

Introduction

If you have your Bible, I want to ask you to go ahead and open it up to the Book of Matthew chapter 4. Matthew chapter 4 is where we are going to start today. I am so glad that you have decided to join us today as we start this new series entitled "What On Earth Am I Here For?" As Shawn has already mentioned, this actually is more than a series. It's an emphasis; it's a church-wide campaign. We are encouraging people to discover the purpose that God has for their lives. This campaign has several different parts, and we want to encourage you to take part in every single one of those. Today as you came in, you may have noticed out in our atrium, in our elevator lobby, or in our children's atrium that there is a book that you can purchase. It's a daily devotional called, "What On Earth Am I Here For?" We would love for you to pick a copy of that up for five dollars and to read along with us as we walk through this emphasis.

Also, every week in worship for the next six weeks, I will be preaching through the life of Peter. Why Peter? Well, because Peter was someone who was called by God, and we believe that when we start talking about the idea of what on earth we are here for, we will soon discover that the reason that we are here is because God has called us. So, what better way to discover how it is and why it is that God has called us than for us to study the life of someone who was also called by God so that we could understand the very nature and the very purpose of calling? I want to encourage you, as you spend time in the Word during your daily devotional or as you begin to spend time in study of the Bible that you will really take some time to set aside and to examine the life of Peter. So I am going to ask you to do that as well.

Also, we want to ask that you would join in a Life Group. We have all sorts of Life Groups that meet on campus every single Sunday. We also have Life Groups that meet off campus on different weeknights. For the next six weeks, every one of our adult Life Groups will be asking the same question, "What on earth am I here for?" and we will be walking through this study together. We would love for you to be part of one of those. Even if you're not already in a group, we want to ask you to join us for that, so you can get the most out of this. This is, I think, the most important question that we can ask because the answer to this question truly is about what we will do with Jesus Christ. I think there is no more important question that we could ever ask, and I really hope that you will join us as we embark on this campaign together. This is taking place in our preschool classes, children's classes, and our student ministry. We really want you to know that we believe that this is the most important thing that we can discover, so I want to ask that you would join us as we embark on this journey together as a church.

Let's begin today in Matthew. Before I start today, let's pray and we will ask God to give us clarity of heart and of mind as we begin to open up His Word and ask Him to speak to us here today.

"Lord, we need to hear from You today. God, many of us may not even know it, but what we really need is simply more of You. Father, today we pray the same prayer as John the Baptist prayed: '*May I decrease; may He increase.*' Father, we ask for an increase of your Son Jesus Christ in this place, in our heart, and Father, in our church. God, we want to be a church that becomes convinced that what You have for us matters more than anything else. And so, Father, I pray that You would speak to us today. God, I don't want to stand up here and have clever speech. I don't want anybody to leave here today saying, 'Man, that preacher; he's really great.' Father, what we want today is for people to leave here saying that the God of Houston Northwest is the greatest God there is. So God, our prayer today is that we encounter You. Father, I pray that your Word, your Scripture, would speak to us, would break down any barriers that we might have, Father, and that it would challenge and move us to respond to the call that You have issued. God, we pray this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen."

1. Calling comes from God. (v. 19)

Matthew chapter 4; we're going to start in verse 18. This is where Jesus calls His first disciples. And as I have already mentioned, we are talking about the life of Peter; this is where Jesus calls Peter. The Scripture says this: *"While walking 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 fishers of men.' Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. And going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets and He called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him."*

He called them. The Greek word there for calling is the word "kaleo." What does it mean for God to "kaleo" us, to call out to us? I think that the first thing that we need in order to understand that calling in your life and in mine - if we are to really understand what it is that we are here for, why it is that God has a purpose for our life and what that purpose is - we need to understand that God calls and that calling comes straight from God. Now that doesn't sound too surprising to many of us. If we go back and we read through Scripture, we will see, "Oh yeah, God called Abraham, God called Moses." It's not uncommon to see God call Samuel or other prophets. We recognize that God is in the business of calling other people, but what I want us to understand is that it is very significant that Jesus called these disciples.

In the ancient Jewish world, there was a pretty particular educational system. Now, it might vary a little bit from village to village, but essentially this was the way that it worked. Both boys and girls were educated in the synagogue from a very early age. They were educated basically in the way of Scripture. What we call the Old Testament, they would call the Torah. So before the age of 12, they would memorize wide swaths of Scripture. Now to you and to me, this is something that might be unimaginable for many of us, but they did not have television shows to memorize; they didn't have radio songs to memorize. They had the Scripture, and so that was what they did. Most of the people of that day, many of them in fact, were illiterate, and they didn't have any printed material in their own homes, so memorizing Scripture was a key component of maintaining their community identity. So, whenever Jesus would stand up in the synagogue in later years, He would quote Scripture and He would read from Scripture. It was very common for people to know whether or not He was accurately telling the Scriptures because they memorized it.

Now, somewhere around the age of 12, there was a dividing point. In some communities, some archeologists have found, the dividing point was a little bit later, but basically around the age of 12 or 13, there was this moment where young girls then began preparation in a different way. They began being prepared for marriage. Most young Jewish girls were married by the age of 15 in ancient Israel. Young men, at that dividing point, then were separated into two classes as well. There was a group of men, who were sort of stellar gifted students, and they would continue on their study of the Torah and they would become a disciple, a follower of someone who taught the Scripture. So what they would do is they would look for a rabbi that they might follow. Others who were less gifted would not be chosen to follow after a rabbi. Well how would that work? The gifted students would watch rabbis in the area, and if they found one that they wanted to be a student of, they would approach that rabbi, and they would go up to them and they would say, "May I follow you?" And if the rabbi said "yes," then they became his "talmid," his student, his disciple. In fact, there was a saying in Jewish culture that if you were the student of a rabbi, you were supposed to follow your rabbi so closely that you would be covered in the dust of his footsteps because you were just walking around following him. You were to mimic his actions, his thoughts, his words. You were to know the way that he would think. That was what it meant to be a disciple, a student of your rabbi. They would say, "May I follow you?" And then he would say "Yes."

So what happens in Matthew 4? Something completely different. Peter and Andrew are fishing. They are mending their nets at the end of a long day's work, and along comes this Rabbi, new to town (Capernaum). His name is Jesus and He has come from Nazareth. He is walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, here in this fishing community, and He sees two men. And He calls out to them, and He says, "You, come be my talmid; come be my disciple." He picks them. Why is that significant? It's significant because most of the people who were gifted students would find out whether or not they were gifted students as they would approach a rabbi and say, "May I follow you?" But for a rabbi to come up to you and say, "I want you to come follow me," that's significant because he is saying, in essence, "I have examined your heart and your life, and I believe you have what it takes. Now, you come follow me." There's something even more significant going on here. You see, earthly rabbis didn't ask for students to follow them, but if we go back through Scripture we see God called people all the time. You see, Jesus is making a statement about who He is. "I call people because I am the Son of God. I can call whoever I want to call. Calling comes from Me. Calling is mine to do." So, whenever God calls Abraham, the calling starts with God. Whenever God calls Moses, the calling starts with God. And whenever God calls His disciples Peter and Andrew, the calling starts with Him.

At the end of His life, in John 15:16, we read this: "*You did not choose Me, I chose you.*" Jesus is reminding His disciples, "You didn't pick Me. I looked at you and I believed that you were worthwhile, and so I chose you to come and to follow after Me." Remember Ephesians 1:4 where Paul echoes this teaching. He says, "*You were chosen in Him...*" in Christ, "*...before the foundation of the world.*" As incomprehensible as it is to many of us, we need to recognize this: that God has chosen, before the foundations of the world, people that He desires to be His disciples, to follow after Him and to engage in this world. In fact, in John 15:16 where He says, "*I chose you; you didn't choose Me...*" Do you know what he says? "I chose you so that you might bear fruit. I want you; I've picked you so that you can show the rest of the world who I truly am."

So this is the magnificent truth that I think we have to begin with today: God draws many people to Himself. He is the One who does the calling. Some of us are sort of under a misconception. We believe that we pick Jesus. No. You didn't pick Him. You can't pick Jesus any more than you can pick your mamma. (Laughter) The way it works is that He looked out at you and He says, "I want her. I want him." And He picked you. Some of you are here today, and God has been doing things in your heart. You can't really explain it or possibly even give language to it today, but God is stirring inside of you, and you are here in worship today. You may not even really be able to explain why you came to church. Maybe someone invited you. Maybe you have been sensing that you need to be closer to God, but God has been doing things inside of your heart. Let me tell you a great possibility of what is taking place. The Holy Spirit might be drawing you to God because God is calling you to follow Him. And if you don't comprehend this, you can't wrap your mind around this, I want you to hear this. That is the greatest thing that can ever happen to you. There is no greater gift that can ever happen than for the God who created supernovas to look down on this miniscule dot floating in space and choose from among the billions of people, one of the humans here, and to say, "That one right there. I want that one to bear fruit for my Name, to bring glory to Me." God wants you and is choosing you.

Now many of you might be saying, "Okay, maybe I buy into that, but why in the world would God choose me in the first place?" Well, it's interesting because in verse 20 we read that "*Immediately they left their nets and followed Him...*" Why? Because He said, "*...follow me and I will make you fishers of men.*" He had a purpose for them. God said, "I want you to follow me for a reason."

2. Calling is for God. (v. 20)

Anybody have those friends who just call you and they seem to have no reason for calling you? And you love them. Right? But when they call you, you answer the phone and you're on the phone with them for ten minutes and you realize, "This call has no purpose." (Laughter) And you're standing there on the phone and you're like, "Oh, wow." And they're still talking, they're still going, and you're like, "How am I going to get off the phone?" That is a frustrating moment. Right? Whenever people call me and I answer the phone I am thinking, "Okay, we've got something to talk about. Let's talk about it and let's be done." If I'm over at your house or if you're over at my house, I'll sit and talk to you all night long because that feels normal to me. But if you just want to call me and talk to me... yeah... that feels weird. Do we have a reason? Why are we here right now? Do you know what the Bible says? The Bible says that whenever God calls you, He always has a reason.

The Greek word "kaleo" that I mentioned earlier that's used in the New Testament; it is used in the New Testament over 100 times. Every single time that the word "kaleo" which means "called" is used, it always is assigned to a purpose or an assignment or a reason. God always has a reason. He calls Abraham to move to the Promised Land. He calls Moses to deliver his people. He calls Peter to be a fisher of men. You are called for a reason, and I want to tell you today the reason why God is calling you... are you ready? This is why God calls you. Galatians 1:6: You are called so that you can experience God's grace. Paul says, *"I am astonished that so many of you are so quickly abandoning the Gospel of grace to which you have been called."*

God calls you not to give you stuff. God calls you so that you can have Him. I want us to understand that because I think that many of us don't recognize that. We keep thinking that God calls us so that we will become famous or so that we will become rich or so good things will happen to us. No. We are called so that we get the greatest prize of all: We get God. Think about this with me for just a second. If God calls you and gives you something that you love more than Him, then God would be an idolater. He would be giving you something that you perceive to be greater than the greatest thing that has ever existed which is Himself. God wants to give you the greatest gift. He wants you to understand the scandalous depths of the grace of a forgiving and loving God. He wants you to have that more than anything else. So whenever we read in Romans 8:28: *"We know that all things work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose."* When you are called according to God's purpose then you begin to understand the way in which even tragedy and difficult circumstances might be arranged so that you can know more of Him. God does not call you so that you will have an easy life. It's a modern myth. God does not call you so that you can see your face one day on the front page of the newspaper. God calls you so that you might have Him. In this daily devotional that we are going to read together, the very first sentence of today's reading, today's devotional, says this: "It's not about you." Many of us believe that, but honestly, the reason that we are called is to get more of Him.

This week I went to Seattle for a couple of days to be with a church that this church, Houston Northwest, helped plant about eight years ago. When I was up there with the elders and the deacons and the ministry leaders of that church, I was just visiting with them and talking with them, and I was amazed at the number of corporations that are up there in Seattle: Microsoft headquarters is there; Amazon is there. One of the guys in the church works for Amazon. He says that Amazon employs 80,000 people. Microsoft... Amazon... these massive corporations that are there, that are located in that place. And what's funny is that each of those men said, "Yeah, I work for these incredible companies, but the greatest purpose that I have found is not in working at a high level for a Fortune 500 company. The greatest purpose that I have found is in discovering and receiving Jesus Christ." I want us to understand this because I think that many of us miss out on the fact that God is calling, not so that He can do something with you. Yes; He will do

that from time to time, but God's primary purpose is not to use you as a tool for some other end. His primary reason for calling you is to use you for one single end; it's so that you can know Him. He wants you to know Him, and as you know Him then He can unfold tasks and purposes. Many of us are missing out on the happiness and joy that God wants us to have in life because we are missing out on the source of greatest happiness and greatest joy. What would that be? Jesus Christ... Him. That's what we need.

3. Calling can come for anyone. (v. 18)

Now this is the funny part. As I have already mentioned to you, sort of this ancient Jewish educational system... verse 18, "*While walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And He says to them, 'Come and follow Me.'*" Why does that matter? It matters because it's a confirmation that when God calls, He can call anyone that He wants. I want you to understand this. I mentioned earlier that around the age of 12, somewhere from 13 to 15, somewhere in that area, the young men would be broken into two groups, and there would be the students who would be able to approach a rabbi and say, "May I follow you?" And they would say, "Yes." Then there would be those who would approach a rabbi and they would say, "May I follow you?" and the rabbi would say "No. Go train yourself for a trade, for a craft."

When we meet Peter in these pages, he is fishing with his brother. We know that Peter is already married because we know that in a few chapters Jesus will heal his mother-in-law. We know that Peter's mother-in-law is living with him, so Peter is out working hard making a living for his family. In other words, Peter couldn't "cut the mustard" in the rabbi school. He was a dropout. He was a failure. And here comes Jesus. He doesn't even seem to interview him, does He? He didn't pull him aside and say, "Okay, let Me think if I'm really interested in you." He looks over and He sees a fisherman, somebody who dropped out of the rabbi school, and He says, "You, come follow Me. I want you." Can you imagine what happened in Peter's mind right then? Someone who thought that he had been forgotten, thrown away, and done with; "I'm just going to sit here and fish for the rest of my life. That's going to be the course of my life. I'm not really someone who can really join into the ranks of the really holy and the ones who are really used by God." And then the Son of God looks at him and says, "I want you." Have any of you ever felt like that before? Like God couldn't really use you because you have reasons that make you unusable. Sometimes I talk to people and they say, "God can't use me because I've done too much bad stuff. I mean, I'm a bad person."

Several years ago I was in a small home group at a church. The group was just starting, so in order to get to know one another, we went around and we shared our testimonies. We took turns sharing our spiritual stories. Week after week we would share our stories, and one week this woman in the group shared her story. She shared how she had followed her dreams to be on Broadway and had gone to New York City and while in New York, while she was there, she got into a relationship with a man that was very abusive, and she found herself pregnant and without someone to support her, and she said right there in the group, "I had an abortion." She just broke into tears; I mean just sobbing and crying. It was the first time that she had ever publicly shared this with anyone. There were about ten of us in the room at the time. After she finished, the entire group just stood up at the same time... no prompting, no instructions... and everyone just went over to her and began to hug her as she wept. And I heard her crying. You know that kind of crying, it's hysterical; you're almost screaming as you're talking because you can't control your volume because so much emotion is just lurching out uncontrollably. She said through that, "I thought y'all would kick me out of the church." Three months later I saw her leading worship. Why? Because God can use anyone. Paul was a religious terrorist. Moses was a murderer and God used them, and if you think I'm not like the people in the Bible, think about let me tell you the story of my friend that I just told you. Because God wants to use you, no matter how much junk you have in your life. If you are continuing to dredge up

the mistakes of your past and hold them up in front of God as proof that you cannot be used for His calling, He says, "Listen, I took care of that stuff a long time ago on a place called Calvary. That doesn't matter to Me. It's been forgiven." Some of us think, "I can't be used because I have got too much darkness back there."

I talked to another man this week. His mother was white and his father was black. He spent his entire life not being able to really find a place where he could be comfortable in identity because both sides of his family wanted him to choose which culture he would find superior and which one he would belong to. He spent his entire life sort of torn between these different worlds. Eventually his family disintegrated and he was sent into foster care, and he was abused mercilessly in several different foster homes. Someone in that situation who has no family and no real identity and sense of who he is, who was abused time and time again... what could God ever do with someone like that? He is training right now to be a pastor.

You don't have to be a worship leader or a pastor to be used by God, but God can call you. There is never too much darkness in your past. You have never done something so serious or so sinful that God will reject you or refuse to call you. You see, in fact, quite the opposite is true. If God is calling you, the truth of the matter is that most likely He sees your brokenness. He sees the abuse in your past. He sees the hurt that has been left behind you and the wake of destruction that is in your trail, and what God wants to say is, "I will be glorified by redeeming you in spite of this." I want you to know that. If you are here today and you think that God is lucky to have me on His team, then guess what? You're just one of those people who has yet to discover just how jacked up you really are... because God doesn't call people who are perfect, ever. There's only one person that was perfect: His name was Jesus, and He's the One who does the calling. He calls broken, abused sinners into His following to get the dust of their rabbi on them so that they might say, "I was broken, destroyed, and useless, but this God saved and redeemed me so that I might say that redemption and glory and honor does not belong to me. It's not someone who did it on their own, not someone who said, "Wow, look at me. I've got the 12 steps to success." No. This glory and this honor goes to the One who redeems, Jesus Christ. (Clapping) That is why we are called. I want us to understand that if God is calling you, you may be sitting around making excuses, saying, "God, You cannot call me." And He says, "I will call who I want to call." If He's calling you, why would you say "No"?

4. Calling is permanent. (v. 20)

At the end of Peter's life, in John chapter 21, Jesus has been crucified and He has been resurrected, but Peter hasn't seen Him in some time. You kind of sense that Peter may be starting to think that this whole thing was just kind of a figment of his imagination. It was like, "I had this really great time, three years of incredible time in the sun, just following Jesus around, but He's gone now. That's over." You kind of get that sense in him because at the start of chapter 21, he says this kind of interesting sentence. He just says, "*I am going fishing.*" It's an interesting verse. I wonder how many men, at some point in their life, have been just sort of feeling like things are just not going their way and they say, "I'm going fishin'." What's funny is several of the other disciples look and they say, "Let's go with him." So they go fishing and what happens? Jesus appears to them on the shore. Peter takes off his outer garment. He jumps into the water and swims to the shore to be with Jesus. They sit there. They roast fish and they have breakfast together, and then Jesus pulls Peter aside and he has a one-on-one with Peter. In a sense, this is what He tells him: "You don't go back to fishing." No. He doesn't put it that way. What does He say to him? He says, "Peter, do you love Me?" Peter says, "Yes, Lord. You know that I love You." And Jesus says, "Feed my sheep." What's He telling him? "Peter, I called you. You thought that I was done with you whenever I was crucified and buried. No, no, no. My call never stops." That's what I want us to understand today. Jesus called Peter in this place, in Matthew chapter 4, but we need to understand that the calling of God is permanent. It

doesn't end. Romans 11:29 says this, and I want you to hear this. This is a very short verse but, man, it is powerful. Listen to this: In Romans 11:29, Paul is talking about Israel and their role in the Gospel and how they fit into the church, and then Paul is explaining God's relationship to Israel. This is the verse that he says; listen to this: "*The gifts and calling...*" (the "kaleo") "*...of God are irrevocable.*" The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

A few years ago I got one of those American Express generic gift cards; you can use it wherever you want. Right after that, I don't remember what happened... I don't know how things are around your house at Christmas, but sometimes we have a lot of trash and that kind of stuff. We are kind of stacking things and storing things, and this American Express gift card that I got was put on a shelf and just kind of forgotten about. So I found it a year later, and I said, "Hey, sweet! I've got free money and so I'm going to go use this." I had taken the card out of the package; I couldn't even remember what the balance was on the card when I got it. So I looked on the back and there's a number. I call American Express and say, "I just want to find out the balance on this card. They say, "The balance is zero." "No. The balance is not zero." "Oh yeah, it's zero." "No, it's really not. I know that it's not because I have never used it. It was given to me." And they say, "Well, if you read the back of your card closely you will see that every month that your card goes unused, a \$4.95 service charge is assessed to your card." This is what we call, "Rip off..." but that's for another day. If you work for American Express, I'm really sorry. I'm not trying to dog on your company here, so I now have this card that is useless. It cannot be used. It was given to me as a gift and now I can't do anything with it.

You know what is funny? I think that many of us sometimes think of God's call as something like that, that it has expiration date... that one day eventually it will wear off. No, no, no. Listen. When God calls you, you are always called. In fact, Jesus tells us that once you have been called... He chose you. He picked you. You cannot be snatched from His hand, because you belong to Him. If He has called you, then the calling on you is permanent. I want us to understand this because sometimes I also think that we're like Peter. We remember that time that we were really close to God and things were going well for us, and we felt like we were really following God really well but then things changed. We moved or we got a new church, or the person who was really mentoring us left, or whatever happened in our lives, something happened that changed our spiritual circumstances, and we begin to believe "I can't really be close to God anymore for this reason," and we think, "Well, I guess it's over." No, it's not over. It's never over because if God has called you, the call on your life is permanent.

5. Calling is not private. (v. 21)

But it's something else as well because we see that whenever Jesus calls Peter and Andrew and it says they get up and they follow Him, He goes right down the shore and it goes to verse 21: "*And going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John, his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and He called them too.*" Whenever Jesus called Peter and Andrew, I wonder what they thought. They're like, "We're special. God picked us. We're going to follow this guy. We will have a little kind of two-on-one time with the Son of God. It's going to be pretty sweet." He walks about 100 yards down the shore and says, "I'll take you two guys, too." "Hey; what about me? I mean, you know, I'm here. I'm somebody." You know, sometimes I think that people believe that the calling that God puts on their life is something that is private. It's only to be something that is secret. It's just "Me-and-God" time, but really it's actually a very public thing.

My sister-in-law, her name is Allison... Allison has an allergic reaction to gluten. I don't know if there are some of you that are fellow gluten sufferers here in the room, but basically her reaction is very, very severe.

In fact, whenever she has had gluten, before they were diagnosing it, her hair was falling out. There was just this terrible rebellion going on within her body with everyone trying to figure out, "What's happening." She was losing all of this weight and was just sick all of the time and had no appetite. Her hair started to fall out. Her fingernails were falling off. Just crazy things were happening inside of her body with these symptoms. We were thinking, "Is this something like cancer that's happening inside of her?" It turns out she was just allergic to gluten. Once it was diagnosed and she changed her diet, suddenly her hair grew back. Her fingernails grew back. There was this change in her appearance and this sort of thing. Why does that matter? Because once what was going on inside of her body was corrected, everyone could see it. It was a very public thing.

I think that for many of us sometimes, we need to recognize that once the grace of God invades your life, once you begin to ingest that and to take that in, it will be obvious and apparent to everyone around you. Many of us are under this sort of weird belief that "I'm just going to have Me-and-God time." It's just sort of this private affair. No. You-and-God time... that begins to change you, and it changes you so publicly that it's out there for everyone to see. In fact, if it doesn't change you at that public of a level, then you are making a radical error in the way that you are engaging God because if God does not change you and make your relationship public, then something is wrong. You're a changed person whenever this takes place. Just as Peter was no longer able to simply be a fisherman, you and I will no longer simply be able to live the life that we have been living once we have been called. Because when you are called, you are no longer simply a mom or an executive or a nurse or a physician or a teacher or a police officer, you are now someone who is walking in the dust of your Rabbi. And as the dust covers you, you will begin to reflect and mimic their lives, not because copying them is what you want to do but because the grace of God has invaded your life, and you want to respond appropriately and so calling is public.

6. Calling demands action. (v. 22)

This is where I want us to end today. Verse 20 and verse 22 are almost exactly the same. "*Immediately they left their nets and followed Him,*" and then verse 22: "*Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him.*" You see, I think that we can sit here and we can talk about what God is calling and what God wants, but I think at the end of the day calling always demands a response from you and from me. It always demands action. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock, and if anyone will open up, I will come in and I will sup with him.*" The bottom line being, Jesus stands at the door; He's calling, He's knocking. Have you ever been at home and you just didn't want to be bugged, and someone knocks on your door and you decide, "I'm not going to answer it. I'm going to pretend like nobody is here." Have you ever done this? You're in there and you're trying not to move. You don't even know why. They can't see through the walls, but you've convinced yourself, "If I move they might hear me." (Laughter) You freeze. And so there's the knocking; the knocking is coming and you think, "Okay, they're gone." And then the knocking starts up again and you're like, "Okay, I can't move yet." Or... how about whenever the phone rings and you don't want to talk? Maybe some of you have experienced this before. Maybe you've taken your cellphone out of your pocket and you've looked at it and you've said, (sighs) "Not right now." And that little button on the top of your phone... You went "click" and you kind of just slid it right back into your pocket. You screened the call. Why would you screen the call and refuse to go to the door? There are a lot of reasons why, but most of the time the reason is because "I don't want to mess with that. I've got better things to do. I've got more important things to deal with right now."

But what if you are expecting a call? A few years ago we were waiting on some medical results to come in. We just kept the phone with us all the time. As soon as it would ring, we were pulling it out as quickly as we could to see what was happening. The second that call came we answered it because we wanted to know

the results from the test. You see, we discern the calls that we want to answer, don't we, pretty quickly. This is my question. "How many of us are here today and God has been calling us and we're screening God's call?" I mean, He's knocking. He is drawing you to Him right now. You feel it and you're saying, "I don't think I have time for this." You see, this is the funny thing. The expression of God's call in your life might change over the years. Maybe for a season it would be serving in a particular ministry, or maybe it would be sharing the Gospel with someone, or maybe it would be just drawing into a deeper relationship with Him so that you might know it. Maybe it would be serving in full-time ministry or being called into missions or going on a mission trip or whatever it is that God is calling you to do. It could be a million different things. I could never know. The expressions will always change, but the truth of the matter is that when God calls, you have to answer the call. This is the weird thing that I don't really understand about God. I can't really wrap my mind around it, but from before the foundations of the earth (I want you to think about this), from before the foundations of the earth, according to Ephesians 1:4, "*He chose us in Him,*" but then He calls and He waits to see if you will answer. That's weird, right? "I picked you and now I'm calling. Will you pick up?"

The call for those of us who aren't believers... this is what the call is... it is that you don't even know it yet, and you can't understand it until you say "Yes" and you answer the call. What God wants is He wants to give your life purpose and meaning, and the way that He is going to do that is He is going to reveal Himself to you through Scripture, through Jesus Christ, and He is going to, through his Word, speak to you, and you're going to get Him, and it's going to explode the very way that you understand life. I mean, it's incredible. But for some of us, what's funny is that we answered that call a long time ago... You know, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 Paul is talking to the church at Thessalonica. He gets to the end, and he is kind of giving them some advice, and then he says, you know, "*Do this... Pray continually*" and then he says, "*Don't quench the Spirit.*" He uses the image of a fire, like you can put it out. I want you to hear me on this. Some of you answered the call a long time ago and then, for whatever reason, you hung up on God. I don't know why. Maybe you just set the phone down and walked away. I can't really begin to explain why it is, but what's happening now is what happened in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5... It's that you quenched the Spirit. You said, "I don't want this anymore" and you walked away from it. It doesn't mean that you have thrown God away because He has still chosen you. He is still holding tight to you, but you aren't experiencing and knowing the power of God in your life. Do you want to know why? Because you've said, "yeah..." (walks away)... But that's not why God would choose and call you. He wants you to walk in the freedom of grace, but you can't experience that unless you answer the call.

So today, as we kick off this campaign, this is what I want us to understand. I want us to recognize this. You cannot know and understand the call of God on your life until you finally pick up the phone and say, "Yes." The call is for you. Will you take it? No one here can make you take it. No one here can press you into that. If God is drawing, I believe that you will not be able to say "No" to Him forever. But if He's drawing, you get to say "Yes" or "No" today. So I want to challenge you: If He is calling you back, to come back. If He's calling you for the first time, say "Yes" to Him, and if He is simply asking you to follow Him at a deeper level, into a new and fresh calling, I want you to say "Yes" to Him as well. Each of us needs to answer the call that God has given us in Christ Jesus. Let's pray together.

"Father, You've called. I know that right now Your Word is working on many of us. It's speaking to many of us, and some of us have been resisting that call for some time. I pray for those who have been saying "No" to God. Father, I pray that right now You are drawing them, they sense it. I pray, God, they would just respond to the call right now; they would stop screening or hiding in their house, and they would just say "Yes." Father, I also want to pray for those who, for whatever reason, put down the phone and walked

away from You a long time ago. They haven't been reading Your Word; they haven't been pursuing You in prayer. Lord, they have just sort of walked away. Lord, I pray that as You stand, You call them back. I pray for repentance; that they would turn around and come back to You. Lord, You're calling others of us in this room; we've just been just sort of going on this day-to-day walk with You, thinking that everything is great and now suddenly we recognize, some of us, that You are calling us into something further and deeper and greater and grander, and the further in we go, the bigger it becomes in following You, and, Lord, I pray that You would press home the call on many of us. Father, if You are calling people to serve or into ministry, or Father, You are calling people into a scary place where they are going to share their faith with someone they haven't been sharing their faith with, God, whatever it is that You are going to do, I pray that You would just press that home. And now God, I pray that You would give the people in this room courage to answer the call, whatever that might be. God, we need to hear Your call, and God I pray that we say 'Yes.' I pray it in the name of Your Son Jesus. Amen."