

Jesus Calls Levi

Bible Verse

"Come, follow me," he said. (Matthew 4:19)

Did You Know?

In Jesus' time, tax collectors were very unpopular. The payment of taxes to the Roman Empire caused resentment among people, and tax collectors reminded people of Roman rule. Additionally, tax collectors made their living by charging more money for taxes than the Romans expected and keeping the difference, a system seemingly designed to encourage greed and dishonesty.

In this week's lesson, we hear the story of Levi, also known as Matthew. The story of Jesus calling Levi to follow him is found in similar accounts in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Levi was a tax collector and was sitting at a tax booth, probably collecting a toll along a major road. When Jesus saw Levi, he issued the invitation, "Follow me." With these words, Jesus invited one who was despised by society.

It is likely that Jesus' association with tax collectors surprised many. We are told in particular of the response of the Pharisees. The Pharisees opposed Jesus' association with those they identified as sinners, such as tax collectors. In the Pharisees' eyes, if a person associated with someone identified as a sinner, then that person became unclean.

The story of Jesus calling Levi is good news for us. Jesus issues the invitation to follow, not to those who are perfect and righteous, but to imperfect, ordinary people.

Jesus calls people like us to follow him.

Levi must have known his life would change if he accepted Jesus' invitation to follow. When Jesus called, Levi followed with no hesitation. Are we able to follow Levi's example?

For more Bible background information, go to DeepBlueKids.com.

Exploration Points

- The children will hear about the call story of some of Jesus' disciples.
- The children will learn how to be disciples.

Bible Story

Luke 5:27-32

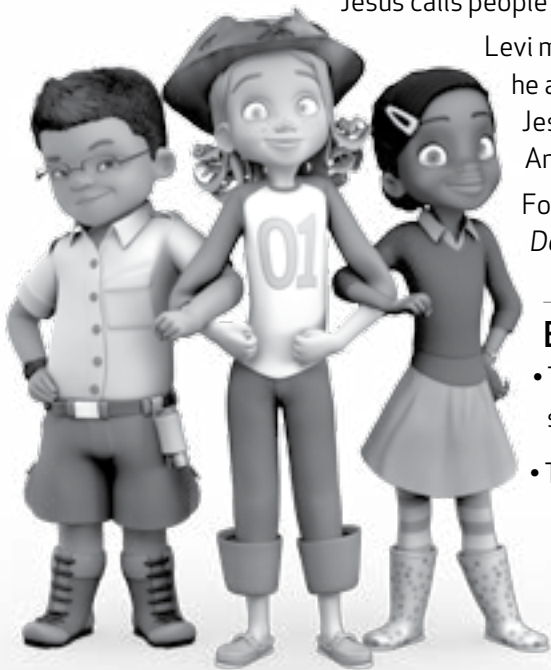
Anchor Point

Jesus calls us to follow him.

Your Lesson

- Welcome
- Penny Tax
- Color-changing Heart
- Confusing Tag
- Theater Group
- Let's All Say Epiphany
- Jesus Calls Levi
- One Word at a Time
- Worship
- Younger Elementary Small Group
- Older Elementary Small Group

 Requires preparation.





Jump In!

The following activities are planned to introduce today's theme. Be sure that there is a leader to welcome and direct the kids to the interest groups of their choice.

An adult will be needed at each group to lead the activity with the children.

WELCOME

- Greet each parent and child as they arrive. Play music to make your room cheerful.

PENNY TAX (MATH ACTIVITY)

Supplies: "Penny Tax" Handout, pencils, cups, pennies (fifty for each child)

⊗ Photocopy "Form 52732: Penny Tax" for each child. Place fifty pennies in each cup.
You will need a cup of pennies for each child. Give each child a cup of pennies.

SAY: I have a gift for each of you today. As you can see, it is a cup of pennies. I'm afraid you can't keep all of the pennies, however. You must pay the penny tax. I have a form for you to use to calculate how much tax you owe.

- Give each child a copy of "Form 52732: Penny Tax," and have the child fill out the form to calculate how much tax is owed.
- After all of the children have completed the form, write the amount of tax to be collected at the bottom of each child's form. Make the amount of tax different for each child, but always more than the amount she or he has calculated.
- Collect the taxes.

ASK: Did you feel the tax collection was fair? Why or why not? How did you feel about me as I was determining how much tax you would pay?

SAY: Our Bible story today is about a tax collector. In Jesus' time, tax collectors were often dishonest and known for cheating people to make more money for themselves. You can understand why people didn't like them!

- Give each child one penny to keep as a reminder of this activity.

COLOR-CHANGING HEART (LOGICAL ACTIVITY)

Supplies: "Changing Heart" Handout, paper in a variety of colors, scissors, gluesticks

⊗ Photocopy "Changing Heart" onto a variety of colors of paper.

SAY: We are going to make some special hearts that can change color.

- Have each child choose two different colors of the "Changing Heart" page.
- Have each child follow these directions.
 - * Cut out the shapes from both pages.
 - * Glue the two shapes together, lining up the edges and using scissors to trim the shapes if necessary.
 - * Following the folding diagram on "Changing Hearts, fold the shape three times.

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≈ TIP ≈

Copy paper or other lightweight paper works best for this activity. Construction paper is too thick to fold well.

- * For each fold, fold the shape as indicated by the dotted line, crease well, unfold and refold along the same line in the other direction, crease well, and unfold.
- * Lay the shape in front of you so that the creases are oriented as shown in the folding diagram.
- * Fold the bottom half of the shape up as you gently push in on the side creases.
- * Your shape should now resemble a heart.
- * Unfold your heart and refold it so that it is a different color.

SAY: You can change this heart by unfolding it and refolding it. Our Bible story today is about a man who changed his heart. Changing our hearts is not as easy as changing this paper heart.

CONFUSING TAG (MOVEMENT ACTIVITY)

SAY: We are going to play a game of tag. But instead of only one person being “IT,” five of you will be IT. The rest of you, of course, will try to avoid being tagged. If you are tagged, you will become IT and the person who tagged you will no longer be IT.

- Let the children play the game. Expect some confusion.

ASK: Was it difficult to know who was IT? Why or why not? Could you tell just by looking at someone whether they were IT?


SAY: Our Bible story today is about someone who changed, although people might not have noticed simply by looking at him.

Dive Deeper

Bring the children together to experience the Bible story and worship. Use a bell to alert the children it is Large Group Time.

BIBLE STORY: JESUS CALLS LEVI

Supplies: “Jesus Calls Levi” Handout

 Photocopy “Jesus Calls Levi” for each child to take home.

SAY: Our Bible story today is about Jesus and a tax collector. In Jesus’ time, tax collectors were disliked and looked down upon.

- Invite the children who participated in the “Penny Tax” activity to explain to the class why tax collectors in Jesus’ time were disliked (because they often cheated people and were unfair). Read the story from “Jesus Calls Levi.”

ASK: Why do you think the Pharisees were upset that Jesus was eating with tax collectors? (*They didn’t think he should associate with people like tax collectors.*) What do you think Jesus meant when he said, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor, but sick people do”? (*Jesus chose to associate with the people who needed to hear his message of love.*)

SAY: Jesus said that he came to call people to change their hearts and lives.


≈ TIP ≈

You will need a large, open area clear of obstacles either outside or inside to play this game. Adjust the number of children who are “IT” based on the size of your group.

ASK: What does it mean to change your heart? (*change the way you live, become more loving*)

SIGN THE BIBLE VERSE ONE WORD AT A TIME

Supplies: Matthew 4:19 Bible Verse Poster; Matthew 4:19 Sign Language Handout

 Familiarize yourself with the sign language for the Bible verse so you can teach it to the children.

- Show the Bible verse poster.
- Encourage the children to read the verse together with you.

ASK: Who is speaking in this verse? (*God*) Who is God's Son? (*Jesus*)


- Show the children the signs for the Bible verse from American Sign Language.
- Encourage the children to sign and say the Bible verse with you several times.
- Divide the children into five groups.

SAY: When I point to your group, say one word of our Bible verse. You will need to pay attention so you know what word to say when I point to your group.

- Encourage the children to say the verse one word at a time as you point to each group, varying the order each time.

WORSHIP

Supplies: "Jesus Calls Followers" poster, markers

 Play familiar worship music and encourage the children to sing and move along with the music.

SAY: Last week we made a poster of Jesus' followers.

ASK: Who did Jesus call to follow him in today's story? (*Levi*)

- Add Levi's name to the "Jesus Calls Followers" poster.

SAY: Even though Levi wasn't perfect, Jesus called him to be a disciple. Jesus calls us to follow him too.

- Invite those children who were not present last week to add their names to the poster.

SAY: Let's learn to say, "I will follow Jesus," in sign language.

- Show the children how to make the sign for "I" by pointing to yourself.
- Show the children how to make the sign for "will" by raising the right hand open with fingers together by the side of the head and bringing the hand down in a forward motion.
- Show the children how to make the sign for "follow" by holding your closed hands together in front of you. As one hand moves off to the side, the other hand follows.
- Show the children how to make the sign for "Jesus" by touching the middle finger of one hand to the palm of the other hand and then repeating this action with the middle finger of the other hand.
- Encourage the children to put the signs together to sign the phrase, "I will follow Jesus."
- Practice the signs together as a class.

SAY: Today is the first Sunday in Lent. Lent is the period of time before Easter. Lent is a good time to focus on changing our hearts to be more like Jesus.

PRAY: God, we thank you for your Son, Jesus, who calls us to follow him. Change our hearts to help us live as Jesus taught us. Amen.

- Dismiss the children to their small groups.



Grow Stronger

Divide the children into small groups based on age levels. Keep the groups small, with a maximum of ten children in each group. You may need to have more than one of each group.

YOUNGER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP

- Invite the children to share what they remember about today's story.

SAY: Some people, like the Pharisees, were surprised when Jesus called Levi to follow him. They didn't think Levi was good enough to be Jesus' follower. Jesus doesn't require a certain level of goodness to follow him. Instead, Jesus calls people to change their hearts and lives when they become his followers.

- Have the children sit on the floor.

SAY: We are going to spend some time thinking about our days and the opportunities we have to follow Jesus.

- Read the following meditation slowly.

Sit comfortably on the floor with enough space around you to stretch your arms out. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath in and slowly let it out. Place your hands on the ground in front of you. Think about the things you do in the morning—waking up, saying hello to your family, eating breakfast, getting ready for school. What does following Jesus look like in the morning? Say a silent prayer asking God to help you be a follower of Jesus in the morning.

(Pause.)

Now open your arms wide as if you could hold the whole world. Wiggle your fingers back and forth. As you are wiggling your fingers, think about all the things you do during the middle of the day—playing with friends, eating lunch, going to school or staying home. What does following Jesus look like throughout the day? How does following Jesus affect the way you treat people and the way you act? Say a silent prayer asking God to help you be a follower of Jesus throughout the day.

(Pause.)

Now stretch your arms above your head. As you reach up, think about all the things you do in the evening—eating supper, spending time with your family, getting ready for bed. What does being a follower of Jesus look like in the evening? Say a silent prayer asking God to help you be a follower of Jesus in the evening.

(Pause.)

Rest your hands on your lap. Take a deep breath in and slowly let it out. Continue to rest your hands in your lap and keep your eyes closed as we pray. Thank you, God, for your constant presence in our lives. With your help, we choose to follow Jesus all day, every day. Amen.

You may open your eyes.

OLDER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP

Supplies: paper, pencils

SAY: Some people, like the Pharisees, were surprised when Jesus called Levi to follow him. They didn't think Levi was good enough to be Jesus' follower.

ASK: Does Jesus require a certain level of goodness in his followers?

SAY: Jesus calls each person to follow him. No one is perfect. Jesus calls people to change their hearts and lives when they become his followers. When we are Jesus' followers, it affects how we act.

ASK: What does it mean to follow Jesus? How does choosing to follow Jesus affect the way we treat people?

- As a group, discuss how being a follower of Jesus affects one's words and actions in the following situations: at home, at school, during a sporting event, in a crowd of strangers, talking with friends, seeing a homeless person, interacting with someone you don't like.

SAY: Jesus taught us by example that we are to love everyone, even those people that may not be liked by others.

- Give each child a piece of paper and a pencil.

SAY: Think about yourself as a follower of Jesus. Consider all the things we have talked about. Write down the things that are difficult or challenging for you to do as Jesus' follower. No one else will see this list.

- Allow the children an opportunity to write.

ASK: Why do you think Levi gave a banquet for Jesus? (*Perhaps he was celebrating his decision. Maybe he wanted his friends to meet Jesus too.*)

SAY: Imagine you are giving a banquet for Jesus. Think about the people you would invite. Think about the people you would not want at your banquet. We are going to spend some time now in silent prayer. Ask God to help you work on the things you have written down on your paper. Ask God to help you love the people you would not want to invite to your banquet. Thank God for loving you.

- Allow time for the children to pray.
- Close with a group prayer.

PRAY: God, we are thankful Jesus calls us to follow him, as imperfect as we are. We want to follow Jesus, but it isn't always easy. Help us to keep trying. Amen.

Jesus Calls Levi

Levi was a tax collector. It was a lonely job because tax collectors were not popular. People disliked tax collectors. Many of them cheated people by taking more money than they were supposed to.

One day Levi was sitting at a booth collecting taxes. As usual, many people refused to even look his way. Jesus and his disciples walked by the booth and Jesus approached Levi. Jesus said to him, "Follow me."

Levi said, "Who me?" He wasn't sure why Jesus would be interested in him.

"Yes, Levi, follow me," Jesus said.

Levi got up, left everything behind, and followed Jesus. Then Levi threw a great banquet for Jesus in his home. A large number of tax collectors and others sat down to eat with them. People were surprised to see Jesus eating with someone they didn't like!

The Pharisees and their legal experts grumbled to his disciples. They said, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus answered, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. I didn't come to call righteous people but sinners to change their hearts and lives."

Levi's meeting with Jesus changed his life. He stopped cheating people and followed Jesus instead.

(Based on Luke 5:27-32.)

Form 52732: Penny Tax

Form
52732 Penny Tax

2016

Fill out this worksheet to calculate the amount of tax you owe.

Sibling Tax	1. Sibling Tax: one cent for each brother or sister, including half-brothers and sisters and stepbrothers and stepsisters.	
	Number of siblings	
Meal Tax	2. Meal Tax: one cent for each meal you ate yesterday. Place a check mark beside each meal you ate yesterday.	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Breakfast	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Lunch	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Supper	
	Number of meals eaten yesterday	
School Tax	3. School Tax: one cent for each grade in elementary school you have completed. (Example: If you are in 4th grade, you will pay 4 cents tax because you have completed kindergarten, first, second, and third grades.)	
	Number of years of school completed	
Communication Tax	4. Communication Tax: one cent for each phone your family has.	
	Number of phones	
Electronic Tax	5. Electronic Tax: one cent for each TV, computer, or gaming system your family owns.	
	Number of electronics	
Plumbing Tax	6. Plumbing Tax: one cent for each bathroom you have in your house.	
	Number of bathrooms	
To calculate tax, add all amounts together.		
		Penny Tax owed



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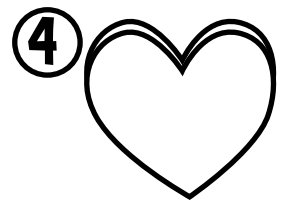
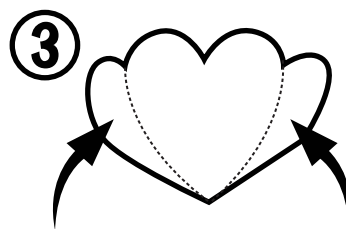
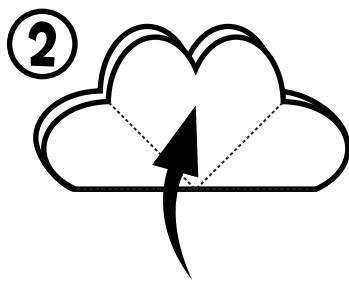
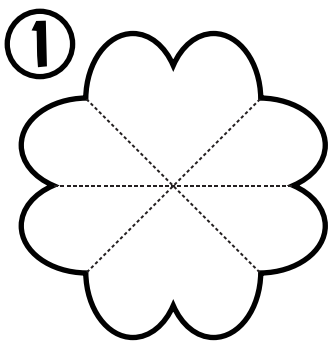
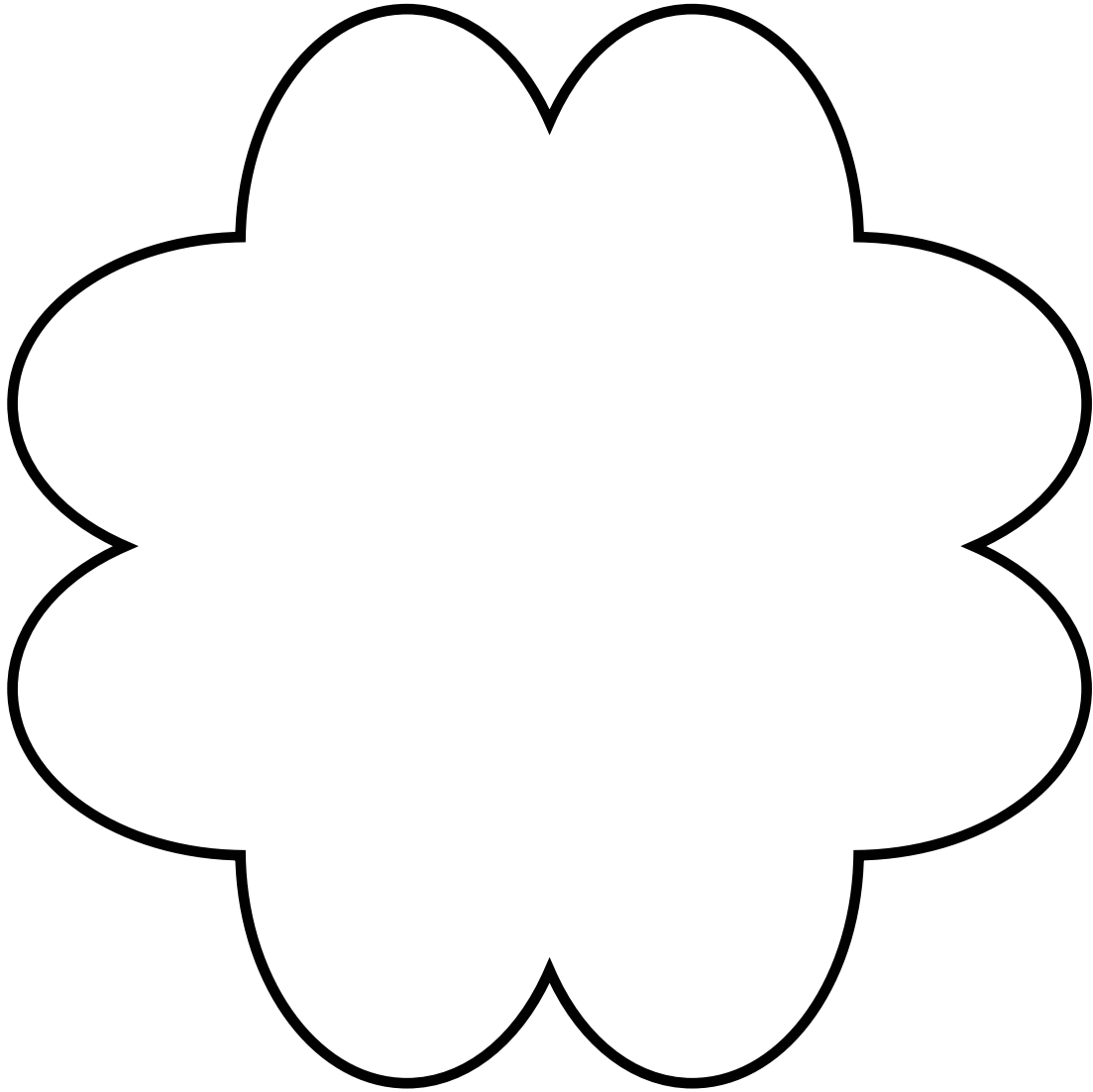
(Do not write in this space.)

Tax owed _____

Total Tax to be collected _____

Please pay the tax collector _____

Changing Heart



Matthew 4:19

“Come, follow me,” he said.



COME
Hand extended, palm up, index finger extended
Sign: Hand extended, palm up, index finger extended

Come

Hold out your hand with index finger extended, palm up. Move your hand toward yourself.



FOLLOW
Both hands in fists, thumbs out, right fist behind left fist
Sign: Both hands in fists, thumbs out, right fist behind left fist

Follow

Make a fist with both hands, thumbs out. Hold the right fist behind the left fist. Move both fists forward.



ME
Hand extended, palm up, index finger extended
Sign: Hand extended, palm up, index finger extended

Me

Point to yourself.

"Come, follow me," he said.

Matthew 4:19

