**Faithfulness**

Matthew 4:12-22

Faithfulness is responsibly **Doing** the work assigned to you.

Here in Matthew 4, we see Jesus **beginning his public ministry**, ***doing the work the Father had given him to do***. Matthew’s gospel is especially filled with the Old Testament to highlight this fact - that Jesus’ life and ministry had all been foretold, even where he would live, in the backwater, insignificant ***fishing village of Capernaum***.

“So that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ‘The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali… the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light.’” Matthew 4:16

God the Father gave God the Son a detailed and specific assignment: to bring the light of God’s truth into the darkness of this broken, sin-filled world. ***For 30 years Jesus fulfilled that assignment by obeying his parents***, learning the Torah, being a faithful Jewish boy. He apprenticed himself to his father, learning the trade of a carpenter and, no doubt, making some exceptional furniture and household implements. The most remarkable thing about the childhood and young adulthood of Jesus is that we don’t know anything about it!

But as we all consider what it means for us to be faithful to what God has assigned to us - let’s reflect on this important point: **sometimes the assignment is to be a good son**, to be a good daughter; to listen and learn; ***to wait and read Scripture and pray***. Sometimes the assignment is to prepare and not worry about the next big thing. This season that you’re in – that IS your big thing. That is your current testing ground. God is preparing you; He is shaping you; He is working in your heart.

This is how God ALWAYS works - **first IN someone, then THROUGH them**. Always.

* Abraham waited 25 years for Isaac to be born.
* Moses waited 40 years, herding sheep in the wilderness, before God called him to lead Israel.
* David waited 10 or 15 years, serving a deranged king, and often running for his life, before ascending to the throne himself.
* The apostles waited in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to be poured out.

God always works in us and then He works through us. And remarkably, it was the same with Jesus. ***The majority of his faithfulness to the Father’s will was living a simple villager’s life*** with his family. 30 years. Then for 3 years he traveled, preached, and healed. Then he faced his ultimate test with his trial, suffering and death. But catch this - the human part of Jesus - the part of the eternal Son of God that was fully human - had to LEARN obedience through what he suffered. Like us, he had to grow into his faithfulness. He was not born a 30-year-old rabbi. He was born as a baby. He did not fast forward through the wacky teen years. He lived and grew through them. He did not opt out of the simple work of carpentry - he embraced it. And then, when the time came to start his public ministry, he moved forward in obedience.

“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Matthew 4:17

**He announced a new kingdom** - the heavenly kingdom of God - and with the arrival of that kingdom came the necessary message of repentance. For only those who turn from and renounce the kingdom of this world can enter the kingdom of heaven. Then he saw two fishermen - brothers he had met a few days or weeks earlier.

“And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’” Matthew 4:19

**In this single command Jesus outlined his entire call**: follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. First, you have to turn from this world and commit to following Jesus as your King. (That’s what the whole kingdom thing means, after all, that the King has arrived and it’s time to choose sides.) Then, after committing to follow Jesus, you accept the result that He is going to change you and make you something you weren’t before.

Simon and Andrew were fishermen. ***After this day, after this call, they would not be fishermen again.*** Instead of catching fish, they would go on to catch people in the net of Jesus’ Kingdom. And so Jesus showed the first disciples what it would mean to call Him King: it would mean following and fishing.

**Discipleship: Character x Calling = Impact**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Character | “Follow me” |
| Calling | “And I will make you fishers of men.” Matt. 4:19 |

Here at Oakwood, we have borrowed **the impact equation** from the Kansas City Underground - character x calling = impact. The two sides of discipleship don’t just add to each other, they multiply each other. If your character is only a 2 or 3, meaning you’re not very mature, not very patient, or loving or faithful, then even if your gifting and ability is a 10, your impact will never get past 20 or 30 because character and calling multiply. So, we can increase our impact by working on both sides - character, maturity in Christ and calling, ministry focus and effectiveness.

Think of it as:

**Discipleship: Character x Calling = Impact**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Character  (Fruit of the Spirit) | “Follow me” |
| Calling  (Gifts of the Spirit) | “And I will make you fishers of men.” Matt. 4:19 |

We have **a handout** here that many of us are using as a monthly worksheet for our Christian growth. It works best in a Discipleship Group as you encourage and challenge 2 or 3 other believers, but you can apply the principles on your own, as a couple, as a family.

Today we are going to very simply ***unpack these two sides of faithfulness for the first disciples***. It will be very encouraging to see that Jesus has very realistic expectations. He didn’t send Peter out to preach the Pentecost sermon we read in Acts 2 that first day. He simply called a pair of brothers to stop what they were doing and come, follow him.

Faithfulness is growing our **Character** to **Be** more like Jesus

“‘*Follow me*, and I will make you fishers of men.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.” Matthew 4:19

Faithfulness begins with simply hearing the call of Christ and responding. It begins with that initial **repentance and faith**. Faith and faithfulness are related terms in both English and Greek. You can’t be faithful without faith. You have to believe Jesus is the King of Kings in order to truly follow Him.

Faithfulness is growing our **Character** to **Be** more like Jesus

* **Believe** in Jesus

“‘*Follow me*, and I will make you fishers of men.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.” Matthew 4:19

When you interact with a king, your attitude should be one of respect and deference and obedience if called upon. We don’t have royalty in the U.S. and our history makes us naturally and automatically defiant of such authority. But for most of history people understood how to act around a king. You were respectful and obedient. Here in America we all function as OUR OWN ROYALTY. We demand respect and try to get as much obedience from OTHERS as we can.

***But the response of Simon and Andrew is so revealing!*** They knew that this was not just some average Jewish Rabbbi calling them - this was THE KING. And it wasn’t just the Roman Emperor - this was The King of all Kings - the Sovereign Ruler of the universe.

**That is what saving faith looks like**. For three generations now we’ve been trained to understand saving faith as raising a hand or going forward at an event. That wasn’t what Jesus was doing there by the Sea of Galilee. He wasn’t passing out fliers and inviting some fishermen to hear him give a talk under a tent later. He was calling them to leave behind everything they knew, the entire life they had built and abandon all of it to devote themselves to Him.

You filled in the blank there or noted on your phone the bullet point - **BELIEVE**. But be sure you get the definition right. To believe that Jesus is Lord is to commit yourself to serve Him as YOUR Lord, Your King. That means your life belongs to Him. You serve Him. You are His just like a knight handing his sword to King Arthur and swearing allegiance to Camelot could no longer live as he previously had.

Faithfulness is growing our **Character** to **Be** more like Jesus

* **Be** with Jesus and **Become** like Jesus

“‘*Follow me*, and I will make you fishers of men.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.” Matthew 4:19

You can’t become like someone you don’t know. You have to be with them to learn from them and over time, you will become like them. The genius of Jesus’ training method was this single, simple point: he was WITH the twelve apostles for every minute of three years. He didn’t teach 4-5 90-minute class sessions each week - **he LIVED with them constantly**.

* They saw him in the morning when he woke up to pray.
* They saw him later in the morning when he set out to preach and heal.
* They saw him as he traveled from town to town, trusting the Father to provide food and housing for their whole team.
* They saw him as he responded to religious people and very non-religious people.
* They saw him. They watched. They listened. They asked questions.

We think we can condense a lot of “discipleship” into a 35-minute sermon or a 60-minute class or a 90 minute Bible study. And, for sure, these are important things. But much more is caught than taught. If we want to really make disciples, we need to really spend time with the ones we intend to disciple. More on that in a minute.

For now, just notice how the disciples grew in character. Jesus did not give them all a book or scroll to read and set up discussion times to process the content of the book. Nothing wrong with doing that; but it’s not what Jesus did. Look at verse 23.

* **Be** with Jesus and **Become** like Jesus

“And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.” Matt. 4:23

In five more verses we will come to the sermon on the mount and get one of Jesus’ longest recorded messages. But at first there was no sermon, no Bible study. At first, it was super simple: come, walk with me. Come, listen to me. Come, watch how I interact with individuals and crowds. And notice who was coming: sick people; demon-possessed people. Jesus didn’t go straight to Jerusalem to talk with the priests and professors in Israel (he’d deal with them soon enough). He stayed out in the country with the everyday folks. And he came to love them, to help them, to heal them.

***When is the last time you just WERE with Jesus?*** Oh, I know we read about Him. We pray to Him. But do we spend time just BEING with Him anymore? Take that as an assignment this week - to read on in the gospel of Matthew and just BE with the Lord. Listen to his teaching. Watch his ministry. Marvel with the crowds. Struggle with the disciples. Ask questions with the Pharisees.

We will never become more like Jesus unless we commit to simply being with Him. We have to know Him - to see His heart in action - to have any idea of the kind of people he wants us to grow up to become.

And isn’t this **the genius of THE FAMILY**? God gave us Moms and Dads, brothers and sisters - both natural and spiritual - for us to BE WITH; to live with; to watch and learn from. And oh, there is no greater blessing than when you see Jesus in your family; when you show Jesus to your children and grandchildren. There is no greater gift on this planet.

There was a big **conference of pastors**, some 5,000 men, together. The preacher had people stand up if they had come to Christ through an evangelistic rally, like Billy Graham or something. A handful stood up and people cheered for their salvation. The preacher had people stand up if a friend or roommate or co-worker had led them to the Lord. A few people stood up and people cheered for their salvation. Then the preacher said, “Stand up if your Mom and Dad led you to put your faith in Jesus.” And the whole room stood up, all at once, except for the small handful who had stood up earlier. It was a breathtaking moment to realize ***the power and the blessing of being raised in a Christian home***.

**Parents, grandparents** - never underestimate the significance of your FAITHFULNESS to the assignment to raise your kids and grandkids to know, love and follow Jesus. How did you learn right and wrong? Probably from Mom and Dad! How did you learn to think of others? To not hit your brother or sister? To share your toys?

This first part of discipleship is simple -

Faithfulness is growing our **Character** to **Be** more like Jesus

Faithfulness is pursuing our **Calling** to **Serve** like Jesus

“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Matt. 4:19

We spent 13 weeks in the fall on CALLING, now we are spending ***15 weeks on Character***. Each of the 13 perfections of Jesus is a challenge and invitation to us - as we see His glorious faithfulness, His absolute righteousness, it summons us to be more like Him. Of those perfections, what is the Holy Spirit calling you to grow in right now? Don’t pick more than one or two. Identify a key area you need to grow in and ask the Lord to help you grow. Work with your D-Group or a close friend to put together a growth plan, just like you would with a personal trainer. Some of us need to lose 20 pounds physically and spiritually in this new year. Let’s make a plan and get a friend who can help us work the plan.

**Consider the perfections of Jesus**: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Building on those 9 fruits of the Spirit we add 4 more: humility, hope, zeal and wisdom. Which one is the Holy Spirit prompting you to grow in right now? Don’t apply the law to your heart - apply the gospel. Look up at the glory of Jesus; look down at your weakness and sinfulness; let that vast difference lead you to repentance and faith so you can experience the grace of the gospel and begin to grow up in Christ-likeness, extending that grace to others.

Character always leads to calling. Growing to be like Jesus in His love, moves you into ministry of love. Growing in Joy moves you to share that joy. Growing in patience, faithfulness, intentionality, and responsibility prompts you to use your time - your minutes and days - to encourage and bless other people in Jesus’ name.

The first part of faithfulness is character - growing to BE more like Jesus. The second half of faithfulness is calling - serving more like Jesus.

Faithfulness is pursuing our **Calling** to **Serve** like Jesus

“So his fame spread through all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them.” Matt. 4:24

There are some **remarkable words** in this verse we can quickly skim past. But notice first where Jesus’ fame spread: Syria. Not Israel. But just east of Northern Israel - Syria. “They brought him” who? Not just Jews! Crowds of Jews and Gentiles came. And Jesus did not turn them away. They brought him ALL the sick. And he healed them ALL.

***Imagine! No distinctions. No interviews.*** No contracts or agreements. No fees of any kind. No passing of the offering basket. No conditions. Just the love of God on full display. Where there is pain - He brings relief. Where there is illness, He brings wholeness and restoration. Where there is demonic bondage, He brings freedom. Where there is blindness to truth, He opens eyes to see and understand. Jesus changes EVERYTHING.

Brothers, sisters - ***do we serve LIKE JESUS?*** Oh, I know that we serve like American Christians - even like Bible-believing, gospel-knowing evangelical Christians. But is our way of serving and reaching out the way JESUS served and reached out?

**The knife of family training cuts both ways**. Yes, it’s a huge blessing to be raised by godly parents. But it’s also a huge hardship to be raised by alcoholics or abusive parents. It’s one of the greatest obstacles in life to grow up in a broken home. You automatically inherit the blind spots and bad habits of such parents, even if you hate them - because you simply don’t know another way.

Now, I’m not saying the entire American Church has been an abusive family - though there certainly has been some of that. But I am saying that we have been raised these last 60 plus years in the church growth movement that had some wonderful strengths but also some significant blind spots and weaknesses. And just like a young couple starting out in marriage has to know the strengths and weaknesses of the families they came from in order to build something new and better; so we need to know - to look full in the face at - the good, the bad and the ugly of the “Christianity” we have been trained in.

Walk into the typical Sunday worship service - big church, small church - doesn’t matter. ***Does it look like Matthew 4:23-24?*** Do you see hurting, broken people? Is word spreading throughout a region about love so tangible it changes lives? Are people coming and bringing all of their friends and family to experience something they’ve never seen or heard of before?

Well, maybe not the worship service, but how about our small groups? Ok - walk into the typical small group or Bible study - does THAT look like Matthew 4:24? Are demons cast out? Are real issues addressed and brought to the Lord Jesus? Are hurting, broken people there?

Jesus did not grab 12 young men and start a Bible study. He started with four young men, and he brought them with him into traveling, preaching, exhausting person to person ministry. And it wouldn’t be long before they would be DOING the ministry themselves.

Jesus used four simple, easily repeatable steps to train the apostles for ministry. Discipleship trainers summarize these in the acroynym MAWL.

Faithfulness is pursuing our **Calling** to **Serve** like Jesus

* **Model** > Assist > Watch > **Leave**

“They brought him all the sick… and he healed them.” Matt. 4:24

First, ***Jesus modeled the kind of ministry he wanted them to later do***. He didn’t present it in a powerpoint or with a video. He showed them - over and over. One village, then another. One crowd, then the next. One person, then the next person.

***It might have been a full year before Jesus sent out the 12***, though it might have only been a few months. The gospel writers weren’t super concerned with chronology, probably because the Holy Spirit knew later readers would be obsessed with timelines and training programs. “You need precisely 3 months to model radical healing ministry and 6 months for exorcism, but 18 months of modeling for a real preaching ministry.” Nonsense. Every person will be different and every situation and culture unique. You need the Holy Spirit. He will guide you as you do ministry like Jesus.

Whatever the timeframe, it wasn’t too long (by our standards) before Jesus got the disciples involved in the ministry - baptizing new converts, doing some initial teaching and training, healing some easier cases, casting out some lower-level demons. First, they assisted him as he did the healing and preaching, then he assisted them as they did the healing and preaching ministry. At first, Jesus was doing almost everything. By the end of the 3 years Jesus was doing almost nothing.

What is striking as you study the method of Jesus to make disciples is ***HOW LITTLE TEACHING is documented***. We get the sermon on the mount at the beginning and the Olivet Discourse and a lot of teaching in Jesus’ final week. In between those teachings, we get 30-40 parables and a lot of other unique interactions. Jesus knew the disciples (and US) didn’t primarily need a theological handbook - what they needed and what we need is a GUIDE. He SHOWED THEM. Then he helped them begin to live and serve as HE lived and served.

He helped them. He watched them. He corrected, reprimanded, coached, and then re-deployed them. He picked them up when they failed. He rebuked them when they doubted. The main thing we get in the gospel accounts is the repeated revelation of the COMMONNESS of the disciples. These were not the best and the brightest. They were just a dozen faithful men. Well, 11. And don’t forget the women. Several women traveled with Jesus taking care of the whole group. That was no small affair, especially when there were 72 men in pairs.

And don’t miss the last step in the ministry training process: LEAVE. Some trainers have proposed the term LAUNCH since leave is sad and painful. But the trainers I’m learning from insist on the word LEAVE as the right term. It is, without question, what Jesus did. Yes, by leaving he launched the 11 into leadership - soon to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. But the leadership lesson is that at some point we have to LEAVE. We have to say, “It’s enough. I’ve given this group, or this D-Group, or this church, what I was supposed to give them, and now other people need me.” Look back at verse 23.

Faithfulness is pursuing our **Calling** to **Serve** like Jesus

* **Model** > Assist > Watch > **Leave**

“And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching… proclaiming… and healing.” Matt. 4:23

Jesus’ ministry was ALL ABOUT LEAVING. They would enter a town, preach, heal, maybe stay for a day or two - then move on. Jesus trained the disciples from their first days with him - this is not going to be a ministry of SETTLING DOWN. It’s a ministry of moving forward. The time comes when all of us must leave so others can come - others can come to take our place in ministry, and others can come into the kingdom for the first time.

If we’re honest about the American Church, ***we have perfected the art of SETTLING DOWN***. We have not done very well at leaving. Now everyone take a deep breath. This message is not an announcement. Thank the Lord Jesus Kristin and I have no plans or desires to go anywhere else.

**We have said good-bye to four other churches** - and everyone was heartbreaking. After four years of youth ministry, we graduated with our freshmen who had grown up into seniors. They were leaving, as teens always do, and we left with them. After seminary, we left my parents and my childhood home of Chicago and moved 800 miles away to Charlotte, NC. We served there for 4 years, for the first time being independent as our own little family with three little boys. But the Lord called us to Louisville, KY, to work with Kristin’s parents at a small E Free Church. After two years, we wanted to leave that church, but the Lord said stay and we stayed three more years for our previous record of 5 years in one place - a record we just surpassed this past October!

But after five years, we said good-bye and moved back to Chicago to serve on staff at a large church. That assignment only lasted three years, but we helped bring fresh energy for outreach to a campus that had lost that vision and calling. And then we heard from this friendly little group in Tampa, FL.

Our four departures were not the best. Many things we could have done better. Fear and mistrust clouds judgment and trust me, pastors are not immune to those things - nor are churches.

***But leaving is an important part of ministry***. If nothing else it reminds us that no ministry depends on us - or if it does, that’s a pretty big problem. But more than that, if we are effective in our calling - if we are FAITHFUL to the work God has given us - then we will always be raising up other disciples with the INTENTION of having them replace us.

You’ve all heard me talk about **Manny, my youth pastor** and mentor for 32 years. I was a sophomore in high school when he came to my church in Chicago. He insisted that I intern with him after my freshman year of college. Then, when I was about to graduate from college, Manny stepped down from the youth ministry job so he could give it to me. The church had been growing so he was able to serve as associate pastor for a couple of years. And then the senior pastor left for another church, so Manny took over as Senior Pastor for the next 20 some years.

I’ve known a handful of people who have started in ministry at their home church. But I’ve not heard another story like mine of a pastor stepping aside so their protege could take over their job. ***Manny was uniquely crazy*** - and yes, that does explain a good bit about me.

The point is, that Manny left his job as youth pastor - he left that group of students, which included three of his children - to make room for me. And when God called us to leave four years later, to go to seminary and later leave Chicago - Manny cheered for us every step of the way. Manny represents for me the faithful pastor who invests in people for the years or months he has with them - and trusts God to take them wherever in the kingdom He wants them to end up. ***Manny served with open hands.***

**That’s the way of Jesus.** Sometimes we have to leave. Sometimes we have to shove someone out of the nest. But that’s the nature of ministry - it’s the process of developing disciples. Model. Assist a young leader. Watch them as they start to do what you used to do. Then leave. Will they do everything like you? No! And be thankful for that. Will they make mistakes! Yes! Just like you did when you took over for the person before you.

Here’s our simple summary:

Faithfulness is growing our **Character** to **Be** more like Jesus

Faithfulness is pursuing our **Calling** to **Serve** like Jesus

“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Matt. 4:19

We follow Jesus - becoming like Him in His perfect character. We fish like Jesus - pursuing our calling to serve as He served. Follow and fish. Character and calling.

Now, let’s apply the gospel.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ↑ | Jesus was perfectly **Faithful** to do the work the Father gave Him. |
| ↓ | We are **Inconsistent** and often negligent in the work assigned to us. |
| ❤ | Jesus **Changes** us from the inside out so we want to and are able to serve God |
| → | With discipline and accountability, we can **Grow** in character and calling |

First, we look up to see **the perfect faithfulness of the Lord Jesus**. For every minute of his earthly life he did the work the Father gave him to do. For 30 years that was simple, mundane family life and work. Then for 3 years it involved a traveling ministry with a small band of common Jews. Finally, Jesus gave up His life on the cross so He could give new life to us!

After looking up, we look down to see how far we fall short of Jesus’ glory. We are not consistently or thoroughly faithful. We neglect the work assigned to us; we do the parts we like and ignore the parts we don’t like. We aren’t intentional to develop our character, nor do we actively pursue our ministry callings.

But in this sinful state Jesus does His work in us and through us. Through the miraculous grace of **REGENERATION**, Jesus changes us from the inside out. He gave you a new heart at the moment you trusted in Him for salvation. He forgave your sins, placed His Holy Spirit inside you, and began to change your desires and empower you to love and serve Him.

So now, through the gospel and depending on the Holy Spirit, you can grow in character to be more like Jesus, and you can pursue your calling to serve as Jesus served. So choose one character quality to focus on this month. Choose one spiritual gift to develop as you seek to serve in your ministry calling.

Let’s work to increase our impact by growing in both character and calling. Jesus was faithful to do His work so we could be faithful to do our work!

Let’s pray.

* Believe in Jesus
* Be with Jesus
* Become like Jesus

Faithfulness is pursuing our **Calling** to **Serve** like Jesus

* Model
* Assist
* Watch
* Leave