



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Matthew: “The Template” FOLLOW ME: THE STORY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Matthew 9:9–13

Tim Badal | July 23, 2023



This summer we have been focusing on two words from Jesus. They're two very simple words: “Follow Me.” As followers of Jesus Christ, we want to follow Him to the best of our abilities in a way that will glorify and honor Him. One of the questions we have to ask is, “How do we do that?”

So we've looked to His disciples, those 12 men who took that call and were transformed by Jesus as they followed Him. They were men who sat under His teaching, obeyed His commandments, and surrendered their all so the call might be evident in their lives. They accepted His invitation to follow Him, but they weren't the only ones who were given that invitation.

In fact, we read in Matthew 16:24 that this invitation to follow Jesus is given to every one of us. It says, “*If anyone...*” That's you, that's me. “*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*” You and I have been given the grand opportunity to follow Jesus, listen to His teachings and obey His commands. We are called to surrender our lives to Him. How do we know if we're doing this well? How do we know if we're on the right path? How do we know if we're incorporating the right things in our following of Him?

This series has centered on the lives of the 12 men who accepted this call. It's easy for us, as we talked about early in this series, to exalt these men and build statues of them in our minds, making them seem super-human. We look at their lives and think, “That was them, but that could never be me.”

Another extreme is to eviscerate them, that is to harshly criticize them. We would think, “These men who were held in such high regard, these men that have churches and statues named after them, they did some really foolish things. If I walked and talked with Jesus, if I experienced all these men experienced with Jesus, I wouldn't have done those things. I wouldn't have betrayed Jesus. I wouldn't have denied Jesus. I wouldn't have been so foolish and moronic as they were at times.”

We're almost done with this series in which we've looked at these disciples as examples to emulate. The good they did, the pattern of discipleship they provided, is something we can learn from. We can see their lives as templates or patterns, and that's what I want to talk about today.

I see in the life of Matthew the quintessential disciple, the template of what discipleship looks like, what the starting steps of discipleship are all about. We use templates all the time. We use them to write documents. We use them to write resumes. We use templates to create websites, to create invoices. We use them to form contracts. We use them in all types of ways for all types of situations. But what exactly is a template? It's been defined like this: “A template is a pre-designed or pre-formatted document, file or set of instructions that serve as a starting point for creating new documents and projects with a consistent structure and layout.” It's the second part of this definition that I want to focus on: “Templates save time and effort by providing a framework that can be customized and adapted to specific needs.”

When we talk about Matthew, I want you to see that he's providing a framework of what following Jesus is all about. But we can't just put ourselves in Matthew's situation, expecting the same experiences and outcomes. A template is a framework. We're going to take what we can learn from Matthew's life, then customize and adapt it to our own lives. So there's a pattern and a framework—a template—that because of his experience with Jesus, Matthew is going to provide for us to adapt and follow in our own situations.

In order to do this, I want to look at two Scriptures this morning, first in Matthew 9 and then in Luke 5. First, let's look at Matthew 9:9-13. Jesus has just been in Nazareth where He had healed a paralytic man. Now He is traveling about 15 miles to the city of Capernaum.

⁹ As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

¹⁰ And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹² But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Turn to Luke 5:27-32 where we see this same story. But Luke gives us a little more information about Matthew. First, we learn that Matthew is also named Levi. That was his Jewish name. The reason Matthew goes by one name with his Jewish friends and another name with his Gentile friends is because he was a tax collector.

²⁷ After this [Jesus] went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." ²⁸ And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.

²⁹ And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. ³⁰ And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" ³¹ And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

So there are two passages about the same moment in time, about the calling of Matthew, aka Levi. What do we know about Matthew? Very little. In fact, in Mark 2 the only thing we know about his early life is that he is the son of Alphaeus. But what we hear three times is one truth—one I don't want us to pass by: he was a tax collector.

In our 21st century American thinking, we think a tax collector is an IRS agent, but this can't be farther from the truth 2,000 years ago. When it comes to the kind of tax collecting Matthew did, tax collectors were the most despised people in Jewish culture because they worked directly for the enemy. The Jewish people were under the occupation of Rome, so the job of people like Matthew was to exact taxes that enabled the Roman empire to continue to oppress the Jewish people. This is unlike the IRS agents in our day, who are well regulated and laudable people, doing what we in a democracy need in order that citizens properly pay their taxes. But in the first century, the taxes men like Matthew collected were more like extortion and thievery.

Now, there were two types of tax collectors in that day. One was called a *gabbai*. It sounds like how we quickly say goodbye. The *gabbais* were general tax collectors, the primary tax assessors. These men were assigned to a certain province and exacted taxes by clearly explaining what the taxes were for, when they were to be paid and the amount required from each person.

In Luke 2, we see the *gabbai* at work. In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken. Every man was called to his home town, so he could be counted and therefore taxed. Everybody knew what they needed to do. There was an explanation of why the tax was being collected, the amount to pay and where it should be paid. There was an objectivity to the job of the *gabbais*. But Matthew wasn't that type of tax collector.

There are three specific tax collectors mentioned in the Gospels. Matthew was one, Zacchaeus was the second one, then there was a tax collector we'll see in a minute in Luke 18. These tax collectors were part of a second group called the *mokhes*. That just doesn't sound good, right? The *mokhes* were gangster tax collectors. These guys had been given authority by the Romans to glean local taxes in their own hometowns. This kind of collection wasn't well regulated, which created opportunities for great corruption. Now, the taxes collected could be animals, goods or services, as well as coins. But it was never clear how much a person had to pay or when they needed to pay it. Sometimes we're told that farmers had to pay when they planted their crops and when they

harvested their crops. Sometimes people would be taxed when they went somewhere, then again when they came back. It sounds like the Illinois Tollway Association, right? There was subjectivity to it. There was corruption. As a result, these tax collectors were hated.

In fact, almost everywhere in the Bible where it mentions tax collectors, it combines them with another group: sinners. "Tax collectors and sinners." Tax collectors were so bad that they had their own subgroup of sinners. A more biblical view would be that we're all sinners, but then there are tax collectors.

We see this in Luke 18 where a Pharisee stood and prayed, "God, I thank you that I'm not like other people: robbers, evil doers and adulterers." That's the Mount Rushmore of sinners. But then he goes on to say, pointing to a guy standing outside the temple, "I am so glad, God, You did not create me to be a tax collector." Tax collectors were hated.

In the Talmud, which was a rabbinical commentary on the Mosaic Law, it was said that God-fearing people were in good stead with God and the Law if they defrauded, cheated or stole from a tax collector. That was giving those most grievous of sinners a dose of their own medicine, hoping their thievery would cause them to stop theirs. These guys were hated.

So what would cause this *mokhe* named Matthew to be invited by Jesus to follow Him? Jesus, this Rabbi, Jesus, this Son of God, Jesus, this Man Who healed the sick and delivered the oppressed, this One is now asking a deplorable like Matthew to follow Him. I want you to notice that what Matthew declares seems to be from chance. Matthew 9:9 says Jesus went out and saw a tax collector. There's no sermon. There's no miracle. There's no debate with the Pharisees that causes this interaction. It is simply Jesus walking and making eye contact with Matthew.

No doubt you've been going about your day and you meet eyes with a stranger. It's that awkward moment, "Am I going to engage them or not? Am I going to connect with them or not?" Maybe you're wondering, "Do I know that person from somewhere?" This is what it seems this moment of chance was. Jesus happened to be walking by and He caught the eyes of Matthew. Then out of this audacious approach of Jesus, He simply speaks two words: "Follow Me." It's not a sermon. What we need to realize is that in this moment, the holiness of heaven is meeting all that is evil in this world as represented in tax collecting.

It's in this seemingly chance moment that I come to my first point today.

Stop thinking that God can't use you.

The reason Matthew serves as a template for us is that he helps us understand we must stop thinking that God can't use us. If there was a person God couldn't use, it would have been Matthew. If there was an occupation Jesus wouldn't want in His inner circle, it would have been tax collecting. Having a tax collector in His midst would inevitably bring the reviling of the chief priests and other leaders of that day. But this is exactly what Jesus did. He went to the lowest of the lows, the dirtiest of the dirty, and He welcomed Matthew into His fold.

This is what Jesus does all the time. In fact, this is why Jesus came into the world. He said, "I came to this world to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Jesus was on an all-out search for Matthew, even though it seems to us like happenstance. But every moment of Matthew's life up to this point was leading to this moment. Jesus knew before the foundation of the earth that at this moment, He was going to call Matthew into My family. He knew He was going to call Matthew into My service, into a life of faith. Matthew was lost and Jesus came to find him.

That's what He's doing right now. He's on an all-out search for modern-day tax collectors, for people like you and me who are lost and far from God. Jesus is on a search mission to find you. When our eyes meet, we need to realize that He knows way more about us than we do. It says in both Luke and Matthew that Jesus "saw."

Right away we're thinking, "Okay, we get it. Their eyes met." Now I'm going to speculate for a moment here, but I think this is credible. Can we agree that when Jesus sees something, it's different than the way we see? The Bible says man looks on the outside appearance, but God looks within (1 Samuel 16:7). As God, when Jesus saw Matthew, He didn't just see the tunic and robe he was wearing, the jewelry he may have had. He doesn't just see the externals. When Jesus, being the omniscient all-knowing Son of God, saw everything. The Bible says everything is laid bare before Jesus. So when it says Jesus saw Matthew, it means Jesus saw everything about him.

When Jesus sees us, He sees everything. He sees the good, the bad and the ugly. He sees the things done in public and the things done in private. He sees every sin. He knows every evil thought and every evil deed. He has seen the things that bring us regret and remorse. He knows the things that embarrass us and bring us great shame.

Jesus saw all of this in Matthew. He saw his utter and total depravity. But in the midst of all of this, there is great encouragement. Nowhere in our text do we see that Jesus chastised Matthew. We don't see Him condemning Matthew. We don't see Him sending Matthew to hell. What we see is Jesus offering an invitation to be a part of Matthew's life. He invites Matthew, "Follow Me. Be My friend. Be My student. Be My representative. Be My spokesman. Be in My family."

What an encouragement for all of us. Modern-day tax collectors, despised and broken, are filled with embarrassment and remorse. The devil fills our minds with the belief that everything we've done will keep us far from God. But Jesus is on an all-out search for us. The Bible says Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world. Matthew is the quintessential template of that process. Jesus came for filthy rotten sinners like you and me. And He came not to condemn us, for *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1). He came to save you, to give you life and to give it to you in all abundance (John 10:10). Matthew is a picture of all of that.

I love what Corrie ten Boom says about Jesus with sinners:

Jesus loves sinners. He only loves sinners. He's never turned away from anyone who came to Him for forgiveness and He died on the cross for sinners. Not for respectable people. You don't have to clean yourself up before you come to the cross; Jesus brings the cross to you.

That's what He does in the life of Matthew. Jesus invites.

Say yes when Jesus calls you.

That brings us to the second thing we need to understand, which is that Matthew said yes when Jesus called. And we need to say yes. We need to know that God can use all of us. If He can save and use a tax collector like Matthew, He can save and use us. But that means we need to say yes when Jesus calls.

I like what Luke says about this in Luke 5:27: *"After this [Jesus] went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth."* Notice that Matthew is in the midst of his sin. Jesus finds him in the midst of extortion and thievery. Jesus says, "Follow Me." What does Matthew do? *"And leaving everything, he rose and followed him."* This isn't always the response Jesus gets.

When Jesus says, "Follow Me," there are other responses. Maybe you're even giving a different response to Jesus right now. We see in the Gospels several different responses to Jesus' call to follow. We read this in Luke 9:57-62:

⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." ⁵⁹ To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." ⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹ Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." ⁶² Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

This is at the end of the chapter where Luke talks about this immediate obedience to the call of God. Some of us here call ourselves followers of Jesus Christ, but we have a whole litany of reasons why we're not following Him. We have all kinds of reasons why we can't serve, why we can't be a disciple. "I've got this to worry about. I've got that to worry about. This season of life is really busy. I'll get to it when the kids are on their own." Or, "I would serve more, or give more, if I had more time and money." We come up with excuses. But Matthew gives us the quintessential picture of discipleship because immediately he leaves everything. He leaves his occupation. He leaves his money. He leaves his crime. And he leaves without any promise that things will go better.

Why would someone do that? I believe the Spirit of almighty God was working in Matthew's heart. He knew Matthew was pursuing things that will not satisfy. So when Jesus showed up and Matthew heard the words "Follow Me," we have no idea what Matthew knew or didn't know about Jesus. But we do know that Matthew was so hungry for something different that he left everything and immediately followed Jesus.

How hungry are you to follow Jesus? How hungry are you to leave everything to follow Him? If there are things that are keeping you from following Him, then can I be very honest with you? That's what you're following. The Bible says, *"Where your treasure is,*

there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). One of those people felt a need to bury his Dad first. In other words, his family came first. Another had some commitment: "I have to do this. I have to do that." Some of us say we're followers of Jesus, but we follow our calendars. We follow our kids. We follow our jobs. There are all manner of things we follow. So we say we want to be followers of Jesus, but Matthew is showing us that to follow Jesus is to leave everything, to deny ourselves and take up our cross. It's a posture that replies yes when Jesus comes calling.

In the Badal home we say this often: "Delayed obedience is just a different way of saying disobedience." We put some time between us and our obedience, so we think God is good with that too. But Matthew shows us that immediate obedience is what Jesus is calling us to. Matthew left everything. Are you willing to do the same?

Luke 5:29-32 goes on to tell us about one of the first things Matthew did as he began to follow Jesus:

²⁹ And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. ³⁰ And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" ³¹ And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Matthew throws a party.

Two things came to Matthew's mind as he began to follow Jesus. First, he decided he would throw a party. He would open his home, use his resources, invest his time and energy to give a feast in honor of Jesus. But he didn't just invite Jesus; e also invited his friends. So who were his friends? After all, he was a tax collector, so his extended family probably hated him. He didn't have many Jewish friends because he was a traitor to the Jews. He was extorting his neighbors so the Romans could get money and he could get wealthy as well.

This gesture of hospitality was the same thing Zacchaeus did after Jesus called him, so it could be that one of the requirements Jesus gave them after they began to follow Him was to right their wrongs. Zacchaeus promised to give back fourfold what he had stolen, so he started writing checks to the people whom he had robbed, even giving them more than they had lost. It was a clear evidence of his repentance. Matthew does something similar. He throws a party, hosting a great feast in honor of Jesus. Then he invites a large company of his fellow tax collectors. Why? I think Matthew realized what was missing in his life was also missing in theirs. All tax collectors were despised and longed for acceptance. They knew they were evil and longed for holiness. The best thing Matthew could do was invite his fellow sinners to come spend time with Jesus.

Listen to me. Have we been Christians far too long that we have forgotten what it's like to be a sinner? Have we forgotten our deep longing and pursuit of power, prestige, possessions and pleasures of this world? Have we forgotten that we were never satisfied but always wanted more? Know that Jesus comes and satisfies the longing of our hearts, then we can forget the deep sense of loss, loneliness and shame we once felt.

Matthew hadn't forgotten that. He said to his friends, "I've found Jesus and have experienced His acceptance. I know how He filled those longings in my heart. I know my friends, neighbors, family members and coworkers have that same longing. I'm going to invite them to get close to Jesus too."

Right away some of you might be thinking, "I'm not Billy Graham; I can't do that." But notice that in both Matthew's and Luke's accounts, there is no mention of a sermon at that party. There are no cliches or Bible trivia. No public prayers. No Christian movie is shown. No altar call is given. The only thing we know for sure is that as the people were reclining at the table—meaning they were enjoying themselves, enjoying good food and camaraderie—there was a rebuttal from the Pharisees who were angry because Jesus was having fun with them as well.

Start bringing Jesus into your community.

This tells us that the way to connect people with Jesus is that we start bringing Him into our community, similar to the way Matthew did. That is, we build bridges for sinners to get closer to Jesus. How are you building bridges for your neighbors to get closer to Jesus? How are you building bridges for your coworkers to come to know Jesus? How are you building bridges for your family

members, friends and schoolmates to get closer to Jesus? It doesn't mean we have to preach at them. Throw a party in honor of Jesus. Have a conversation in honor of Jesus. Connect people to Jesus.

For example, you hear someone is going through a hard time. "Well, I've been there too. I've known that kind of struggle. Here's where I have found peace, hope and redemption. His name is Jesus. My life is different because of Jesus." Or when they ask you, "Why do you treat your wife and kids the way you do?" you can reply, "It's because of Jesus." Or, "Why do you act the way you do?" —"It's because of Jesus. Can I tell you more about Him?" They will reply, "No," "Okay," or maybe even, "Yes."

After the first service, a couple came up to me and said, "What you're preaching is what happened to us yesterday. All kinds of things didn't go well with our morning; it was different than we had planned and created a divine opportunity for a neighbor to see us. We were having breakfast outside on our patio and prayed for our meal. Our neighbor overheard us, came over to our house and said, 'I heard you praying. You're religious people. Can I ask you for wisdom about a life decision?'" This created an opportunity for the gospel to be proclaimed.

Opportunities are everywhere, but are we building bridges? Are we looking for opportunities to pray with people, to meet people where they're at? Evangelism has been described as "One beggar telling another beggar where to find bread." Matthew found the bread—the Bread of Life —and would not stop until he told all his community about Jesus. And he did this in a creative way—he threw a party. Remember, we don't have to mimic Matthew. He's his own person, but he does give us a template. So how can we customize and adapt in our own lives this opportunity to be a bridge builder for sinners to meet Jesus?

Matthew wrote a story.

Matthew threw a party, then he wrote a story. What do we know about Matthew? Very little. But in another sense we know a ton about him because he wrote the first Gospel. As you look at the story of Matthew through his Gospel, it's amazing that it's all about Jesus. It's a little ironic that most of what we glean about Matthew's story isn't just said in his Gospel. Rather, we have to go to Luke to get more details.

Matthew's calling recorded in his Gospel is only four verses. You would think when you get to your part of the story, you would say a lot more, but he doesn't. Just four verses. He doesn't even say, "Jesus called me." He says Jesus called "a man." He stays out of the story. He makes us connect the dots. I think this is important.

Last night I was finishing my final thoughts on this message. I prayed, as I normally do, asking that God would use what I prepared to impact you, my friends. Then I always take one more look, hoping to find one more thing that will illustrate it better. I found myself thumbing through Matthew's Gospel. I don't know why I did, but I started looking at the opening verses of each of the 28 chapters in this book. It dawned on me that 95% of these opening verses directly point to Jesus. Even when they don't, he's talking about someone else who's pointing people to Jesus, like John the Baptist in Matthew 3. It dawned on me that we know so little about Matthew. We don't know what he did after Jesus was resurrected and ascended to heaven. We don't know how he fulfilled the Great Commission. We don't know how he died. But in this Gospel that was written mainly to his Jewish kinsmen, we see that Jesus is everything to Matthew.

Jesus is to be our priority as well. Jesus is our focus. Jesus is our greatest pursuit. And friends, this is why Matthew serves as a template for us. Matthew reminds us that none of us are too bad to be saved and used by God. Matthew reminds us that we need to start saying yes a whole lot more to Jesus, instead of saying maybe or no. Matthew is the template because he shows us what it means to bridge build for Jesus so sinners can be closer to Him.

What story are you sharing? What party are you throwing so you can show your transformation—that you were lost but Jesus found you? Matthew did this because he was so incredibly thankful for the work Jesus had done. How can we show our gratitude for what Jesus has done? He has found us. He has saved us. Now He is calling us into a relationship with Him, so that we may tell others about all we experience in Jesus. Matthew serves as our template. How can we adapt his model and customize his pattern into our lives, so that we may honor and glorify Jesus in all we say and do?