

## **“Leaving Home”**

### **Matthew 4:12-23**

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Do you think Mary cried when Jesus left home? You know she did. What parent would not? I cried when all three of mine left. As a matter of fact, the hardest I have cried as an adult was the day my oldest child left home. There is something about going through that traumatic experience the first time for which no one can prepare you.

Jesus was Mary’s oldest child. He lived at home for thirty years before leaving, which no doubt made the separation more painful. I imagine lots of tears fell the day Jesus packed and headed north.

**So why did Jesus leave Nazareth and move to Capernaum?** Matthew connected it to John the Baptist’s imprisonment by Herod Antipas, who was furious over John condemning his sexual immorality. John’s voice was silenced. It was time for Jesus to find his.

Did he need to go to a friendlier place to do so, though? Was he in danger of being injured, imprisoned or even killed if he stayed in Nazareth? It seems he was because of the reaction to his visit to the synagogue after his baptism. His words were not well received by most of his listeners and they drove him out of town intending to throw him over a cliff. So, he decided to withdraw to the calmer region around the Sea of Galilee.

Many believe that Jesus moved north not only for safety, but because Galilee was fertile soil for the gospel. The historian, Josephus, described the Galileans as a people open to new and innovative ideas. According to him, they were “fond of innovations and by nature disposed to change.” This was due to the fact that the great roads of the world passed through the region and brought travelers from faraway places. This was not true of Judea to the south, however, which was far more isolated and secluded, the “way to nowhere” as Josephus called it.

So it appeared that geography and history made it possible for a new teacher with a new message to be heard in Galilee. Jesus knew this and moved to the most northerly district in Palestine to make Capernaum his new home.

Jesus was not the only one that needed to leave home. Continue reading the story. “As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother, John, in the boat with their father, Zebedee, mending their nets and he called to them. Immediately, they left the boat and their father and followed him” Matthew 4:18-22.

**Why did these four fishermen uproot their lives and follow Jesus?** It was certainly not because they had nothing to do or little to risk.

In his book, Footsteps of a Fisherman, Scott Walker reminds us that “Capernaum was a thriving fishing village and fishing was a lucrative business. Pork was forbidden by Jewish dietary laws and lamb was reserved for special occasions and festivities. Fish was therefore the staple source of protein for all of Palestine.” Why would these men walk away from a good job with a secure future to follow Jesus?

It appears that they heard and responded to an irresistible call. Now, I don’t think this was the first time the five of them had spoken to each other. Mark suggests that Jesus stayed for a time in Peter’s home after moving to Capernaum. Without a doubt, this led to long conversations between Jesus, Peter, Andrew and their friends as they ate meals together. A level of mutual respect and trust was already developing.

On this particular day on the shore of the sea, though, this humble Galilean carpenter offered them the opportunity of a lifetime with two simple words, “Follow me.” As good as life

was for them, he offered them something better, a partnership with God that would change the world for the better. Who could resist this call? Apparently they could not and left home to follow him.

Are you tracking one of the themes running throughout this powerful story? The five main characters recognized it was time for them to head in new directions. Because of the circumstances around them, the challenge before them or the tantalizing call to them, they could not stay where they were. The time was right to make radical changes in their lives and they took advantage of it.

**Is it time for you to do this, too?** Do you need to respond to the changing landscape around you? Have you received a divine call that is pulling you in a new direction? Is there an irresistible challenge distracting you? Are your friends encouraging you to pursue a new dream, using latent talents?

Is it time for you to go back to school, pursue a new career or open a business? Is it time for you to make changes in your attitude, values, priorities or relationships? Is it time for you to go on a mission trip, teach Sunday school, work with our children or youth or sing in the choir?

In Robert Dale's book, To Dream Again, he reminds us that dreams can run their course and grow stale and lifeless. When this happens, new dreams must be birthed and pursued. Is it time for you to do this?

**What do you need in order to chart a new course and travel down an unfamiliar road?** What did Jesus and these new disciples need? I suspect they needed the same things we do: guidance, direction, wisdom, understanding, courage, confidence, companions, faith and hope.

Episcopal priest and author Tom Ehrlich writes that they needed to be "humble enough to learn, brave enough to fail, foolish enough to imagine a better world and faithful enough to join hands with the flawed and broken." I appreciate his insight.

**Where did they find these things?** They found them in the same place many others have, faith in God and relationships with fellow pilgrims.

I am struck by Jesus' first words in Matthew's gospel. "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven has come near." These are actually John's words that Jesus repeated, perhaps in his honor or for the sake of continuity.

You know, however, from your biblical studies that the word repent means to change course, to turn and head in a new direction. **How is this possible?** How can we change the way we think, believe and behave? How can we change our attitude or the way we relate to others? How can we adjust the way we arrange our values and priorities or handle temptations or problems? How can we overcome fear and doubt, leave our comfort zones, say yes to alluring challenges and travel down unfamiliar roads with strangers?

I don't think we can, at least not by ourselves and Jesus recognized this. This is why he did not merely tell people to repent or change. He told them to repent because the Kingdom of heaven was near.

I don't see the nearness of the kingdom as a threat but a promise. God's presence in their lives would make change possible, even radical change. Like a loving parent, He would lead and guide them. He would inspire and empower them. He would encourage and equip them.

In some ways they would never leave home because He would always be with them. He would never leave nor forsake them.

**Do you need this kind of faith in order to make changes in your attitude, values, priorities and relationships?** Do you need this kind of faith to change your lifestyle, pursue a new career, go back to school or open a business? Do you need this kind of faith to forgive someone and rebuild a relationship? Do you need this kind of faith to sign up for one of our 2008 mission trips or become more involved in our own church? Do you need to accept Jesus' invitation to follow him down a new path? What is keeping you from making this decision?

Listen to the words of Elton Trueblood in his book, [A Place to Stand](#). “At the deepest point in his life it is required of a man that he be a gambler, and in our greatest gamble it is reasonable to allow the testimony of Christ to tip the balance. A Christian is one who bets his life that Christ is right.”

Will you do that right now? Will you say yes to Jesus’ invitation and follow him down new paths of self-discovery that lead to higher levels of service and fulfillment? Like the disciples, will you let him replace something good with something better? Will you partner with him to make the world better? With all my heart, I hope so.