

Prayer

Almighty God, may we always be ready for the release of Your power through the Holy Spirit. Give us a longing to see You work in our midst, and an expectation that great things will happen. Give us a heart to join with You in the Gospel work of salvation that saves souls, and may we know the joy of Your presence as we work together in this great and Godly task. Thank You, Almighty God; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: 'Anointing'

Pray for God's people to await the anointing of the Holy Spirit for the work He wants them to do. Pray that the Lord will remove the fear and dread people have about such things.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for the nation of Iran and against evil and repression*
- *Ask the Lord to help us agree about how to look after our world*
- *Give thanks to God for those you know who show God's love*

Meditation

When life is quiet, Lord, fill my mind with what is good;
And keep the enemy away from my thoughts and feelings.

When life is routine, Lord, give me the concentration I need
To pay attention to the detail of what I do, and honour You with my work.

When life becomes difficult, Lord, save me from panicking;
Help me to focus on You, and trust in Your spiritual guidance.

When life is horrendous, Lord, give me the courage to hold firmly to You;
Drawing from Your Spirit the energy I need to get through every trouble.

When life becomes easier, Lord, may I not forget You or Your love;
But remember Your faithfulness through good times and bad.

When life is quiet, Lord, fill my mind with what is good;
Keep me alert, and prepare me, in faith, for all that's to come.

Bible Study - Mark 1:16-20

¹⁶ As Jesus passed by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ Jesus said to them, 'Come and follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' ¹⁸ They left their nets immediately, and followed Him. ¹⁹ When He had gone a little farther, He saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; they were in a boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Jesus called them straight away, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired labourers and followed Him.

Review

This brief and powerful story about the calling of the first disciples begins the story of Jesus' active ministry in Mark's Gospel. We have been given a compelling summary of what God

wanted Jesus to do in the previous verses (1:9-14), and the way in which Jesus began His work by calling disciples demonstrates a significant point about how God works within His world. He chooses to work with people, and he does this irrespective of human perspectives about personality, general suitability and background.

Many things have been said about this passage, and many sermons have been preached upon it. However, we cannot read these words without recalling that the man who was called first, named Simon (later Peter), was the man who spoke out bravely and boldly only a few years later at Pentecost. He delivered a stunning sermon (Acts 2) that effectively began the church, and he guided this growing band of people through their earliest and most formative years. In addition, Simon Peter's brother Andrew became the man who did more than most to introduce people to Jesus (see John 1:40, 6:8, 12:22), James became a prominent leader of the church, and John became the disciple who was possibly closest to Jesus during His life (John 21:7,20). All four of them started out in life as country fishermen. Their lives may well have been satisfying and interesting before they met Jesus, but without His call, all of them would have spent the rest of their natural lives doing the same work and being tied to the same family and social groups from which they came in Galilee. Because of Jesus' call, they became the people God used to change the world forever through the Gospel of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. The immensity of what happened to these four men has fascinated people ever since, and the story of their call to follow Jesus remains one of the most popular stories of the New Testament.

We only have the bare bones of this wonderful story of the call of the first disciples; Mark has cut it right back to the minimum of information, just like the baptism of Jesus we have just read (1:9-11). Because of this, there is little we can say with any certainty about these four men. We are forced to remember that God delights to work with all kinds of people, and His choice can never be subject to human scrutiny, especially where a special and unique work of God's grace is at stake. When Abraham was chosen by God to be the forefather of the people of Israel, the Old Testament tells us nothing about him which might distinguish him from anyone else of his day; we only know that he was chosen by God (Genesis 11:31-12:3), just as Simon, Andrew, James and John were chosen.

Also, the story of the calling of the first disciples is swift. Mark tells us that Simon and Andrew 'left their nets immediately' (1:18), and that James and John were called 'straight away' (1:20). Yesterday, we noticed the speed with which everything happened once Jesus was baptised, and there is no let up in the pace here! The task of saving the world was immediate and urgent. Jesus was not being cruel by asking these first four disciples to leave everything immediately; what Jesus had in mind for them to do could not wait. God's plan of salvation was His urgent response to sin and evil in the world.

Simon, Andrew, James and John, were simple people, merely driven along by God's Spirit to do what Jesus wanted of them like puppets. Each had individuality and character, and they responded because Jesus' spiritual power and authority drew them, but this is all Mark wants us to know. The whole incident speaks about the divine power of Jesus and the unconditional response of humanity, and this is the starting place for God's great work of salvation in the world.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss why Jesus chose to call fishermen as his first followers.
2. Does Jesus commonly ask people to leave everything to follow Him today? Why does He do this?
3. Why is this story popular and why do people remember the call of the first disciples? How does the story describe Christian faith?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I find it amazing to read this story and think that one quick decision made by these men enabled God to do so much in the world. I wonder whether Jesus called others and they did not respond, and I wonder whether Jesus is always calling people today, but only some respond. The whole business of call and response is a deep mystery that is hard to fathom, and perhaps it is something we should leave with the Lord. We do know one thing, however, which is that Jesus transforms people's lives for the better. It was true of Peter, Andrew, James and John, and it is true of us now.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Write down on a sheet of paper what might make you 'leave everything' at the behest of someone else. Think about what you have written and how it illustrates your own faith. Offer your thoughts up to God in prayer.*
- *Give thanks to God for the many people who, over the years, have left everything behind to follow Jesus and do His will. Pray that God will bless those who have made this sacrifice today.*

Final Prayer

Stay with us, Lord Jesus, through all the dangers and perils of this day. May we have such a firm grasp of You through faith that we do not let you down, and may we demonstrate in all we do how much we love You and give You thanks for what You have done for us. Hold on to us by the power of Your Holy Spirit, we pray; AMEN