve here at Connection...