

March 31

Lesson 5 (NIV)

CALLED TO FOLLOW

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 91

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew

4:12–22

MATTHEW 4:12–22

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,

the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,

Galilee of the Gentiles—

¹⁶ the people living in darkness

have seen a great light;

on those living in the land of the shadow of death

a light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹ 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, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.



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KEY VERSE

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”—**Matthew 4:19**

DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

Unit 2: Call to Ministry

LESSONS 5–9

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recall the reason for the need to repent.
2. Explain the relationship between repentance and the kingdom of heaven.
3. Make a plan to identify a sacrifice to make for better discipleship.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Be Reasonable?
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Two Transitions (MATTHEW 4:12, 13)
 - A. John in Prison (v. 12a)
 - B. Jesus to Capernaum (vv. 12b, 13)
Light in a Dark Place
- II. One Light (MATTHEW 4:14-17)
 - A. Prophecy's Fulfillment (v. 14)
 - B. Fulfillment's Result (vv. 15, 16)
 - C. What Must Happen (v. 17a)
 - D. Why It Must Happen (v. 17b)
Home Transitions
- III. Four Responses (MATTHEW 4:18-22)
 - A. Simon Peter and Andrew (vv. 18-20)
 - B. James and John (vv. 21, 22)

Conclusion

- A. Boat Time, Dock Time
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Capernaum	Kuh- <i>per</i> -nay-um.
Herod Antipas	<i>Hair</i> -ud An-tih-pus.
Isaiah	Eye-zay-uh.
Naphtali	<i>Naf</i> -tuh-lye.
Nazareth	<i>Naz</i> -uh-reth.
Sepphoris	<i>Sef</i> -uh-ris.
synagogue	<i>sin</i> -uh-gog.
Tiberius Caesar	Tie- <i>beer</i> -ee-us <i>See</i> -zer.
Zebedee	<i>Zeb</i> -eh-dee.
Zebulun	<i>Zeb</i> -you-lun.

Introduction

A. Be Reasonable?

In the spring of 2014, Dr. Kent Brantley went to Liberia to serve as a medical missionary. One day he woke up with the realization that he himself was about to become a patient—he had contracted the Ebola virus. His goal transitioned from saving lives for the glory of God to being a Christian example of faith whether he lived or died. “We didn’t believe that because we were going there as medical missionaries we would automatically be divinely protected from getting Ebola.”

Indeed, he was right. Far from being protected from a dread disease because he was a follower of Christ, it was the fact that he was a dedicated follower of Christ that put him in the position of contract-

ing Ebola!

Christians are reasonable people. We are solid citizens and reliable employees and mates. We try to avoid excess in all areas of our lives. But what about the radical demands of following Jesus? Is moderation a virtue there? Have we placed “reasonable” restrictions on discipleship?

B. Lesson Context

The book of Matthew is commonly recognized as being “the most Jewish” of the four Gospels. This is evident from the outset in Matthew’s use of the numeric value of King David’s name as a memory device in Jesus’ genealogy ([Matthew 1:17](#)). Using more than 60 quotes from the Old Testament, Matthew explains the life of Jesus from birth to resurrection. The flight to and from Egypt is reminiscent of the nation of Israel’s enslavement in and delivery from Egypt. Herod’s opposition to Jesus mirrors that of Pharaoh to Moses. The parallels are many! Matthew notes that John the Baptist’s preaching is also according to Scripture, preparing the way for Jesus.

Matthew’s Jewishness is also evident in his use of the phrase “kingdom of heaven” rather than “kingdom of God.” The former expression occurs more than 30 times in the New Testament, and all of them are in the book of Matthew. “King-

dom of heaven” is a respectful Jewish way of saying “kingdom of God,” since God’s name was not spoken by devout Jews of the day. Other words would be substituted for the divine name so clarity would be maintained. Thus the use of the word *heaven*.

This is not a universal rule, since Matthew himself has at least four instances of “kingdom of God.” (There may be five, depending on how a textual variant is counted.) Even given these exceptions, the difference is striking.

Another point regarding the Jewishness of Matthew’s Gospel is Jesus’ time in a wilderness, which immediately leads into today’s lesson text. The parallel is with the nation of Israel’s experience in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. The 40 years of Israel’s stay is mirrored in Jesus’ stay of 40 days ([Numbers 14:33, 34; Matthew 4:2](#)). But unlike that case, Jesus did not suffer defeat as a result (compare [Numbers 14:39–45](#)). Instead, he faced Satan’s temptations victoriously, defeating him with the faithful and proper use of Scripture three times. Today’s text comes next.

I. Two Transitions ([MATTHEW 4:12, 13](#))

A. John in Prison (v. [12a](#))

[12a](#). When Jesus heard that John

had been put in prison,

John the Baptist began his ministry “in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar” (Luke 3:1-3). The issues involved in pinning down this exact year by modern reckoning are complicated. But we can say with a reasonable degree of certainty that this was AD 28. The Gospel accounts imply that Jesus’ ministry begins shortly after John’s when the fact of Jesus’ age of “about 30 years old” is taken into account (Luke 3:23).

John’s imprisonment is also noted in Matthew 11:2; 14:3; Mark 6:17; Luke 3:19, 20; John 3:24. We take care, of course, not to confuse John the Baptist with John the Evangelist, the latter being the one who writes the Gospel that bears his name.

B. Jesus to Capernaum (vv. 12b, 13)

12b. he withdrew to Galilee.

All four Gospels report that Jesus begins his public ministry by preaching in Galilee (Mark 1:14; Luke 4:14; John 4:3). These accounts portray Jesus as resolute. We can be sure he does not react without prayerful consideration, given the 40 days just spent in the wilderness (see the Lesson Context).

At first glance, it may appear that Jesus travels to Galilee for safety concerns. But he is not running scared. He did not run from the devil in the wilderness experience just completed (see the

Lesson Context), and he doesn’t need to run from earthly authorities. In instances where he escapes danger (see Luke 4:28-30; John 8:59; 10:39), the issue is one of timing: “They tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come” (John 7:30). In this regard, the danger posed in John 10:39 presents itself anew when Jesus returns to that scene in the account beginning in John 11:7 because the time is right.

Furthermore, Galilee at this time is ruled by Herod Antipas, who will later behead John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-11). So there is no safety there. To put it another way, if Jesus is running for his safety, he does not run far enough! The real reason for the retrograde movement to Galilee will be seen shortly.

13a. Leaving Nazareth,

There seems to be a lot left unspoken in this simple phrase. Nazareth does not have a good reputation (John 1:46). But that doesn’t seem to be the reason Jesus leaves his hometown of some three decades (Luke 2:4, 39, 51).

Perhaps divine insight causes him to realize in advance that he will have no credibility there (compare Luke 4:16-30; John 4:44). Because of their hard-hearted rejection of the man who grew up among them, the people of Nazareth will not see their town become the center of his ministry (see Matthew 13:53-58). Even so, “of

Nazareth” becomes part of Jesus’ identity ([Matthew 26:71](#); etc.).

What Do You Think?

Were someone to quote the old axiom “Bloom where you’re planted” to convince you not to move, how should you respond, if at all?

Digging Deeper

Which biblical figures influence you most in forming your answer? Why?

13b. he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—

Capernaum is a typical working-class village of the era. One estimate puts its population at about 1,500. Sited *in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali*, it is about 20 miles northeast of Nazareth. Zebulun and Naphtali are regions named for two of the sons of Jacob (see [Genesis 30:8; 35:23](#)). The borders of their land grant go back to the days of Joshua ([Joshua 19:10–16, 32–39](#)).

If there ever was a backwater place in the Roman Empire, this is it! It is possible that many first-century readers of Matthew are not even aware of this little fishing village. Although mentioned by name 16 times in the four Gospels (and nowhere else), it is not nearly as significant as Jerusalem, Sepphoris, Tiberius,

or, of course, Rome.

Yet Jesus chooses insignificant Capernaum as the base of operations from which to launch his public ministry. [John 2:12](#) notes that after the miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, Jesus returns to Capernaum, not Nazareth, “with his mother and brothers and his disciples.”

Our expanded look at Capernaum serves at least two purposes. First, the role the village is about to play is witnessed by an intertextual bond with the book of Isaiah (see below). Second, the early mention of Capernaum creates context for first century readers who may not know anything about the village.

Regarding Jesus himself, he is a nobody by outward appearance ([Isaiah 53:2](#)). He was not born in a palace, but in a shelter for livestock ([Luke 2:7](#)). His hometown is not magnificent Jerusalem, but the middle-of-nowhere village of Nazareth—a village with a less than sterling reputation ([John 1:46](#)). He was born to poor parents (compare [Luke 2:22–24; Leviticus 12:1–8](#)). His early experience was as a refugee in Egypt ([Matthew 2:13–15](#)). When his parents returned with him to Nazareth, he experienced life as a carpenter ([Mark 6:3](#)). His life has been one shared by common humanity.

II. One Light

(MATTHEW 4:14-17)

A. Prophecy's Fulfillment (v. 14)

14. to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

The prophet Isaiah had a prophetic ministry that lasted from roughly 740 to 680 BC. The four Gospels quote from the book of Isaiah more than 20 times. The book's vital prophecies of the coming Messiah has earned it the designation "the fifth Gospel" to many Bible students. Regarding Matthew's respect for and use of the Hebrew Scriptures, see the [Lesson Context](#).

B. Fulfillment's Result (vv. 15, 16)

15, 16. "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."

The quotation is from [Isaiah 9:1, 2](#). The phrase *Galilee of the Gentiles* recognizes that that region had been conquered by foreigners as the 10 northern tribes were taken into exile in 722 BC. To see and hear the ancient tribal names *Zebulun* and *Naphtali* is to revive hope in the promises of God. What may at first glance look like a retreat to a supposedly safer territory is actually a full-throated

rally with language rooted deeply in the narrative of a just and merciful God. He is the one who rescues!

LIGHT IN A DARK PLACE

Richard Wurmbrand (1909–2001) is remembered as the twentieth century's voice of the persecuted church. He began an underground church movement in Romania as part of protest against the government's control of churches. His subsequent imprisonment totaled 14 years.

He spent several of those years in solitary confinement. His dark, windowless cell, 12 feet underground, was designed to cut him off completely from the outside world. But Wurmbrand refused to let himself be overcome by that darkness.

After his release, Wurmbrand dedicated his life to exposing the brutal persecution of believers in Communist countries. He wrote 18 books in English, testified before the Internal Security Subcommittee of the U.S. Senate, and began the organization now known as Voice of the Martyrs. The imprisonment meant to silence Wurmbrand only increased his influence.

This same irony is true in the life of John the Baptist. Herod's attempt to silence John only served to signal the beginning of Jesus' ministry. His earthly ministry has now passed to us. What

darkness are you helping overcome today?

—J. E.

What Do You Think?

How will you use [Isaiah 9:1, 2](#), if at all, when witnessing for Jesus to someone who has never even heard of Isaiah?

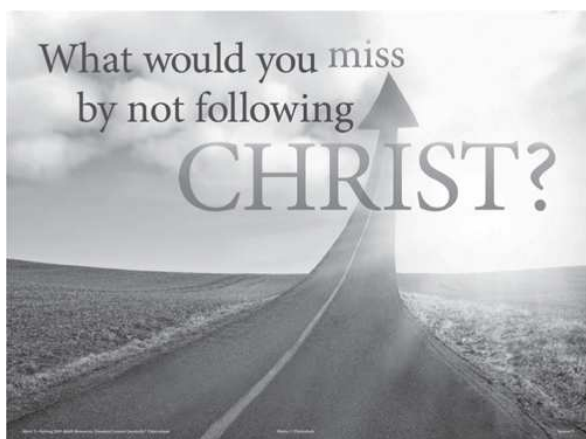
Digging Deeper

Consider which parts of Paul's evangelistic approach in [Acts 17:22-32](#) are relevant in a modern context in this regard.

C. What Must Happen (v. 17a)

17a. From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent,

The exact amount of *time* that passes between when Jesus settles into Capernaum and when he begins to *preach* is unspecified. Furthermore, Matthew is quite succinct in reviewing the content of Jesus' preaching.



Visual for Lesson 5. This question can be posed for discussion at various points in the lesson. It is particularly well suited for the lesson's conclusion.

What Jesus expects as a result of his preaching is summed up in the single word *repent*. When we see that word, our first thought (which is not wrong) may be to think in terms of leaving a life of sin ([John 8:11](#); etc.) and embracing righteousness ([Matthew 3:8](#); etc.). More foundationally, repentance is grounded in a change of thought and heart (compare [1 Kings 8:47-50](#); [Matthew 3:9](#); [Acts 8:20-22](#); etc.). Sincere changes in behavior result from changes in heart.

D. Why It Must Happen (v. 17b)

17b. “for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

The requirement to repent is immediately backed up with the reason we see here. But this raises three questions: (1) What exactly is *the kingdom of heaven*? (2) What does the phrase *has come near* mean? and (3) What does each phrase signify in relation to the other?

The kingdom of heaven refers to the fulfillment of God's promise to reverse the course of history, a history tainted by sin. That reversal involves establishing his reign in place of the tyrannous, selfish reign of sin and death ([Romans 5:14, 21](#)). It is a kingdom, as Jesus later told Pilate,

that “is not of this world” ([John 18:36](#)).

God, of course, has never ceased to reign over the entire universe since its creation. Therefore his rule has always included planet Earth and its kingdoms ([Isaiah 37:16](#); [Romans 13:1](#)). Forces both physical and spiritual in nature have set up reigns and realms that have opposed his rule ([Ephesians 6:12](#); etc.). God uses these for his purposes ([Isaiah 7:18–25](#); [John 19:11](#); etc.) and assigns them to the garbage heap of history and eternity as he wills ([Isaiah 10:5–19](#); [Daniel 2:40–43](#); [4:35](#); [7:7](#), [20–25](#); [Luke 10:18](#); [Revelation 21:8](#); etc.). History as it has unfolded since the days of Jesus reveals that the kingdom he announces supplants all others, but not in the way anyone in the first century AD supposes.

For Jesus’ audience, God’s promise of a kingdom to come includes a strong nationalistic focus on Israel. Devout Jews expect God’s promised kingdom to result in the defeat of Israel’s enemies, with the Roman Empire especially in the cross hairs (compare [Acts 1:6](#)). God’s kingdom, in other words, is commonly expected to be political and military in nature like any other, with the exception that it is to be ruled righteously by, and in submission to, God.

A primary way Jesus will challenge this expectation as his ministry unfolds is through parables (see, for example,

lesson 1 of this quarter). These project a very different vision of God’s promised kingdom than commonly anticipated.

What Do You Think?

What steps can your church take to help its members avoid equating allegiance to any particular nation with allegiance to the kingdom of Heaven?

Digging Deeper

Consider nationalistic errors such as the phrase *Gott mit uns* (“God with us”) as inscribed on German equipment during World War II.

The exact meaning of the verb that is translated *has come near* (along with its closely related adverb form) is the subject of much debate. One clear way it is used in the New Testament is to specify that something is physically near, or approaching, something else (examples: [Matthew 21:1](#); [Luke 24:28](#); [John 6:19](#)). This is known as a *spatial sense*. Another unmistakable way the word is used is in referring to something that is near, or getting nearer, in time (examples: [Matthew 21:34](#); [26:18](#); [John 6:4](#)). This is known as a *temporal sense*. A possible third meaning-usage speaks of closeness of a relationship (examples: [Romans 10:8](#); [Ephesians 2:13, 17](#); [James 4:8](#)). This may be called a *relational sense*.

All may be true for the case at hand.

Wherever Jesus is, the kingdom is. Those standing near Jesus are standing next to the perfect embodiment (incarnation) of the kingdom of Heaven. He arrives when “the set time had fully come” ([Galatians 4:4](#)) to put right our relationship with God ([4:5](#)). Thus the spatial, the temporal, and the relational senses all have support. We also may discern the idea of spiritual proximity in [Luke 17:20, 21](#).

In the person of Jesus, the kingdom of Heaven is nearer than it ever has been. It is coming in a power that does not reflect the power of human kingdoms that wax and wane. Rather, the kingdom of Heaven will redefine what power means.

HOME TRANSITIONS

As baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) reach retirement age, they face the realization of necessary change. Never fear, however: companies such as Close at Hand Home Transitions are dedicated to helping make the necessary adjustments as boomers embrace the next phase of life.

For those choosing to downsize their living arrangements, Close at Hand helps draw up a new floor plan, determines what furniture will fit, oversees movers, sets up new utility and subscription services, etc. The service only works, however, for folks who are not in denial regarding their changing needs.

As Jesus began his ministry, he challenged those who would listen that a new living arrangement was at hand: residency in the kingdom of Heaven. Listeners were free either to accept or deny the reality of that statement. Those who accepted it did so by repenting. Making the transition to become a resident of the kingdom of Heaven is only preparatory to another transition, however. That further and final transition is set forth in [John 14:2, 3](#). We might say that Jesus is the original and ultimate “close at hand home transition” company. And he charges nothing for his services!

—J. E.

III. Four Responses ([MATTHEW 4:18–22](#))

A. Simon Peter and Andrew (vv. 18–20)

18–20. 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.

See the commentary on [Mark 1:16–18](#) in lesson 2, pages 243, 244. To that we may add that *Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew* and the two mentioned

next are models of discipleship as they set the positive example of responding to Jesus' call *at once* (contrast [Matthew 8:21, 22](#)). Another way to translate the Greek word behind *at once* is "immediately," which is exactly what verse [22](#), below, does.

B. James and John (vv. 21, 22)

21, 22. 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.

See the commentary on [Mark 1:19, 20](#) in lesson [2](#), page [244](#).

What Do You Think?

Were you to perceive a call from Christ to a certain ministry tomorrow, how would you test the validity of that call?

Digging Deeper

How will you know whether God is calling you to immediate action vs. to a ministry that involves a degree of delay? Consider in your response the urgencies (or lack thereof) in [Luke 9:59–62](#) and [John 11:6](#).

Conclusion

A. Boat Time, Dock Time

When Jesus invited Peter, Andrew, James, and John to join his ministry, he was inviting men who knew the importance of both the boat-time activity of casting nets ([Matthew 4:18](#)) and the dock-time activity of preparing those nets to be cast ([4:21](#)). Effective ministry today must recognize the same distinction. What Christians see and hear in half-hour sermons is boat time, when their minister is casting a net. Undergirding that boat time is (or should be) a lot of dock time—time spent preparing. Sermons that lack adequate dock time of preparation will be ineffective.

We can expand this analogy to the life of any Christian. When the opportunity to speak a word for Jesus presents itself, will we have put in the necessary dock time so that word will be persuasive (see [1 Peter 3:15](#))?

The analogy applies also to vocation changes. Would you consider leaving one career for another in order to follow Jesus more closely? Or will you hurriedly think *I have to provide for my family, or I'm worse than an unbeliever!* to dismiss such a possibility immediately ([1 Timothy 5:8](#)).

Consider how today's world might look if the four disciples of today's lesson had said no. They received no assurance

that their families would be adequately provided for, but they had no higher priority than Jesus' call on their lives (compare [Matthew 19:27](#); [Luke 5:28](#); [9:59–62](#)). What about you?

What Do You Think?

What is one transition you need to make (and perhaps have been putting off) in order to serve Christ better?

Digging Deeper

In addition to the transitions made by the first four disciples, consider how the transitions in these passages influence your response: [Genesis 12:4](#); [31:3](#); [Exodus 3](#); [Nehemiah 1](#); [2](#); [Acts 8:26](#); [9:15](#); [26:15](#), [16](#).

B. Prayer

Father, strengthen us to follow your Son without reserve. Give us ears to hear his call and a willingness to follow him no matter the cost. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Following Jesus is our highest priority.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#)

Into the Lesson

Have participants use their smartphones to perform an Internet search for the phrase *new directions*. Ask learners to call out (1) the names of businesses that use that phrase in their names and (2) the product or service of the businesses. Continue until four or five responses are voiced. Possible results will include companies that treat mental health issues, publish cutting-edge books, produce alternative medicines, and arrange travel for those with physical disabilities. (If fewer than half your class members have smartphones, do the Internet search yourself beforehand. Distribute one-page handouts that list four or five companies as above.)

In discussing use of the phrase *new directions* in the business names, ask for possible reasons the companies did so. Ask learners about times they sensed a need for a new direction in life.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Going My Way?” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. After no more than one minute, reveal the answer and discuss the quote. Ask

learners about times they sensed a need for a new direction in life.

After either activity say, “At times, we encounter people and ideas that challenge us to take a radical new direction in life. When Jesus called his first disciples with a new direction, they accepted.”

Into the Word

Divide the class in half. Designate one of the halves as *The Seeing Group*. Give members this assignment on a handout (you prepare): Read [Matthew 4:12-17](#). Write three questions that summarize how seeing the light of Jesus can give us a new direction. Designate the other half as *The Following Group*. Give members this assignment on a handout (you prepare): Read [Matthew 4:18-22](#). Write three commands that summarize how agreeing to follow Jesus results in a new direction.

Possible results for The Seeing Group: Do you see a path forward? (v. 16a) / Do you want a life worth living? (v. 16b) / Can you see changes you need to make in your life? (v. 17). *Possible results for The Following Group:* Change your career! (v. 19) / Leave the past behind! (v. 20) / Love me more than anyone else in your life! (v. 22). Encourage creative thinking; many responses are possible.

Allow groups a few moments to summarize their texts and what they have written.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Complete the Outline” activity from the reproducible page. Have students work in small groups to complete it.

After either activity say, “Like the fishermen of Galilee, we cannot see Jesus for who he truly is and remain the same. How will knowing Jesus alter your behavior this week?”

Into Life

Write these statements on the board:

Jesus’ teaching helps me understand

what my future can hold.

Jesus’ call to repentance points out how my life should change.

Jesus’ challenge to follow him must rearrange my priorities.

Allow class members to consider these statements silently as they ask themselves, “What commitment can I make in response to each one?” *Possible responses:* Since the light of Jesus lights our paths, we do not have to fear what might jump out of the shadows to harm us. Because we see his perfect example, we can change the way we have been treating someone. Because he wants us to do his work, we can decide to invest time in his kingdom.

After a few moments, lead in a closing prayer, promising to answer Jesus’ call to

discipleship.

Option. If you did not use the “Going My Way” activity earlier, use it here as part of a closing prayer of commitment.