

Is there anything more annoying than getting a call these days? Most of them are robocalls, pushing some product, some candidate, some credit card scam, or letting you know the IRS is after you and agents are literally on the way to arrest you unless you make a payment. Texas leads the nation in calls received; 556 million through April, in fact. For most of these calls, we simply push the red button on our phones to make the call go away. We have no interest in answering it because we know it will waste our time and do nothing to improve our lives.

These calls may all be the same, but there is a different call that, if you answer it, life will never be the same. Actually, if you answer this call, **you** will never be the same. We can choose to reject the call, and many do so not because it will have little impact on their lives, but because it will change it completely. You see, if you answer this call, you will become something you never could become on your own. And that's what we're going to talk about over the next few weeks. This morning we begin a new series I've had on the radar for months now. We are calling it *Becoming*. Through it, we are going to look at what happens when we answer the call of Jesus and how he causes us to become more and more like him. It's a series on what it means to be a disciple.

For many of us, we hear the word disciple and have a general idea of its meaning, but we're not sure how to get there or know if we're measuring up? That's why this series is so important. We are going to look through the Gospels and book of Acts to see four ways Jesus' original followers answered his call and became more like him. And it's an opportunity for us to ask ourselves "Is this true of me?", "What step do I need to take for this to be so?", and "How can I help others get there?"

But first we need to understand the initial call of Jesus. Three words to help you remember: **Know. Grow. Go.** Those three words summarize what Jesus calls us to.

Mark 1:16-20] ¹⁶ Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

Mark details how Jesus' called his first disciples as he began his ministry. He calls you and me in the very same way today, and that call has three components.

Jesus calls us to know him personally.

Jesus begins with the words "follow me". This is more than a request for them to take a walk with him along the seashore. The word Jesus used was a technical word that meant "Go behind me as a disciple." This is an invitation to a relationship. Jesus calls us to know him intimately, be in his presence, listen to his words, watch him as he models the way, and follow in his footsteps.

This call is also countercultural. In that day, someone would seek out a rabbi and ask to be their disciple. Jesus flips that on its head and calls us into relationship with him. But understand, like

the original disciples, Jesus doesn't call us to himself because we are so impressive, and he's got to have us. Jesus doesn't recruit us like a blue-chip prospect to take his gospel-proclaiming program to new heights. In fact, Jesus calls us in spite of what he sees in us. But he does so because he loves us, and he also sees potential; potential in what he can do in and through a willing heart that answers his call.

Don't ever lose sight of the fact that our discipleship journey of becoming more like Jesus begins with a holy God so in love with us that he sent his Son to die for us and rise three days later, and it is through a relationship with him that we receive forgiveness, a new and eternal life, and a new purpose for that life. That means our first priority of being a disciple is to know Jesus. Why? Because you can't become what you do not know. If I want to become a doctor, I need to learn from a doctor. If we want to become more godly, we need to learn from the Son of God, who begins his call by inviting us to follow him. So Jesus calls us to know him personally.

Jesus calls us to grow in him perpetually.

You see that Jesus says, "I will make you become". A life that answers the call of Jesus is one that will undergo significant transformation, but it's important for us to understand how and when those changes come about.

There are things I can achieve on my own. I can exercise and get in shape by myself. But it's not like that with Jesus. "Become" is a passive verb. He doesn't say "follow me and make yourself become what you see". It's not "follow me and once you have it figured out you can go your own way and live the new life under your own power." It's "follow me *and I will make you become*". You and I do not have the capacity to make ourselves into what Jesus intends. What we are to become can only be achieved by the grace of God. Thankfully, he who calls, makes. We do have a part to play, though, and I believe, for many, this is the reason they don't answer the call. **Answering the call of Jesus is more than just a change of direction. It's a change of devotion.** It's turning from an old way of life in order to show up with a willingness to let Jesus grow you up.

It's also important for us to also realize this doesn't happen overnight. My home is currently filled with the sounds of tubas and guitars. What I hear today, though, is much more pleasing to the ear than what I heard months ago. Over time, my boys became better musicians. And it's the same way with the call of Jesus. Becoming like him happens over time. It is a lifelong process. It's why we called the series *Becoming*. We never fully arrive, but we do always want to be growing. That means it's a daily decision to answer Jesus' call, even if you've been a follower of his for a long time.

I had a conversation with someone recently who was comparing who he was before he answered the call of Jesus to who he is now. He was living his life far from God, but he answered the call and, as he did so, God began to change him a little bit at a time. He told me of the things he used to do, then would say "But I don't do that anymore." Ultimately, he concluded "I just want to love people, take care of my family, and do some good with my company." It took some time for him to get there, and he didn't do so on his own, but he answered the call and allowed Jesus to go to work.

Some of you think you are beyond hope, just too messed up for Jesus to be able to do much good. But remember the Bible says the power that raised Jesus from the dead is in you if you have trusted in him. If he can overcome the grave, he can overcome whatever is in your past. I also want to encourage those of you who have known Jesus a long time. You still have room to grow, and you can be an example to the rest of us. If you are still breathing, he's not done with you yet. Jesus is still in the making business.

Jesus calls us to go with him purposefully.

The last part of Jesus' call is that he will make us "fishers of men". Those Jesus calls to himself he sends out on a mission. That mission is to call others in the way Jesus has called us. Know. Grow. Go. We are to introduce others to the Jesus we know. We are to model the way for them as we grow. We are to love them when we go.

If there was a part of the call we may be most familiar with, it's this one, given all of our talk about God given purpose. However, just like our GGP, this last part of the call cannot be separated from the other two. It is only through a relationship with Jesus and his preparation of us that we can be sent out and have an impact in his name. But at the same time, it's not consecutive. It's concurrent. We grow as we go, and we go as we grow. Some of us are waiting for the perfect time. If I can only get a little more Bible knowledge. I need to confirm all of my spiritual gifts. I'm waiting for 100% certainty. Sometimes we just need to move and leave the results up to God. There is no greater purpose in life, no greater mission to be a part of, then to be used by God to call others to himself.

So what do we do with this? Well, we have to make a decision about if we will answer the call, and I'm not here to tell you it's an easy one. We can look at the disciples' prompt and complete response and think "that was easy". But it came at a cost. They left their businesses and left their family. And in a few chapters Mark is going to quote Jesus in saying "If you want to follow me, you will have to pick up your own cross." Following comes at a cost, but if you know the story of the disciples, you know it was worth it for them, and I say with unlimited confidence it will be worth it for you.

As you may remember, we had a Family Picnic in the spring, and I told you that the new ministry year was going to be about stories. That God was turning the page to a new chapter of the story he was telling through this church, and I believe he is wanting to author a new chapter in the story he is telling through your life individually. But for that to happen, we must all commit or recommit to answer the call of Jesus and determine what he is calling us to next.

Between now and June 30, we will share **1,000 stories of courageous next steps in becoming more like Jesus**. And I'm talking more courageous than moving coffee to the first floor! **We believe God still calls and is calling each of us to follow him courageously.** We want everyone to answer that call, take their next step, and tell their stories all year long. We will tell them on Sunday mornings, in our Life Groups, on our website, and through social media. We've even come up with a hashtag #storiesofbecoming so that our church body can search for them and we can collect them. Can you imagine what will happen in and through this church if we all answer the call of Jesus, take that courageous next step, and then tell the story? Think about the

impact it will have on us, the impact it will have on visitors, the impact it will have as we “go”, and the glory our God will receive as we do so.

And I’m going to go first. Anything I ask of you I must ask of myself. I’ve been in prayer about this for a few months, knowing we were going to be inviting all of us to participate. I have asked God what my next step is, and he has answered...abundantly!

My process in determining sermon series is a prayerful one. I ask God what we need to talk about as a church family, and God is good to give me direction on that. Most recently, I felt a clear encouragement to do a series on worship. We were hiring a new worship pastor and, as we talk about becoming more like Jesus, our hearts of worship towards our worthy God is foundational. And while I always preach the sermon to myself as I prepare to preach it to you, there was something different about the last four weeks.

I have many times told our staff, and said here, that we are utterly dependent on the grace of God to accomplish anything. And I still believe that 100% today. But I’ve also told you that, if there is anything that will get in the way of my worship of God, it’s my doing for God. And so, in the midst of the worship series, I believe God, through the prompting of his Holy Spirit, said “Kurt, I know you are dependent upon me. But I want you to be desperate for me.” I’m not talking about my need for God to accomplish my calling as a pastor or husband or dad. I’m talking about the cry of my heart becoming that I want nothing more than to be in his presence. And so, for the last month or so, I have been praying “Lord, uncap my heart”, that I would open it up completely to him.

This is courageous because, while I’m ok being dependent, I struggle with being desperate. I recoil at being that exposed, that vulnerable. I anticipate being shown God’s holiness, and my lack of, to depths I’ve never known before. And I’m afraid God will show me how the things in my life I value so much have, in some ways, become idols. But I also know that he is good and loving and the savior of my soul, and there is nothing that will bless me more than knowing him more intimately. So I am answering his call and taking this step.

And now it’s your turn. What courageous next step is Jesus calling you to in becoming more like him? Maybe it’s answering the call the first time by trusting in Christ for salvation or finally allowing Jesus to do his work of transformation. Maybe it’s going first in reconciling with someone you’re in conflict with, starting that new thing God’s been prompting you to do, introducing yourself to your neighbor, confronting your idols, or making Jesus the center of your life.

Some of you already know what this is. You thought of it as soon as I said something because God has already been bringing it to your mind and heart. Others of you need some time. But all of us have something, and we want to do this together. That’s why I can’t encourage you enough to get into a Life Group if you are not in one so that you can have a group of caring people who can call you to this next step and help you along the way.

But as you think about what it might be, and the cost of taking that courageous step comes to mind, I want to encourage you with a verse that speaks directly to it. It has been meaningful to me these last few months, and it is the verse of the year for our staff.

[Joshua 1:9] ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

Israel was about to take their courageous next step of crossing the Jordan River and entering the Promised Land. They were going to have to trust God for his provision and protection as he called them to be his people. I used to read that first sentence with the emphasis on “commanded”, like God is saying “Get to it!” But now I read it with the emphasis on “I”, as in God reminding Israel that whatever he calls them to, he’s in the middle of. And it’s a reminder to us of God’s promise of himself to all who answer his call to live their lives with and for him. And because of that promise, we can all be strong and courageous as we take our next step.

Fellowship, Jesus is calling. Are you going to answer?