

Luke 5:1-11; 6:12-16 (1984 NIV)
The Ones Whom Jesus Called

Introduction

Luke 5:1-11 tells us how Christ called Peter to follow Him. The progress of this story begins with a frustrated fisherman cleaning his nets after a long, hard night.

What does the call to follow Jesus entail? We will answer this by first recounting the call of Peter to follow Jesus.

First, let's consider ...

I. A Point of Failure (5:1-3, 5a)

- 1 One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God.
- 2 He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets.
- 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.
- 5a Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything ...

Fishing is hard work. It's one thing to fish on weekends for leisure. It's something else to fish every day for a living. Peter, Andrew, James, and John fished on the Sea of Gennesaret (or Galilee) all year round.

Now it is morning. Peter and the others are tired and probably in a foul mood. Now they are busy mending their nets—time-consuming work made more difficult by the frustration of having caught nothing the night before.

When Jesus asks Peter if He can use his boat, Peter immediately agrees. He knows Jesus and admires Him greatly. So when Jesus wants to use his boat as a pulpit, Peter feels honoured to grant the request.

You can say that Jesus comes to the scene of Peter's failure and uses the opportunity to preach the Word. He uses a simple fishing boat as a springboard to do a miracle.

But nothing in this story happens by chance. All is meant to teach us an important truth: Jesus still prepares us for His call by allowing us to experience personal failure.

Until we sense our need of Him, we will not be ready to follow Him. After all, if you think you are self-sufficient, why would you need Jesus? The Lord often strips us of our proud self-reliance before we can be greatly used by Him. Peter must be stripped of His self-reliant pride before he is ready to respond to the call of Jesus.

Moving on, let's now consider ...

II. A Challenge to Obedience (5:4-5)

4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

5 Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

The words of Jesus contain both a command and a promise. It's not as if Jesus is saying, "Let's go out into the deep water, put down the nets, and let's see what happens." Jesus is promising that if Peter will obey, he will catch fish. I'm sure that after a long night of fruitless fishing, this must have been hard to believe.

We can learn two related lessons here:

- The Lord never gives foolish commands, though they may sound foolish humanly speaking.
- Even the Lord's miracles would require us to act in obedience that may seem foolish.

There are certainly reasons for Peter to be sceptical. After all, the experience of the previous night has seemed conclusive. As a professional fisherman, Peter knows the sea well. He could have said, "Sorry, I believe it's not worth the trouble." Or "I'm the expert here ... let's not waste any more time trying."

But I love the way Peter puts it, "Because you say so ..." (v. 5). In the King James Version, the phrase is "Nevertheless, at Thy Word ..." This ought to be the catchphrase of the saints. Conditions may be dark and circumstances may overwhelm us, and our fears may threaten to sink us. But the Lord speaks and His people say, "Nevertheless, at Thy Word ..." And off they go in obedience.

- Abraham set off across the desert to a place out there, somewhere, and only God knows where with no more than "Nevertheless, at Thy Word ..."
- Noah built an ark in the face of an unbelieving world with no more than "Nevertheless, at Thy Word ..."
- Moses went back to Egypt to defy Pharaoh, looking to heaven and saying, "Nevertheless, at Thy Word ..."

- Joshua led the people to march around Jericho day after day, repeating this in his heart, “Nevertheless, at Thy Word ...”
- David heard the Lord and faced the giant Goliath with this great and godly confidence in Him, “Nevertheless, at Thy Word ...”

Same with Peter here, “Nevertheless, at Thy Word ... I will let down the nets.” So, we still have a part to play, and that’s why the Lord calls. The fish aren’t going to jump into the boat by themselves. We still have to do what we have to do. We’ve got to go to work. I believe there are many answers to prayers that are now awaiting only one action from you—“Let down your nets.” Put your nets down into the deep water; do your part; and then God will do His.

Lloyd Ogilvie who died on 5 June 2019, had served as Chaplain of the United States Senate, and he once put this truth like this: “Without God we can’t; without us He won’t.”

Moving on, let’s now consider ...

III. A Recognition of Divine Power (5:6-7)

6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

So many fish come into the nets that the nets begin to break. And when the men fill up both boats with this huge catch of fish, the weight threatens to sink both boats.

Please note that the fish are there all along. It is just that Peter couldn’t catch them the night before. But when Jesus is in the boat, everything changes. Everything is happening according to the divine plan. So, Peter is allowed to fail so that he would learn what he could not do without Jesus’ help, and what he could do with Jesus’ help.

There is an encouraging truth embodied in this part of the story: Jesus can turn our emptiness into fullness in His power and in His time.

Moving on again, let’s now consider ...

IV. A Confession of Inadequacy (5:8-10a)

8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”

9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken,

10a and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners ...

Now, why would Peter beg Jesus to leave after He has given Peter success beyond his wildest dreams?

Peter, like many others, just could not handle that kind of success. Like most of us, Peter thinks according to "man-size" successes, not according to "God-size" miracles. He only has room in his mind for things that he could handle and bring about on his own. But when Jesus gets involved, the results drop him onto his knees before Jesus. Why? Because to see the Lord's mighty work is to see ourselves as we really are—limited, finite human beings. Ouch! That hurts our ego.

Once Peter realizes who Jesus really is, he sees himself in a new light. And this is something too humbling (or humiliating?) for him. Peter cannot stand the contrast between the power of Christ and his own sinfulness. His pride has been burned away by a transforming vision of Christ. But as we will soon read in v. 10b, the voice of the Lord to Peter at this point is not a harsh rebuke, but a gentle reassurance.

So we learn this truth: The Lord is gentle to one who knows his/her inadequacy and is honest about it.

Let's now consider one last scene in this account, and that has to do with ...

V. A Commitment to Step Out (5:10b-11)

10b Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people."

11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

There is an important lesson for us to consider here: No one can truly encounter Jesus and walk away unchanged. We may end up closer to the Lord or we may further harden our hearts, but no one can truly encounter Jesus and stay the same way as before. In Peter's case, his confession becomes a part of his testimony. He knows he is a sinner; not ashamed to admit it; and Jesus accepts him and even calls him to follow Him.

Peter proves the point that the Lord's call is always good, but it's not always comfortable. One day you're doing your very familiar thing—catching fish. The next day you're called to leave all that's familiar to you to do something rather strange—catching people. "Lord, what's that! Catching people—are you calling to me to be a policeman or what?" In this sense, the Lord can mess up your comfortable and settled life with His call ... but in a good way.

The computer revolution has brought about great benefits to our everyday life. And for this, we have to thank the founder of Apple Computers for playing a huge role in bringing this about—the late Steve Jobs.

Steve Jobs was just 21 when he and Steve Wozniak (another Steve) invented the Apple Computer. Until then computers were a monstrous mass of vacuum tubes which occupied huge room space. The ingenuity of the two Steve's managed to take that mass of tubes and incorporate them inside a box small enough to sit on a desk.

Jobs and Wozniak offered their invention to Atari, a pioneer in home computers. But both Steve's weren't interested in big bucks. All they wanted was a decent salary and the opportunity to continue their work. Atari said "no" to them. So, they offered it to Hewlett-Packard, who also said "no" to them.

It seemed Jobs and Wozniak alone could see the possibilities at that time. So Jobs sold his Volkswagon van and Wozniak sold his scientific calculator, and with the US\$1,300 that they had gathered, they formed Apple Computers.

Steve Jobs soon discovered that if his vision was to reach fruition, he needed greater management expertise. So Jobs approached John Sculley, then President of Pepsi-Cola. There was absolutely no reason why Sculley should leave a highly paid position in a world-leading company to go work with a bunch of computer nerds in a fledgling industry. Not surprisingly, Sculley said "no" to Jobs.

But Jobs wouldn't take "no" for an answer. He approached Sculley again. Again Sculley turned him down. In a last ditch effort, Jobs passionately presented his visionary ideas to Sculley and he asked Sculley a question that finally persuaded him to accept. The question was: "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water or do you want a chance to change the world?"

"Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water or do you want a chance to change the world?" Jobs and Sculley then started the computer revolution and went on to change the world. The rest is history.

(<https://storiesforpreaching.com.au/sermonillustrations/stop-selling-sugared-water>)

Jesus came to Peter then and He comes to us today with a similar question: "Do you want to spend the rest of your life catching fish (i.e. making a comfortable life for yourself and nothing more) or do you want a chance to fish

for people (i.e. making a difference in the lives of others by reaching out to them in Jesus' love)?"

Jesus has a vision to change the world with the work and values of the Kingdom of God. And today, He is calling His people to follow Him in making a difference in our world for the sake of God's Kingdom.

For Peter and the other disciples, following Christ means leaving behind the old priorities—their boats, their nets, their fishing ground—and allowing Christ to lead them to follow Kingdom priorities.

Even some good things must be left behind in order that better things may come in and from the Lord. So we have this truth about following Jesus: To follow Jesus in His new season for us, stepping out of our comfort zone is just the beginning of greater things to come.

Peter is called to follow Jesus. But in his journey following Jesus, Peter proves to be brash, vacillating, impulsive, and even undependable. He would make bold promises that he couldn't follow through. He is one who would jump wholeheartedly into something, and then bails out before finishing. He is often the first one in, and the first one out. However, please note that the Peter in the Gospels is transformed into a different person in the book of Acts.

Like Peter, each of us is known as a "sinner" as well as a "saint". Sometimes the sinner in us pops out, and Jesus has to correct and rebuke us. Prayerfully, as we progress in the Christian life, the saint in us becomes more and more dominant. This will happen as we follow Jesus, and allow Him to teach and mould us into what He wants us to be and to do.

Now, we come to Luke 6:12-16. Here we see how the call to follow Jesus further develops in the naming of the 12 apostles. By Luke 6, Jesus has almost finished half of His three years of earthly ministry. He knows and realizes that one of the things He must do is pass on the essential truths of why He came to a few people who would in turn pass it on to others after He is gone.

So He must choose a few whom He would devote Himself to teach and train so that they might continue to minister to others when He goes back to the Father. Jesus chose 12 men who were also known as the 12 Apostles.

In the choosing of the 12 apostles, I like for us to look at some of them and examine this one thing about them—that is ...

VI. The Humanity & Diversity of the Twelve Apostles (6:12-16)

12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

13 When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles:

14 Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew,

15 Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot,

16 Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

1. Andrew

The first on the list is Peter. But since we have already talked much about him, I like us to look at the next one on the list—i.e. Andrew. This is Peter's brother. In Scripture, he is often in the background. But whenever he does appear, he is leading people to Christ. In fact, the first thing he does as a disciple is lead his brother, Simon Peter, to Christ. However, after this point, he lives in his brother's shadow. His name is rarely mentioned in Scripture. He is pleased to do what Jesus wants him to do whether he receives recognition or not.

Every church should be blessed with several Andrews—people who gently and quietly bring people to Jesus; people who serve with no care for position, status, prestige, or limelight.

2. James

James is the next apostle on our list. He, along with his brother John, is a son of Zebedee. The way Zebedee and his family are portrayed in Scripture leads us to believe that this family is very prominent politically, religiously, and economically. In other words, they are rich, powerful, well liked, and well known. And James is the eldest son of Zebedee. What does that mean? It means when Zebedee dies, James is in line to receive a huge inheritance. But by following Jesus, he has given all that up.

Unfortunately, James becomes so zealous about Jesus that he loses his passion for people, and becomes almost bloodthirsty. James is so passionate about Jesus, that when a certain city rejects the Lord, James says, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9:54).

Being passionate about Jesus is good, but it must not cause us to hate those who reject Jesus. James becomes so intense and fervent in his love for Jesus that he sometimes gets carried away by it.

James is also ambitious. It is James and his brother John who, at the prodding of their mother, try to gain prominence over the other disciples. They come before Jesus and ask if they could have the thrones on either side of Him when He enters into His kingdom. Remember, their family is very influential and so maybe their mother (whose name is Salome) thinks this is the way to get what you want (Matt. 27:56; Mark 16:1).

Are you passionate for Jesus? That's wonderful. But be sure that your zeal doesn't make you think that others are lesser people, or you are better, or more blessed than them.

3. John

The younger brother of James is John. Together, Jesus has nicknamed them "The Sons of Thunder". That is a fitting nickname for them. John stands right there with James when James wants to call down fire from heaven.

Yes, John is always zealous for the Lord and His truth. But Jesus teaches him to balance it with love. And out of this, a transformed John quotes the words of Jesus in John 13:34-35 - "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Discipleship is not merely about speaking zealously for Jesus and of His truth to others; discipleship is also about reaching out to others compassionately with Jesus' love.

4. Philip

Philip is the fifth apostle named. In John 6, it tells us something about Philip. It appears that Philip is the facts-and-figures guy. He is practical and always wants to do things by the book. He is often pointing out why things cannot be done rather than finding creative ways to do them.

In John 6, we find that Jesus has attracted a crowd of 5,000 men, which means there is probably much more people when the women and children are included. When these become hungry, Jesus turns to Philip and asks him where they can get bread to feed the people. The text clearly says that Jesus has asked Philip this to test him.

In John 6:7, Philip says that two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread to give everybody even a little bit of food. Philip has already seen how Jesus has healed people and turned water into wine. But when Jesus asks him how they could feed the people, Philip only says that it cannot be done. He forgot that with God, all things are possible according to His will and way. And Jesus reminds him of this that day by feeding everybody with only five loaves and two fish.

The final event revealing Philip's character is in the upper room during the Last Supper. In His entire ministry, Jesus has been saying how He and the Father are one, and if you have seen Him, you have seen the Father. Jesus is constantly trying to get the disciples to understand that He is God, and if you know Him, you know the Father. Jesus repeats all of this in His upper room discourse, at which point Philip says, "Lord, show us the Father, and it will be sufficient." This guy can't think outside the box! Basically, Philip is saying, "Jesus, stop talking all this gibberish stuff about you and the Father being one. If you want to show us the Father, just show us the Father." Jesus chides

Philip and tells him again that He and the Father are one. Philip still cannot quite grasp how this could be. He is too stuck in his own thinking of what can be and what cannot be; too stuck to the rule book.

And yet, these are the kind of people God uses—people like you and me who are often slow to learn, and trusting more in our own ways than in God's ways.

5. Matthew (Levi)

Matthew was a tax collector for the Roman government before Jesus called him. His fellow Jews hated him as they regarded him a traitor. But upon following Christ, he resigned from the Income Tax Dept. with immediate effect, and now shares the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. Tradition says he ministered among his Jewish brethren for many years before he was burned at the stake.

6. Thomas

Thomas is often nicknamed "Doubting Thomas" though this nickname is found nowhere in Scripture. He has a tendency to see the negative side of things. He anticipates the worst in everything.

When Jesus has died, Thomas probably wants to give up and throw in the towel. He feels abandoned. Thomas was not in the upper room with the rest of the disciples when Jesus first appeared to them. Maybe he was elsewhere wallowing in his own misery. So when the disciples excitedly told him that Jesus was alive and had risen from the dead, he was not convinced.

Now some days later, Thomas is with them in the upper room, and Jesus appears once more. He goes straight to Thomas and says, "Put your finger here, look at my hands. Reach your hand here into my side" (John 20:27). Thomas has been pessimistic, but his doubt is caused by grief, uncertainty, and the pain of loneliness.

But the Lord is so gentle with him. Yes, the Lord is with all of us even when we doubt. Jesus, because He became human, understands our weakness. He sympathizes with our uncertainty. Thomas never doubts again after this. Tradition tells us that he took the Gospel to India. Like almost all his fellow apostles, he died a martyr by having a spear thrust through his side, just like his Master. You might say he was not doubting his Master, but duplicating his Master when he died.

7. Simon the Zealot

Simon is a Zealot. The Zealots are a fiery, religious-political organization whose primary goal is to overthrow the Roman occupation of Israel. They hate the Roman government and anybody remotely associated with it. Their primary method of opposing the Roman government is through terrorism and covert violence. The Romans regarded them as militant, violent outlaws.

It is men like Matthew the one-time tax collector that Simon the Zealot would love to kill. Matthew might have been quite nervous having Simon around him. But both Simon and Matthew are so transformed by being with and in Christ such that they could serve with the Lord side by side.

Though Simon might have originally joined Jesus for political reasons (he looks to Jesus to lead in overthrowing the Roman government), somewhere along the line, Simon's hate-filled heart is overthrown and he becomes a devoted follower of Christ. History says that he took the salvation message to the British Isles where he was killed for preaching the Gospel.

So, we have examined some of these named apostles. All of them were so different from one another—different personalities, different temperaments, different skills and abilities, and different backgrounds. But the Lord had used them greatly in spite of their humanity and diversity.

8. Judas Iscariot, the traitor

The last name on the list, however, is one that we don't want to be associated with. Judas Iscariot is universally scorned for his betrayal of the innocent and perfect Son of God for a handful of coins. While the other apostles are examples of how God can use ordinary people in extraordinary ways, Judas is a warning about the dangers of sin. And not just sin, but spiritual carelessness in the life of a person. Here is a man who has spent much time with Christ, but has never really grasped who Christ is or what Christ comes to do.

Some people are like Judas in a sense—read the Bible, attend church, mix with Christians. But like Judas, they are only in it for what Christ can give to them.

I don't think Judas has intended to have Christ killed. He has originally signed on with Jesus because he thinks Jesus is going to pass out glory, honour, and riches. But it never happens. They just get poorer and poorer. They make more and more enemies. Judas is not getting rich the way he thinks he would. So, he begins to steal a few coins from the money purse now and then. Jesus just isn't doing things right. Jesus isn't operating the way Judas thinks He should. So Judas decides that he has to do something for his own good as he cannot depend on Jesus anymore.

There are also people today who come to Jesus only to see what they can get out of Him. That's the attitude of Judas. In His last words concerning Judas, Jesus calls him not a "child of God" born to redemption, but a "son of perdition" condemned to destruction (John 17:12). What a sad commentary indeed!

The 12 apostles were human just like us. They had their strengths and weaknesses. They made their share of mistakes. Each of them is different, showing us that there is no one kind of person God is looking to use. He is able to use all of us, if we are willing. Often times we reverse that—we think

God is only willing if we are able. Willingness is the key. Just like us, the 12 apostles were not perfect; they had their flaws. But that is precisely why God was able to glorify Himself through them. So, never feel unqualified to be called by the Lord and to serve Him because He is looking for a willing heart, not a perfect resume.

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that after spending the night awake and praying, Jesus chose and called a motley crowd of people—like Matthew the tax collector who worked for the Romans, James the Zealot who hated the Romans, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed Him for some “blood money”. Did Jesus make a mistake, and did that after an overnight prayer?

Sometimes, we feel like that too—after all the praying and even fasting, we make a decision ... and the result turns out terribly wrong!!! And we scream, “God, why you play such a bad joke on me!”

The choosing and calling of His 12 Apostles is not to show that Jesus does make mistakes like us. Rather, it is to teach us some lessons about Him in the way He deals with human mistakes as He works with imperfect people and as these people work with one another.

- Jesus shows us that He is not forgetful of our imperfections, but forbearing towards us.
- Jesus shows us that He is not finding fault with our imperfections, but forgiving towards us.
- Jesus shows us that He is not tearing us down for our imperfections, but transforming us for the better.

And just like how Jesus called and worked with 12 imperfect men to do the will of the Father, let’s also show forbearance, forgiveness, and transforming grace to one another as we work together. Amen!

Reflect & Apply:

1. In your opinion, what are your strengths and weaknesses in walking with the Lord and working with others?
2. In view of your strengths and weaknesses, what can you do to improve on your walking with the Lord and in your working with others?
3. What does it mean for you to show forbearance, forgiveness, and transforming grace to others?