

Introductions

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him.

Matthew 9:9 NRSV

How do I know that God wants me?

It's a question we may sometimes ask ourselves. We can feel that past mistakes, our ongoing struggles, or lack of spiritual discipline place us on the outside looking in. Perhaps we fall into the trap of comparison and see others as 'better' Christians.

In this session, we meet Matthew, the person traditionally associated with writing this Gospel. We find him working in a derided profession, a collaborator with the Roman occupying forces and a social outcast. Yet it is to him that Jesus comes with a life-changing invitation: "Follow me."

As we witness this encounter and a controversial meal that followed (Matthew 9:10-13), we see the very heart of Jesus' mission. He's not come to call people who are already good enough, or only a certain sort of person, but all those who are prepared to follow him.

Matthew wants to introduce us to Jesus from the very start of his Gospel, beginning with Christ's genealogy - the roll call of his ancestors. But let's be honest: most of us skip over the Bible's genealogies. They can seem like dry, unpronounceable lists of names from a distant past - just what you don't need when it's your turn to read the lesson on Sunday.

But for Matthew, writing to his Jewish kinspeople, this family tree was the essential starting point. It's Jesus' résumé, proving he is the long-awaited Messiah, the rightful heir to King David's throne. But it's more than that. It's a story of God's faithfulness through centuries of messy human history, leading to the

ultimate moment of fulfilment. And in the story of Jesus' miraculous conception, Matthew reveals the most breathtaking truth of all: this promised King isn't just a messenger *from* God; he *is* God, come to be with us.

Now choose a track and then return for...

Hymn Suggestions

1. "Just As I Am, Without One Plea"
2. "Amazing Grace"
3. "Will You Come and Follow Me" (The Summons)

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, friend of sinners, we thank you that you came for those who recognise their need for you. Thank you for calling Matthew, and for calling us. Not because we are worthy to even gather up the crumbs from under your table, but because you are full of mercy.

Forgive us for the times we stand at a distance and judge. Give us your heart for those on the outside. Help us this week to hear your simple, powerful call, "Follow me," and give us the grace to follow. In your precious name we pray, Amen.



Reflective

Let's start by reading about Matthew: Matthew 9:9-13.

Imagine the scene as Matthew is sitting at his tax collector's booth. His peers didn't see this as a respectable civil service job; it was viewed as state-sanctioned extortion. He was working for the Roman oppressors and enriching himself at others' expense. He would have been despised and viewed as religiously unclean - a 'sinner' in the contemporary sense of the word. Now, imagine Jesus walking by. He sees Matthew. He doesn't see a lost cause. He sees a man in need of him. And he speaks two words: "Follow me." There's no interview, no probationary period, no demand for Matthew to clean up his act first. The call is full of grace. And Matthew's response is immediate. He gets up, leaves the tax booth, and follows.

(Pause for a time of silence. Try to put yourself in Matthew's shoes. What might he have been feeling? Surprise? Fear? Hope?)

The story continues at Matthew's house. He throws a party and invites his friends, other tax collectors and 'sinners'. And Jesus is there, eating with them. In this culture, to share a meal was to share life, to offer acceptance. To the strictly observant Pharisees, what Jesus is doing here is scandalous. A holy man would never contaminate himself like this. Their question drips with contempt: "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

In reply, Jesus quotes the prophet Hosea, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice". His actions are not a denial of the Scriptures, but their fulfilment. God's heart has always been for mercy. In the calling of Matthew, Jesus defines his mission: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." In other words, there is no such thing as a 'better' follower of Jesus. He simply calls us to follow.

(Pause for another time of silence. Be honest with yourself, do you believe that Jesus would sit and eat with you? And are you ever tempted to see others as outside the scope of God's grace?)

Now let's go back and read how Matthew introduces us to Jesus: **Matthew 1:17-23**.

Matthew began with Jesus' genealogy: fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile in Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah. This isn't just a list; it's a carefully structured story of God's sovereign plan unfolding through history.

Then he focuses on Joseph. He is betrothed to Mary, a legally binding arrangement. He discovers she is pregnant, and he knows he is not the father. His first reaction is one of quiet kindness. He is a "righteous man" (v. 19), so he decides to end the engagement quietly.

But Matthew wants us to see that this seemingly scandalous event is, in fact, the fulfilment of a great promise from the prophet Isaiah: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means 'God with us')." The promise wasn't just for a great king or a prophet. The promise was for God himself to come and dwell among his people.

For quiet reflection, perhaps with quiet music playing:

- Have you ever felt like you were on the 'outside', spiritually or otherwise?
- Jesus' call to Matthew was simple: "Follow me." What does it look like for you to follow Christ in everyday life?
- The Pharisees judged from a distance. Jesus ate with the 'sinners'. How can our church best reflect Christ's love and grace?

Creative Prayer Response

Take a coin (or a bank card if you don't have cash). Hold it in your hand. Think about the things you cling to for security, just as Matthew could have clung to his job and his income. One by one, name them quietly before God. Ask Jesus to help you leave your 'tax booth' and follow him.

Takeaway for this week

As you go about your week, consider the people you interact with – the shop assistant, the person at the bus stop, a colleague – and silently pray, "Lord, show me how you see this person. Fill my heart with your love for them." At the end of the week, reflect on whether this small exercise changed any of your attitudes or interactions.

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



Digging Deeper

Read Matthew 9:9-13

Discussion Starters:

1. What do we know about tax collectors in first-century Galilee? Why were they so despised by other Jews? (Consider both political and religious reasons).
2. The act of “table fellowship” was hugely significant. What message was Jesus sending to the ‘sinners’ by eating with them? What message was he sending to the Pharisees?
3. Jesus quotes **Hosea 6:6**: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” What was the original context of this verse in Hosea? How does Jesus’ use of it here fulfil its meaning?
4. What does Jesus mean when he says, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners”? Is he saying that the Pharisees are genuinely ‘righteous’ and don’t need him? Or is a deeper irony at play?
5. Look at the genealogy in **Matthew 1:1-16**. Matthew includes four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and “Uriah’s wife” (Bathsheba, v. 6). Do you know their stories (see Genesis 38, Joshua 2, Ruth 1, 2 Samuel 11)? Why was it so unusual for Matthew to include them, and what point(s) might he be wanting to make?
6. The angel gives the divine interpretation of the name Jesus: “he will save his people from their sins” (v. 21). How might this have subverted the expectations of first-century Jews looking for a Messiah?
7. Compare this account with Luke’s nativity story (Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-7). Luke’s focus is on Mary, while Matthew’s is on Joseph. What is Matthew’s emphasis?

Applying this to our lives

- Who might be seen as the ‘tax collectors and sinners’ in our culture today?
- The Pharisees created barriers between ‘in’ and ‘out’ people. What are some of the barriers we, consciously or unconsciously, put up in our churches?
- How can we, individually and as a church, “go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’” in our daily lives?

For next time

Next week’s passage is about Jesus calling his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee. Matthew intentionally sets this scene by quoting a specific Old Testament prophecy. To prepare, read Isaiah 9:1-7 during the week. This passage speaks of “Galilee of the nations” and a great light dawning in the darkness. What expectations does this prophecy evoke? Having this in mind will illuminate why Jesus beginning his ministry in this region was so significant.

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



FAMILIES & ALL-AGE

Matthew 9:9-13. Jesus calls Matthew, even though he wasn't seen as a 'good' person

Required Resources:

- Toy coins (could be cardboard cutouts)
- Table
- Picture of a king/Roman leader (or mime a crown)
- Music for "Follow the Leader"
- A few sweets or alternative small snack

Helpful Resources (things to include for maximum fun)

- Cardboard cutout tax booth or 'Tax collector' sign
- Puppet king
- Play food or suitable real food if appropriate, enough to feel like plenty for your group

INTRODUCTION ACTIVITY

See how many different jobs the group can think of in one minute, then have a quick discussion about what types of jobs people might like to do. Whatever you end up doing, you can do it for Jesus. He promises to be with us and to help us, and he calls us to trust him and follow.

Interactive Story: Jesus calls Matthew and eats with him and his friends

[BACKGROUND SOUND PLAYING OF BUSY MARKETPLACE - TOY COINS (A COUPLE FOR EVERY CHILD GIVEN OUT AT THE BEGINNING AND POUCH, TAX BOOTH CUTOUT OF CARD, SCROLL OR SIGN THAT SAYS TAX COLLECTOR)]

It was a sunny day, in a busy town. Everyone was shuffling around in the market ready to spend their money **[GET ALL THE CHILDREN SHUFFLING AROUND WITH THEIR MONEY]** But one man was sat all alone at his table, counting his coins!

Matthew had a very important job, but not everyone liked it. He was a tax collector **[CAN YOU SAY TAX COLLECTOR?]**, which meant he collected money from the people to give to the Roman king **[CROWN/ PUPPET PROP]**. Sometimes, people felt the tax collectors took too much money and because of this, people didn't like Matthew very much

[EVERY CHILD GIVE ONE OF THEIR COINS TO MATTHEW IN THE TAX BOOTH]

[EVERYBODY LOOK GRUMPY]

One day, Jesus was walking by **[FOOTSTEPS SOUND EFFECT]** [can you say "Jesus!"], and he saw Matthew sitting at his stand collecting taxes. Jesus looked right at Matthew and said, **[SLOWLY AND CLEARLY "FOLLOW ME!"]** **[EVERYONE SAY "FOLLOW ME!"]** - Matthew was probably very surprised!

[CAN YOU DO A SHOCKED FACE?]

But guess what? Matthew got up, left all his money behind, and followed Jesus! **PROMPTS CONGA LINE/FOLLOW THE LEADER GAME FROM BELOW, AROUND HALL WITH FUN PIECE OF MUSIC (DOESN'T NEED TO BE A WHOLE SONG) FOLLOWING LEADER AS THEY PRETEND TO BE JESUS**

Later, Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, and there were lots of people there. **[HAND OUT TOY FOOD AND GET CHILDREN SITTING IN A CIRCLE PASSING FOOD AND PRETENDING TO EAT]** Not just Jesus' friends, but also many other tax collectors and people who weren't always thought of as "good." They were all eating and chatting together. - **WOULD YOU INVITE PEOPLE TO YOUR PARTY THAT OTHERS THOUGHT WERE BAD?**

Some grown-ups who often thought they were the ones God was most pleased with, saw this. They said to Jesus's friends, "Why does your teacher eat with people like that?" They thought Jesus should only be with really 'good' people, like them.

[WHO CAN DO THE BEST 'CROSS' FACE? GRUMPY FOLDED ARMS]

But Jesus said something very important, "It's not the healthy people who need a doctor, but the sick ones."

Jesus came to help everyone, especially those who felt lost or made mistakes. Just like a doctor helps people who are sick, Jesus helps people who need to learn how to follow God. He loves everyone, no matter what job they have or what mistakes they've made! And He wants us to be kind like that to everyone too.

'KIND' IN SIGN LANGUAGE - THUMBS UP (FOR GOOD) START POINTING AT OUR CHEST AND THEN MOVING OUR ARMS FORWARD TO GIVE A DOUBLE THUMBS UP IN FRONT OF US - PASSING GOOD FROM ME TO YOU!

[NOW WHO CAN DO THE BIGGEST 'HAPPY' FACE?]

GAME AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

- **Game:** Follow the Leader. The person at the front of the line begins walking around the room, gradually incorporating actions as they go. Those behind have to copy the one in front. You can either play that those who make mistakes sit out a turn, or leave everyone in.
- **Activity/Craft:** Cut out small circles and on one side draw a coin, on the other colour in the words "Follow me". Can you carry this with you this week to remember our story? Talk about Jesus turning Matthew's life around.

TALKING POINTS

- Why did some people think that Jesus shouldn't eat with tax collectors?
- What did Jesus want everyone to see about who can be his friend?
- How can we be kind like that to other people who might be left out?

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer