

March 10

Lesson 2 (NIV)

## CALLED TO SACRIFICE

**DEVOTIONAL READING:** [Philippians 3:7–](#)

16

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** [Mark 1:16–](#)

20; [Luke 14:25–33](#)

### MARK 1:16–20

<sup>16</sup>As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” <sup>18</sup>At once they left their nets and followed him.

<sup>19</sup>When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. <sup>20</sup>Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

### LUKE 14:25–33

<sup>25</sup>Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:

<sup>26</sup>“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters — yes, even

their own life — such a person cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup>And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

<sup>28</sup>“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? <sup>29</sup>For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, <sup>30</sup>saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

<sup>31</sup>“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup>If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. <sup>33</sup>In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.”



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### KEY VERSE

*Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*—**Luke 14:27**

## DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

### Unit 1: Call to Discipleship

LESSONS 1–4

### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each

learner will be able to:

1. Restate Jesus' concept of discipleship.
2. Explain how a Christian is to evaluate commitments in light of the call of discipleship.
3. Identify a problem area in his or her discipleship to Christ and implement a plan to correct it.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. No Nominal Christians
  - B. Lesson Context: Jesus' Ministry Begins
  - C. Lesson Context: Jesus' Death Looms
- I. Heed the Call (MARK 1:16–20)
    - A. Gathering (vv. 16–18)  
*Leaving Nets ... and Networks*
    - B. Forsaking (vv. 19, 20)
  - II. Count the Cost (LUKE 14:25–33)
    - A. Greatest Commitment (vv. 25–27)  
*A Revered Second Place*
    - B. Calculated Commitment (vv. 28–30)
    - C. Absolute Commitment (vv. 31–33)

#### Conclusion

- A. Giving Our All
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## HOW TO SAY IT

Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz ( <i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i> ).
Ezra	Ez-ruh.
Galatians	Guh-lay-shunz.
Galilee	Gal-uh-lee.
Haggai	Hag-eye or Hag-ay-eye.
Nehemiah	Nee-huh- <b>my</b> -uh.
Zebedee	Zeb-eh-dee.

## Introduction

### A. No Nominal Christians

Perhaps you have heard or read news stories about the percentage of people who are Christians in various parts of the world. Social scientists commonly survey populations to discover people's religious affiliation, noting trends over time.

To be identified as a Christian in most such surveys usually requires only a claim to be Christian. Few surveys ask about behaviors and practices as evidence of Christian commitment; the foundations of prayer, Bible reading, and worship attendance are ignored. Thus many people are counted as Christians merely through their self-identification as such. A term often applied to such people is *nominal Christians*. They are Christians in name only.

Before we form an opinion regarding

the validity of that designation, we should consider what Jesus has to say about it in today's lesson.

### B. Lesson Context: Jesus' Ministry Begins

The first of today's two texts comes from the beginning of Mark's Gospel. His storyline begins with John the Baptist's preaching that all must repent and be cleansed by God to prepare for the imminent arrival of God's king ([Mark 1:2-8](#)). Jesus then appears in the storyline for his baptism. At that time, he is identified by a voice from Heaven as God's kingly Son ([1:9-11](#)). After his triumph over the devil's tests ([1:12, 13](#)), Jesus repeats John's message of repentance, announcing that God's promised reign is very near ([1:14, 15](#)).

The coming of God's promised reign, his "kingdom," is central to Jesus' teaching. God's kingdom is the reestablishment of his rule over all creation, especially over rebellious humanity. The well-known words of the Lord's Prayer express this idea: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" ([Matthew 6:10](#)). Jesus links his coming and ministry to the inauguration of God's kingdom. This is a movement that will one day extend the rule of God to the ends of the earth ([Acts 1:8](#)), reaching complete fulfillment as Jesus returns as king ([1:11](#)). It is in this light that Jesus

calls the first of his disciples.

### **C. Lesson Context: Jesus' Death Looms**

Our second text, from Luke's Gospel, occurs in the period of Jesus' ministry when he was on his final trip to Jerusalem. He knew he was to die there, and he had warned his disciple of that fact (Luke 9:22, 44). But they failed to understand (9:45). The crowds that joined him had high expectations of his kingly triumph. He would indeed triumph as king, but not in a way anybody expected!

#### **I. Heed the Call (MARK 1:16-20)**

Against the background noted earlier, Jesus began to call Galilean fishermen to be his disciples. Fishing was a major industry on the Sea of Galilee in Jesus' time. Fishing operations were organized into a large guild, and many fish were processed into a tasty paste—an early version of MSG—that was sealed in jars and shipped all over the Roman Empire.

Fishing was hard work, and profits were constrained by taxes and guild regulations. But fishing provided a reliable income for hundreds of families in a place and time where life was an overwhelming struggle for most. To simply walk away from the fishing profession was unheard of.

### **A. Gathering (vv. 16-18)**

**16. As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.**

Jesus' ministry begins and largely focuses on Galilee. This is the northern region of Israel's homeland that features as its geographical focus *the Sea of Galilee*, which is a large freshwater lake.

Along that lake Jesus sees two brothers working as *fishermen*. We can picture them standing in a wooden boat about 20 feet long, skillfully throwing a heavy net into the water to gather some of the abundant fish that *the lake* supplies.

#### ***What Do You Think?***

In what ways might the Lord call you to minister for Him in the week ahead?

#### ***Digging Deeper***

What techniques might Satan use to get you to disregard that call? How can you resist these?

These two will become members of the 12 disciples, or followers, whom Jesus will later designate to be "apostles" (lesson 6, page 275, discusses definition per Matthew 10:2; also see Luke 6:13). Listings of the apostles occur in Matthew 10:2-4 [lesson 6]; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:13-16; and Acts 1:13.

*Simon* (also known as Peter) will become the most prominent member of those 12. That's probably why his name occurs first in all four lists. Indeed, he is called "first" in [Matthew 10:2](#). The name of *his brother Andrew* occurs in the top third of all four lists, also indicating prominence (compare [John 6:8](#); [12:22](#); see also page 276).

The paths of the 12, especially that of Peter, will be complicated, marked as much by failure as by faithfulness. But here we see simply two ordinary, hard-working fishermen with nothing to commend them as exceptional.

**17. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."**

Jesus' invitation is blunt and brief. His challenge is to follow him as disciples as learners follow their teacher. The custom of Jesus' time is that students of Jewish religious teachers actually live side by side with their teachers. That allows observance of actions as part of the teaching process. Jesus' invitation is to that kind of life.

But the prospect of fishing *for people* sets Jesus apart from other teachers. Since these fishermen used nets (not rods) and fishing lines with hooks, we can see Jesus' image is one of gathering. It echoes the words of the prophet Jeremiah, who used the image of fisher-

men to promise that God would regather his scattered people after Judah's exile ([Jeremiah 16:16](#)). God's kingdom, Jesus has announced, is about to appear (see the [Lesson Context](#)). These two men will join Jesus in gathering a people who are ready to live as loyal subjects under God's rule.

Thus the invitation to become disciples of Jesus is an invitation to work to extend God's kingdom. This is the most consequential work that one can undertake. It is a work that ultimately will extend to all nations.

**18. At once they left their nets and followed him.**

Peter and Andrew's response is as abrupt as is Jesus' invitation: they abandon their trade, their way of life and means of survival, and follow Jesus. Their lives will never be the same. But their lives will be not less but much more than before.

#### **LEAVING NETS ... AND NETWORKS**

As a child star of the sitcom *Growing Pains* (1985-1992), Kirk Cameron eventually rejected atheism and turned to Christ. Cameron would ask that lines be removed from the script for his TV character that went against his faith. His more recent roles have been in faith-based films.

Those who become followers of Jesus may struggle with conflicts between the

demands of their careers and the commands of their Savior. Many find ways to survive and even thrive in their careers after becoming Christians. Others choose to leave their current employment to avoid these conflicts. Cameron is just one example of Hollywood stars of the recent past to have done so.



Visual for Lesson 2. Keep this visual hidden until the lesson's conclusion. Then pose its choices for discussion.

A growing relationship with Jesus caused some Galilean fishermen to revisit their career choices. That fact should cause us to ponder the next question here.

—J. E.

### **What Do You Think?**

Under what circumstances, if any, should one not take immediate action on a perceived call to serve? Why?

### **Digging Deeper**

Consider [Nehemiah 1:1–4, 11; 2:11–16](#); [Haggai 1:9](#); [Luke 9:59–62](#);

[14:31](#); [Romans 10:2](#); [Galatians 1:15–18](#); and [1 John 4:1](#) in your response.

## **B. Forsaking (vv. 19, 20)**

**19, 20.** When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Jesus issues a similar call, and two more brother-fishermen respond. These two, *James son of Zebedee and his brother John*, will always be listed in the top third of the four lists mentioned above.

Mark emphasizes the cost of their decision as he notes that they leave behind a father as well as *hired men*. The brothers' roots in their business are deep, and the work is apparently successful enough. But forsaking all is for them not too high a price when the “pay” is to take part in fulfilling the work of God in the world.

Looking across the gospel story, we can better understand these men's response to Jesus. Though this invitation is abrupt, other Gospel writers show us that the fishermen are prepared for it. John the Baptist has already identified Jesus to them as “the Lamb of God” ([John](#)



Jesus to them as “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29, 35–42). Luke shows us that Jesus’ call is accompanied by an impressive miracle (Luke 5:1–11).

Neither are these men chosen because they are choice. Mark will emphasize that Peter will argue with Jesus (Mark 8:31–33) and even deny him (14:66–72). James and John will presumptuously ask to sit in the places of power when Jesus is enthroned, failing to understand that Jesus is going to his death (10:35–45). All members of the 12 will fail Jesus at his arrest, abandoning him to his enemies (14:43–50).

Even so, Jesus will invite them back into his company at his resurrection (Mark 14:27, 28; 16:7). He will commission them as his messengers (Matthew 28:18–20). Impressive as their response is in the moment, the Lord’s persistent grace is even more powerful.

## II. Count the Cost (LUKE 14:25–33)

Our next passage is one of several in which Jesus redirects expectation from easy glory to costly suffering. The shadow of the cross falls across this passage, but the light of Easter morning shines on it as well.

### A. Greatest Commitment (vv. 25–27)

**25. Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:**

Crowds have grown as Jesus continued teaching and performing miracles on his way to Jerusalem (see the [Lesson Context](#)). Expectation that Jesus is God’s promised king spread. His presence must mean political freedom and economic prosperity for Israel. So Jesus begins to address the crowds to confront them with the real nature of his kingdom.

**26. “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.**

Jesus begins with a list of family relationships that people cherish most. These are not merely valued by his audience. They were regarded rightly as sacred. Faithfulness as a child, spouse, parent, or sibling is demanded by God’s law. Added to this list is one’s *own life*, one’s very existence. Yet Jesus says that to be his *disciple*—one who follows him and learns from him how to live the godly life—one must *hate* all these!

This is how Jesus makes his point. Important as such relationships are, following Jesus is even more important. Those who follow him must do so with the understanding that nothing else can

be allowed to interfere. To be a disciple is greater than any other value or relationship.

Disciples learn that following him does not diminish love for others. Rather, it increases it. The irony of Jesus' instruction is that only by putting him in unchallenged first place does one learn to love faithfully those most cherished. But make no mistake: relationships with those for whom one would give one's own life are still of less value than following Jesus as a disciple.

#### **What Do You Think?**

What struggles might you have to undergo in order to "hate" your family in the way Jesus intends that word to be taken?

#### **Digging Deeper**

What insights, if any, do [Ezra 10:1-17](#); [Job 2:7-10](#); [Luke 8:19-21](#); and [1 Corinthians 7:12-16](#) offer in this regard?

### **A REVERED SECOND PLACE**

After being sworn in as vice president in 2017, Mike Pence's personal priorities came under intense scrutiny by the press. Those priorities were driven by his and his wife's professed commitment to Jesus. That commitment included certain rules they held in their marriage. One such was the husband's promise not to go

to dinner with a woman unless his wife accompanied him.

When a reporter asked wife Karen about the couple's commitment to put each other first, she quickly corrected the misunderstanding: although the Pences valued family above fame, power, and politics, they were not first place in each other's lives. She went on to tell of a time when they were dating. When she referred to Mike as her "number one," her husband-to-be warned that she would be disappointed if he were number one to her. The first-place position had to go to someone who truly deserved it—the Lord Jesus.

This is consistent with the warning Jesus gave to those who would follow him. Compared with the love of Jesus, one's love of family members should seem like "hate!" In what ways is Jesus still not first in your life?

—J. E.

**27. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.**

The cross is so familiar in Christianity that we often forget its significance for Jesus' audience. The Roman Empire uses death by crucifixion as a way of asserting its absolute power over subject peoples. Crucifixions are public spectacles of torture and terror, making examples of those who dare to defy Roman authority.



Anyone who carries a cross is marked as a defeated enemy of Rome, about to feel the full effect of Rome's wrath.

Jesus uses the image of cross-bearing because of his own impending death by crucifixion. But his cross will not mean defeat. By giving his life willingly, surrendering to his enemies and letting them do their worst, Jesus will pay sin's price. In what is known today as *the substitutionary atonement*, Jesus will give his worthy life on behalf of the unworthy.

Those who follow Jesus as disciples do so to join him in the work of God's kingdom, establishing God's reign in the world. As they do, they must carry out that work as Jesus has modeled: by giving themselves sacrificially in service to others (Luke 9:23). They, like Jesus, must trust God to provide and vindicate. They must bear in mind that they will see the full fruit of their labor only at the resurrection from the dead.

Perhaps you have heard someone say, "I guess that is my cross to bear" in response to a tragedy or loss. But the cross we bear does not refer to issues of inconvenience or painful circumstances that normally come our way in this fallen world. Rather, the cross we bear is what characterizes the life of one who follows Jesus. We live not to serve self but to serve others as the Lord did, holding nothing back (Luke 22:24-30).

## **B. Calculated Commitment (vv. 28-30)**

**28. "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?"**

Jesus now uses a comparison to impress on his followers the nature of such a commitment. Though buildings in the ancient world are simpler than those today, they are still very expensive relative to one's resources. A tower, which might be used to guard a plot of agricultural land or even a town or city, is especially costly. It requires careful accounting to be sure that one has the resources to finish it. So Jesus urges his followers to listen carefully to his teaching, to understand the cost that he will pay and that they in turn will pay as well.

**29, 30. For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'**

An incomplete tower is not just a material failure. It is also a cause for public shame and mockery. The failed project becomes the basis for cruel jokes and ridicule. A tower in Jesus' time is a means of protection, a projection of power. By contrast, a failed tower is an expression of shame and weakness.

*What Do You Think?*

How will you know when a pause to count cost reaches the point of being mere procrastination and lack of faith?

***Digging Deeper***

Is that point the same for everyone?  
Why, or why not?

There is seeming shame in taking up one's cross ([Hebrews 12:2](#)). But there is glory in following the enthroned king who was crucified. The real shame is in failing to recognize Jesus as God's king, failing to surrender the price to follow him. That opportunity is not to be missed at any price.

**C. Absolute Commitment (vv. 31-33)**

**31. "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?"**

Jesus now provides a second comparison, also about assessing costs. Here a king faces a battle against an adversary with an army double the size of his own. Can the king with the smaller army prevail?

In this comparison, the answer seems clear: only under the exceptional circumstances can an army defeat an adversary twice its size. A proper assessment of the

situation suggests only one possible course of action (next verse).

**32. If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.**

The outnumbered king has only one choice. He cannot take the risk of battle. He can only send his representatives to meet his adversary *a long way off*, way before their armies meet, to sue for peace on unfavorable terms. That choice is humiliating, but it is far better than defeat and death. This illustration includes the challenge of facing reality.

**33. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.**

This statement brings Jesus' comparisons to bear on the audience. Like a person building a tower, they must understand the true cost of following Jesus. Like a king facing an army of overwhelming force, they must be prepared to pay a cost that seems like defeat but is in fact the way to life.

That cost is all that a person has. No possession, no status, no relationship, no home, no identity, no dream can measure up to following and serving the ruler of God's kingdom. Nothing or no one else can give the life that he gives. Nothing else can restore us to our true selves as he does. It is a hard choice, the supreme

choice—a choice that comes at great cost. But it is the only choice, no matter the cost.

***What Do You Think?***

How will a person know when he or she has given up everything to follow Christ?

***Digging Deeper***

How is your response informed by Bible examples of those who gave up much status (Moses, Paul, etc.) vs. those who gained status (Joseph, Daniel, etc.) in God's service?

## **Conclusion**

### **A. Giving Our All**

In our study of today's two lesson texts, we have seen how two seemingly incompatible ideas belong together. Jesus indeed brings God's promised rule, but he warns us that God's victory is achieved in weakness, lowliness, and suffering.

We cannot expect to receive a calling from the Lord as dramatic as the one that Peter, Andrew, James, and John received. None of us are called to be eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry on earth as those four were. Yet like them, we share in his mission of advancing the promised reign of God. Jesus calls us to be his instruments so that God's will can be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

That calling makes us more than people who give lip service to a vaguely Christian identity. Rather, Jesus' call demands of us our all. That call challenges our fundamental relationships, even as it compels us to love our family and friends more than we ever have before. The call demands that all our possessions and time be put at God's disposal as we invest earthly resources for eternal return: the harvest of souls. The call means leaving many treasures behind but receiving countless more in return ([Luke 18:29, 30](#)).

Some think of the word *Christian* to be a term for those who confess Christ, while the word *disciple* is reserved for those seriously committed to following him. The New Testament knows no such distinction. To confess Christ as Lord demands a counting of the cost of that confession. The cost is everything, but the payoff (if that's the best term) is participation in the eternal, victorious rule of God Almighty.

### **B. Prayer**

Almighty God, may we acknowledge your rule in our lives to the extent that we submit fully to your Son. Strengthen us in the way of the cross, even as we thank you for eternal life that awaits. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot  
keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

—Jim Elliot

## **INVOLVEMENT LEARNING**

*Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible*  
Student

### **Into the Lesson**

Form students into pairs to discuss these questions: 1-Who has had high expectations for you? 2-How have you responded to that?

After a few minutes of discussion, ask volunteers to share insights. Then say, “Studies show that the higher the expectations a parent, teacher, or coach has for a child, the more likely the child is to try to meet those expectations. In today’s lesson we’ll see how Jesus’ high expectations of four men become his expectations for us as well.”

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Highest Percentage” quiz from the reproducible page, which you can download. After no more than one minute, reveal answers and ask learners which answers surprise them most and why. Make the point that the results come from surveys to which people merely self-report their religion. Then say, “There’s no way of knowing how many of these respondents are Christians in name only. Today we’ll see the very high standards that Jesus sets for those who are his disciples in the fullest sense.”

## Into the Word

Form students into two groups of no more than five each. (If your class is larger, form more groups and give duplicate assignments of those below.) Distribute the following on handouts (you prepare) to the group you designate *Responding to the Call Group*: Use [Mark 1:16–20](#) as a launching point to answer the following questions: 1–When Jesus called Simon and Andrew to come and follow him, what did the two understand him to mean? 2–In what way different from the call of traditional Jewish teachers did Jesus call the two to follow? 3–When Simon and Andrew chose to follow Jesus, what did they leave behind—not only in terms of what the text says, but by implication?

Also distribute the following on handouts (you prepare) to the group you designate *Counting the Cost Group*: Use [Luke 14:25–33](#) as a launching point to discuss the following questions: 1–What did Jesus imply in speaking of hating family members? 2–What did Jesus’ illustrations of a tower and a king with an undersized army signify? 3–When James and John followed Jesus, what did they leave behind—not only in terms of what the text says, but by implication?

In the ensuing whole-class discussion, first go over answers to the first two questions of the *Responding* group(s), skip

the third, then go over responses to the first two questions of the *Counting* group(s), followed by simultaneous discussion of the third question of both groups.

Expect the following responses from the *Responding* group(s): 1–*Become disciples as you live alongside me, learning how best to serve God.* 2–*They would be catching men, not fish.* Expect the following responses from the *Counting* group(s): 1–*Devotion must be to Jesus above all else.* 2–*One needs to think carefully about what a commitment to discipleship entails.*

For the simultaneous third questions: *to abandon what the text says they abandoned was to give up their means of livelihood.*

## Into Life

Write the following list on the board: 1–Love Jesus more than family; 2–Be willing to lose your life in service to him; 3–Give up everything you own. Have students pair off and choose one category. Ask them to discuss how they are doing in meeting Jesus’ expectations for discipleship in that area and propose how to improve.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Which Would You Choose?” activity from the reproducible page. Allow one minute to complete it, then pair students off to discuss the choices they made. As a

class discuss the final choice and why so many people choose to live as Christians in name only rather than as committed disciples. Close with a prayer to be more committed.