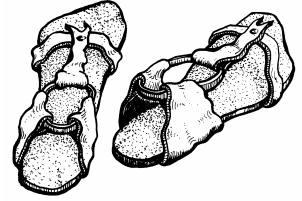


Journey Into Following Jesus



Lesson 1 . . . Why God Can Use You

As we get acquainted with the twelve disciples during the course of this “journey,” you will be surprised to discover one of them is much like you. The disciples remind us the Lord uses very ordinary people just like you and me to do extraordinary things. Jesus chooses them about a year after His baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. He has been working miracles, preaching, and traveling around Galilee with many followers (Mk 2:23, 3:7) but has not yet chosen the Twelve. People come from all over Palestine to hear and see this Miracle Worker (Mk 3:8). The choosing of the Twelve from His large body of followers is recorded in two gospels (Mk 3:13-19 and Lk 6:12-16). Look in Luke 6:14-16 at those He handpicks and fill in the missing names:

NOTES



Simon (whom he named _____), his brother _____, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, _____, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and _____ Iscariot, who became a traitor.

The Twelve are listed three times in the Gospels (Mt 10:2-4; Mk 3:16-19; Lk 6:14-16). Whose name always appears first, and whose last?

First _____ Last _____

The Twelve had very diverse personalities and political views. Matthew was a tax collector who sold out to the Roman government and collected taxes for them. Simon the Zealot was a fierce Jewish patriot, ready to give his life to free Israel from Roman domination. They were polar opposites politically, which shows our Lord is great enough to transform and use Democrats, Republicans, and even Independents. As we get to know the twelve disciples, we will discover **four** characteristics that reveal **why God can use you** and me.

1. They were ordinary.

Through the centuries the Twelve have been portrayed as saints much different from us. They have been immortalized in stained glass windows where they are shown floating in the air with halos over their heads, but they were just like you and me. The disciples were real, average, normal people with the same temperaments, weaknesses, and fears as you and me.

Not one of them would have ever been thought of as doing something great or becoming famous. None of them had great talents, intellectual abilities, or great influence. When Peter and John, the most prominent among the

Twelve, preach before the Sanhedrin, the members are astonished when they see Peter and John's boldness. Why, according to Acts 4:13a?

God usually finds His choice servants in the ranks of *ordinary* people like you and me. He does use the highly educated (like Paul), the wealthy (like Abraham and Job), and even sometimes the powerful (like King David and King Solomon). But most often He uses *ordinary* people like you and me.

God usually calls those who are not *wise by human standards . . . influential, or of noble birth*. He most often chooses the *foolish, the weak, the lowly, and the despised* (1 Cor. 1:26-28). In other words, God mostly calls plain, *ordinary* people like you and me to do extraordinary things. Why, according to 1 Corinthians 1:29?

There was nothing about any of the Twelve to make anyone think they would ever distinguish themselves. In every way **they were ordinary**.

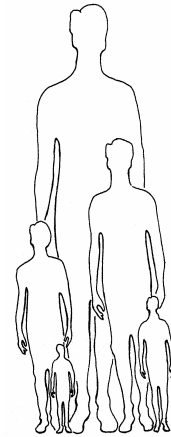
2. They were young.

They weren't old, mature, or experienced. They were very young; probably most were in their early twenties, with John in his late teens being the youngest and Peter in his mid-twenties being the oldest.

One thing we must never forget is the young will soon take over the ministry, so they need to be trusted and trained. We also must realize, as we get older, we get into ruts, and our worship can become routine and dry. The older we get, the less we like new methods and ideas because we don't like change. However, young people are full of enthusiasm and new ideas. Therefore, we who are older should heed what admonition of Paul to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12a?

This means older believers should be very sensitive to the views and ideas of younger believers. We not only need to lead them, we need to heed them. Younger believers should be encouraged to take places of service and leadership in the church.

As we study the twelve disciples, we need to remember **they were ordinary, they were young**, and . . .



3. They were often disappointing.

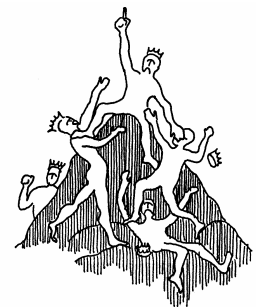
The Gospels clearly reveal the imperfections and weaknesses of the Twelve, who often disappoint our Lord. For example, the disciples personally hear Jesus teach about faith and see Him demonstrate His power through many miracles. Then, one day after a series of miracles including the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Mt 8:14-15), they are sailing across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus goes to sleep, and a violent storm arises, causing waves to break over into the boat. The disciples awaken Jesus and tell Him they are going to drown. Jesus immediately gets up and rebukes the wind, which causes the raging waters and the storm to subside with a great calm (Lk 8:24). Then, what does Jesus ask the disciples (Luke 8:25a)?

Later, as the time approaches for His crucifixion, Jesus resolutely heads for Jerusalem. When Jesus and the Twelve come to a village in Samaria, the villagers let it be known Jesus and His disciples are not welcome. As a result, according to Luke 9:54, what do James and John ask the Lord?

This is not exactly a demonstration of the love and forgiveness Jesus has been teaching them. Jesus calls James and John the *Sons of Thunder* (Mk 3:17) because He is aware of their hot tempers and impatience.

At the Last Supper, just hours before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus is teaching them about His suffering and death. He serves them fruit of the vine and bread, which represents His blood and body. However, at this touching moment what does Luke 22:24 tell us His disciples are doing?

As Jesus is teaching them about His Cross, they are arguing about crowns. Moreover, the night before Jesus' crucifixion all the disciples boast they will never deny Him. Yet, at His arrest they all desert Him, and Peter denies the Lord. Then, on the first Sunday morning after Jesus is crucified, the women return from the empty tomb to tell the disciples about Jesus' resurrection. What does Luke 24:11 tell us is the disciples' response?

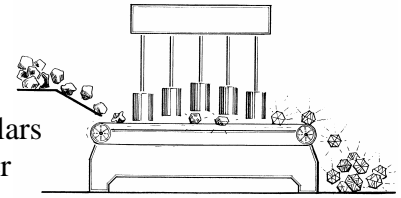


In spite of all their failures, selfishness, and sin, Jesus loves them to the end and never gives up on them. No matter what we do or how we fail the Lord, He never stops loving us and never stops wanting to use us. That's why we have what wonderful promise in 2 Timothy 2:13a?

When studying the disciples we need to remember **they were ordinary**, **they were young**, and **they were often disappointing**, but . . .

4. They were transformed.

Our Master takes these men, who are diamonds in the rough, with all their weaknesses and failures, and transforms them into the pillars of the church (Eph. 2:20). When we get to heaven we will discover the New Jerusalem has a wall around it. According to Revelation 21:14, what is written on the twelve foundations that hold up the wall?



Getting to know the twelve disciples should inspire us because if Jesus can use people like them, He can use you and me. He can use us because He can transform us just like He did the disciples.

A legend says the angel Gabriel meets Jesus in heaven as He arrives after His ascension. He asks Jesus about His work on earth, and Jesus tells him, "I have turned it over to my twelve disciples." Knowing what kind of men they are, the astonished Gabriel asks, "What are your plans if they fail?" Jesus replies, "I have no other plans." Although this story is a legend, that was true then, and it is true now. If we don't do what Jesus has called us to do, who will? Jesus has not entrusted His ministry on earth to angels but solely to you and me. How does Jesus express this truth in John 20:21b? (See also John 17:18.)

God can use you because He used the twelve disciples who **were ordinary**, **young**, and **often disappointing**, but **were transformed** by our Lord. Which of these characteristics most reveals **why God can use you**?
