



THE TWELVE

Preparing for the mission with Jesus' disciples

THE TWELVE: PREPARING FOR THE MISSION WITH JESUS' DISCIPLES

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INTRODUCTION TO THIS SERIES AND BOOKLET

This booklet is made up of edited transcripts from Cornerstone Church Johannesburg's preaching series on the twelve disciples, which took place between January to March, 2014.

These sermons can be downloaded from the Cornerstone Church website at www.cornerstonechurch.co.za/the-twelve

The sermons complement the booklet, but the booklet is designed to work independently of these.

At the end of each section are questions that were used by Cornerstone Church's Life Group (home group) leaders. They work well for group study but an individual will find them useful for their personal devotions as well.

Find more resources at www.cornerstonechurch.co.za.

This booklet is also available in formats for Kindle, Kobo and other ebook readers.

PETER: PART ONE

A BIO OF PETER

Name: Simon son of Jonah (nicknamed “Peter” by Jesus, meaning “rock”)

Marital Status: Married

Wife's name: Unknown

Home town: Bethsaida, a town on Lake Gennesaret in Galilee (exact location unknown, possibly the north shore). The apostle Philip also came from this town.

Profession: Fisherman

Age: 20-25 years old

Relatives: Andrew his brother, and his mother-in-law, are mentioned in the scriptures.

Personality: Extroverted, brusque, abrasive, loud, enthusiastic, impulsive, resolute, eager, bold, aggressive and outspoken. Peter is noted for being somewhat brash. He was quick to speak and share an opinion. He was quick to act and sometimes slow to think. He was susceptible to external influences and intimidated at times. But Peter really did love Jesus.

Social status: Uneducated in the Mosaic Law but seemed to have a reasonable fishing business with his brother (Andrew) and partners (James and John the sons of Zebedee). He seemed to have owned his own boat and it appears as though he owned a house in Capernaum as well.

General facts: Spoke Aramaic but also had an accent that clearly

identified him as a Galilean; was 'unlearned' i.e. he had no additional religious or scriptural instruction; was a disciple of John the Baptist, and was one of the three apostles closest to Jesus.

Position amongst the 12: Although not named as a leader, Peter certainly seems to be the apostle that was most well known amongst Jesus's followers (his name is mentioned about 110 times in the gospels). His name is mentioned first in all the lists of the Apostles. Jesus seemed to have a closer relationship with him together with James and John and these three would often be called out by Jesus to go somewhere or do something that the others were not invited to (Example: the transfiguration and the Garden of Gethsemane). After Christ's ascension, Peter appears to take a position of leadership, quickly becoming the spokesman for the group, and the other disciples seem to follow without resistance.

Death: He was martyred as prophesied by Jesus. Early Church tradition claims that Peter was in Rome in the last phase of his life and that he was executed by crucifixion (upside down, with arms outstretched) at the time of the Great Fire of Rome of the year 64, during the reign of Emperor Nero. Most scholars believe that Peter was crucified sometime between AD 64 and 68.

INTRODUCTION

It's phenomenal how God can take something so broken and turn it into something beautiful. That's what we're going to see as we look more closely at Peter. We want to see how Christ worked with him and changed him and see what the important issues of discipleship are.

Jesus purposefully spent three years raising twelve men to multiply Himself and His mission. He never built them only around His gifts but built His gifts into them!

Last year in Johannesburg, five to seven hundred thousand sermons were preached. But the transformation of society went backwards. The missing ingredient is the application and mobilising of the priesthood. We need more discipling!

The minute you stop growing and taking new ground, you die. We need to get back into the place of being disciplined by God and we need to be asking: how do we follow Christ in a local church? How do we allow Jesus to disciple us?

Above you can see some facts about Peter in his bio. Perhaps you can identify with his personality - abrasive, loud and enthusiastic. See, Christ doesn't look for people who have finished characters. He wants to use every one of us and, in the process, he'll finish us off. It's great that Jesus takes rough and uneducated people - people we wouldn't use. If we were doing any of the choosing, we would have a lengthy process where people need to fill out all sorts of forms and we would choose respectable people. But Jesus doesn't do that. Here we see how he took this man, Peter, turned him the right way up and knew

that this man could change the world for the Gospel.

Jesus sees potential in every single personality type. Later we'll see Andrew was the antithesis of Peter. It all goes to show that Jesus uses anyone and everyone who is willing!

This series is about learning to become Christ-followers and a disciple is someone who follows Christ even when it becomes unclear. A disciple never stops following Jesus, regardless of anything that happens, and this is what we need to come back to. The best we know is that Peter, probably about 62 or 63 years old, was martyred for his faith. He served God faithfully and counted his martyrdom a privilege. We need to come back to Christ so that we can follow in this example.

We are going to look at the life of Peter in two parts

There is more scripture about Peter than any of the other disciples so that's why we've divided this section on Peter into two parts:

Part 1 'Character' (Becoming more like Christ)

Part 2 'Mission' (Turning the world upside down with the Gospel)

The Spirit is changing every one of us into the likeness and image of Jesus. See Jesus didn't come in and develop a depth in Peter for its own sake, but so that he could be prepared to do extraordinary exploits. When we get to know Peter better in the Bible we'll notice that he seems like someone we wouldn't trust. Yet God entrusts so much to him, as he wants to do with all of us.

CHARACTER

The model for our character is Jesus, not anyone else. In many “discipleship movements” of the past people just became clones of others. And we see those movements come to an end as a result. The only hero is Jesus and any preacher who doesn't point to Jesus will find the doors close on the ministries they have been called to.

2 Corinthians 3 : 17 - 18

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Our hope is to be more like Jesus.

Lessons we learn from Peter's life:

The following are some of the important stories we can learn from. We want to use them to highlight the discipleship principles that Jesus employed in the life of Peter.

Peter's unworthiness on the boat

Luke 5 : 1 - 11

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons

of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Peter is a fisherman by trade and Jesus was a carpenter. Most of us would have told the carpenter that he doesn't know how to fish and therefore doesn't know what he's talking about. But Peter doesn't blink an eye and lets down the nets at Jesus' word. Already the discipleship process was happening.

Peter calls himself a "sinful man". This is important. We cannot become followers of Christ unless we come to terms that there is only one who is worthy; if we don't come to this place and realise that Jesus is righteous, not us. If you believe you're righteous and God got a great deal when you decided to become a Christian, you're going to follow yourself and your own interests, not Jesus. That's going to go nowhere fast.

He left everything and followed Jesus

Matthew 4 : 18 - 22

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.

After the event recorded in Luke above, Peter left everything and followed Jesus. Peter even had to give up his occupation because he had been given a new one. For many of us we won't give up our occupation because it's not our call to do so, but we still have to leave everything and follow Christ. This isn't just for full-time elders, we also have marketplace elders. We've got to work out our vocational call with God.

But we must come to terms with the fact that there's nothing righteous in us and it's Jesus that will make us fishers of men. The "I'll make you" is discipleship and the "fishers of men" refers to mission. We are discipled for mission. If these two are not happening there's a breakdown in the process somewhere.

Peter's revelation that Jesus is the Christ

Matthew 16 : 13 - 19

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar- Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the

gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Peter has a revelation that Jesus is the Christ. See, Jesus asks the disciples who *they* say the Christ is - he's not interested in hearing from you what others think, he wants to know what *you* think.

We need a revelation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God - and we need that revelation continuously. Peter was able to hear, receive, and his heart was open for God to show him who Jesus was. You have to constantly settle that in your heart because very soon Jesus can become a waiter who answers your prayers to make you comfortable, or a prophet who says a few wise words. No, he is the Anointed One who you owe everything to; you can't compare Him to any other god, system or philosophy, it's him and him alone.

The Gospel is so simple and it's so important that we get back into being discipled by Jesus. Stop thinking you can save yourself. If you're not convinced that Jesus is the only saviour you'll never preach that with conviction. If people aren't saying that he is the only saviour around you, pray for them.

How did you come to believe in Jesus? You got a revelation and it hit your heart. We never move off of that in discipleship. We don't replace that with church rules and regulations. Christ is the way, he is the Lord; we do not bow to men, women, systems, or anything else.

What does Jesus mean by "on this rock, I will build my church?" Jesus

is saying that on this revelation of him being the Christ, he will build his Church. If you're not building your life on this revelation you are building with sticks and paper and hay, and on that day when everything is tested with fire it'll be burned up.

If you want to unclutter your life, get back to this. There's only one righteous and we must leave everything and follow him.

Peter learned the cost of discipleship

After this revelation we see Peter's nature come out.

Matthew 16 : 21 - 28

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each

person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

Here we see Peter had applied his human wisdom to the revelation of Jesus being the Christ he received earlier. Jesus didn't soften his rebuke - he stopped Peter's thinking in its tracks.

Imagine one of the elders in your church said to you, “Get behind me Satan!”? Wouldn't you soon be 'hearing' from God that you need to go to a different church? Why can't we take correction? The truth is that discipleship is about correction. This has nothing to do with man's rules or someone looking or not looking good, it's about life and death issues. Jesus had to go and die on the cross and we must not try and add human wisdom to the Gospel message.

Get off your high horse and these attitudes we have. We need to be able to be corrected, every single one of us.

Peter shows passion and courage

Matthew 14 : 22 - 33

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when

the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

We want the attitude we see in verse 28. And we know that when we see the wind, we need to look to Jesus, not the circumstances. But note in verse 31 that Jesus doesn't say to Peter, "Well done, you tried so hard." Instead, he says "O you of little faith"! Could we stand to be corrected like that?

We need to launch out and take risks so that we can be corrected. Some of us play in the safe zone. No, let's launch out of there. We're too reserved and far too calculating. In the Scriptures Peter is a wonderful case study of faith that grows. Some of us sit with little faith and will die with little faith, because we never activate it so God can add to it.

Peter's humanity

Luke 9 : 32 - 33

Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"— not knowing what he said.

Peter was just like you and I. Here, in this passage, we see that Peter was full of immaturity - he wanted to camp in this place but Jesus decides that instead they must go down and continue with the mission. What can be said about this? Well, have you noticed how some churches are built around constant manifestations? If we camp at manifestations of the Spirit and those sorts of things we're not using those manifestations like God intends. Instead, God calls us in the manifestation to take the mission out. What follows after this scripture? Jesus goes down and releases a boy from a demon. The mission continued and there was freedom because of that.

Sometimes, like Peter, we say the most inappropriate things at the most inappropriate time. But we're in good company.

John 13 : 5 - 9

Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you

do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”

We can see that Peter had so much respect and love for Christ, but Jesus was teaching him that he would need to get on his knees and serve his brothers like he had.

Mark 14 : 26 - 31

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” Peter said to him, “Even though they all fall away, I will not.” And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.” But he said emphatically, “If I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And they all said the same.

Peter says he won't deny Christ (Mark 14:26 - 31) but does three times. He cuts off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the High Priest, when they come to arrest Jesus. (Matthew 26:51; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:50; John 18:4-11) He ran to Jesus' tomb as soon as he is told by Mary and the women that were with her that Jesus had risen. (Luke 24:12; John 20:2-6.) These all show his humanity.

Peter continually asked questions, wanting to learn

Here are one of the most redeeming qualities of Peter:

In **Matthew 17: 24 - 27** he asks if they should pay temple tax. Peter finds the tax for him and Jesus in the mouth of a fish he caught.

In **Matthew 18:21 - 35** Peter asks how many times he should forgive someone who continually sins against him.

In **Mark 10:28** and **Luke 12:28-29** we see that after Jesus pitied the rich young ruler, Peter stated that they (the disciples) had left their homes to follow Jesus. He receives Jesus' commendation and promise of reward for this.

In **Mark 13:3**, along with Andrew, James and John, Peter asked Jesus privately about when and how the temple would be destroyed and what the signs of the end of the times would be.

Peter asked Jesus whether His eschatological parables in **Luke 12** applied to them as the disciples.

Jesus thinned out the 'crowd' following him, challenging them that his true followers would be those who were willing to eat his flesh and drink his blood. Many abandoned Him. He then turned to his disciples asking if they too would abandon Him. But Peter answered Jesus 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life ...' (John 6:60-71.)

Where do we ask our questions? Primarily in prayer. Then of course we have leaders in the local church to discuss things with as well. Are we teachable? Or do we know it all?

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Have we come to terms with our sinfulness and need of a saviour?

2. “Follow me and I’ll make you fishers of men.” How does this play out in today’s world?

- His body, the church is the agency through which He works today
- So all these ingredients of discipleship take place through the local church
- Follow Jesus (Christ followers);
- Jesus makes us (discipleship);
- We become fishers of men (missional).

3. Have I left everything and followed Christ?

Questions around local church are important here. Are you integrated and functioning accordingly? Are you making use of the vehicles and relationships in your church to do so?

We work out and live out our discipleship in a local church where we are integrated and functioning and submitted to leaders. Are you looking over your shoulder at who needs help? Are you going to always sidestep when Jesus says to you, “I will make you” or when correction comes? If not, guess what, it’s going to get worse at your next church, until the problem carries you around instead of the other way around.

Use your local church and the relationships you have there. We work it out, that's what relationship is about. Elders are also followers of Christ and are also tempted like others. We follow Christ in and through a local church - the church is God's vehicle to help followers to do what they're called to do.

PETER: PART TWO

Mission

TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN WITH THE GOSPEL

In the first part of our study on Peter we noted how Jesus formed Peter's character for the purpose of mission. In this part we'll look at the mission itself - the focus of what it is we do as Christians.

As we mentioned before, in 2013 about five hundred to seven hundred thousand sermons were preached in Johannesburg yet things have gone backwards. This is a shocking stat and the missing ingredient in the mobilisation of the priesthood is us becoming disciples of Christ. Surely all of the preaching going on should mean that society would change? Surely something of what God is doing in us should bring change? Well, we must be willing to change.

The Bible talks of us hungering and thirsting for righteousness and we agree with that, but the scriptures talk of more after that. Now that we hunger and thirst for righteousness, what changes? **Now that we've had moments with God, what changes?**

We're turning the world upside down with the gospel of **Jesus**, not our understanding of church planting or discipleship or some great doctrine. **What was Jesus called to do on this earth? To seek and save the lost.** Your calling in Jesus should fit right into that. Too often we say we're called to this or that and it's outside of what Jesus was called to. We're called to be his disciples, so let's go back to that.

That doesn't mean we become a thirty-year old Jewish man and grow a beard. We're talking about the heart. Jesus didn't teach his disciples how to preach but spent seven years dealing with the disciples' hearts. So we need to get away from an idea that we create people who look and act like us. We want people who are in love with Jesus, not us, so we can all get busy with his mission.

Peter wasn't a clean cut guy. When he drew closer to God he found that there was a calling on his life that Jesus had for him. There are three important points we want to highlight here that point to how Jesus disciplined him that helped Peter develop his call. These three discipleship points will help us impact our world.

1. Christ's purpose needs to become our calling

Luke 9:10 says that **Jesus' mission was to “seek and save the lost.”**

Luke 4 : 42 - 44 also highlights this:

“And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, but he said to them, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.”

When Peter preaches to Cornelius (and his household) later on in Acts, he summarises Jesus' ministry like this (**Acts 10:37-38**):

“You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.”

Jesus was brought onto this earth to seek and save the lost. Wherever he went he drew people towards him. So if that was Jesus' purpose and Peter was called by Jesus, what was Peter's purpose? Exactly the same. **And what is our purpose? Exactly the same.**

The principle of being Christ followers (disciples) is that we deny ourselves and follow Jesus, and through this see the very nature (character) of Jesus develop in our lives: “gentle and lowly in heart.”

2. Discipleship by doing

After following Jesus for only seven months, Peter is sent out on mission, along with the rest of the twelve. **Therefore we need not be perfect, only willing and obedient!** Also, there are lessons we can only learn on the job, in the field, while doing the work of the ministry.

Let's look at a summary of those seven months of discipling that Peter was exposed to:

Matthew 9 : 35 - 38

“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and

healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."

- Jesus preaches in a synagogue.
- Jesus heals a leper.
- Jesus heals the paralytic man, whose four friends break open the roof and lower him to where Jesus was.
- Jesus heals a crippled man at Bethesda.
- Jesus heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath.
- Jesus calls the twelve to be apostles.
- Jesus teaches on the mountainside (the sermon on the mount).
- Jesus heals the centurion's servant.
- Jesus rebukes three cities (Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum) for not repenting. (Matthew 11:20.)
- Jesus eats at Simon the leper's house.
- Jesus heals a man who is blind and mute, delivering him of a demon. Filled with jealousy, the Pharisees accuse Jesus of healing in the power of Satan, and Jesus rebukes them!
- Jesus' family look for him and he replies, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:50.)
- Jesus delivers the demoniac of Gerasenes from a legion of

demons.

- A woman with a issue of blood for twelve years is healed when she touches the hem of Jesus' garment.
- Jesus raises Jairus' (the synagogue ruler's) daughter from the dead.
- Jesus teaches using parables (the parable of the sower and the Kingdom parables). He explains the parables to his disciples.
- Jesus is rejected at Nazareth and He says that a prophet is without honour in his home town. He could not do any miracles there because of their great unbelief.

This is discipleship as Jesus intends! **When we compare the way we disciple it is far more passive, theoretical and mostly lukewarm!** It's more about being spectators or consumers – a “come and get” approach instead of a “come and give” approach. But this is incredibly practical – an 'on-the-job' approach.

Jesus sends them out:

Matthew 10 : 1 - 11

(Called, commissioned and empowered for mission)

“And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.”

(Sent to give freely)

“These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. (NIV says “freely you have received, freely give”)”

(Persecution will come - there is a cost involved)

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

(Have no fear)

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven...”

(Not peace, but a sword)

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a

*man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter- in- law against her mother- in- law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. **Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.***

Four months later the 72 disciples are sent out (Luke 10). When they return they are caught up with the miracles and power that had been given to them. But Jesus keeps them focused on their salvation!

Luke 10 : 17 - 20

"The seventy- two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

In going out on mission, adjustments are made. We will miss out on these if our understanding of Christianity is a static or consumer one, with sitting and receiving only. We find that many go out on apostolic trips and the work done in them far outweighs what happened through them.

Too many of us want a good theory of the nations and want to sit and read about it. Let's forget about that and go on the next trip and

something *will* change.

Matthew summarises Jesus' ministry like this (**Matthew 9:35 - 38**):

*“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, **teaching** in their synagogues and **proclaiming** the gospel of the kingdom and **healing** every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”*

We need to be teaching, proclaiming the Gospel and trusting that the Holy Spirit will demonstrate the Kingdom through miracles like healing. Jesus didn't wait for the disciples to go through school and become respectable before he sent them. He was concerned about them having his heart. He wasn't worried about Peter dressing properly and having manners, but whether seeking and saving the lost burned in his bones.

Peter was being prepared for mission throughout his time with Jesus. As painful as the process was, we see the purpose of it all in Acts where Peter becomes the apostolic spearhead, preaching and pioneering the Gospel, seeing 3,000 saved at one time. Now we see the value of every correction and bit of maturing he went through in the discipleship process. Peter's denial of Jesus and his subsequent reinstatement and calling serves as one of the best examples of the purpose of discipleship - being shaped for mission.

Luke 22 : 31 - 34

Jesus foretells Peter's denial

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”

Luke 22 : 54 - 62

Peter denies Jesus three times

And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

John 21 : 15 - 19

Jesus reinstates Peter, calling him again and prophesying his death

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he

said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”

We serve a great God - Jesus uses us and gives us our mission despite our failures. Peter denied Jesus three times! **Some Christians think that if you deny Jesus once you're not going to heaven! But not with Jesus.** He is gracious and merciful and loving. If we have a heart after God he will re-instate our call and re-instate us. **God wants us to be men and women after his own heart**, he's not too worried about everything else.

3. Enabling by the Holy Spirit

In the first half of Acts Peter takes a leading role in continuing Jesus' mission of discipling the nations. **The difference? Peter was now filled and enabled by the Holy Spirit.**

- He took the lead in deciding to appoint an apostle to replace Judas. (Acts 1:15-22.)
- He was present in the upper room when God baptised the 120 disciples in the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2.)
- He stood up to preach to the crowd when the disciples were

accused of being drunk after being filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. As the result of his preaching 3,000 were saved! (Acts 2:14-40.)

- Peter, along with John, healed the disabled man whilst they were on their way to the temple to pray. This results in persecution by the religious council and 5,000 more are added to the Kingdom! (Acts 3-4.) They pray and ask God for greater boldness to preach his Gospel.

Acts 4 : 29 - 31

“And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”

- He foretells the death of Ananias and Sapphira, and numbers continue to be added to the church. (Acts 5:1-11.)
- Peter is imprisoned and whipped for preaching the Gospel; his defense before the council. (Acts 5:17-42.) But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men'. (Acts 5:29.)
- Goes to Samaria after Philip preaches the Gospel there and the whole town is saved and prays for the new converts to receive the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:15-18.)
- He rebuked Simon the sorcerer who desired to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:18-24.)

- Returns to Jerusalem. (Acts 8:25.)
- Visits Joppa while on a preaching circuit; stays with Simon, the tanner; raises Dorcas from the dead. (Acts 9:36-43.)
- Through a series of events Peter preaches the Gospel to Cornelius and his household, and the Gospel now expands to the Gentiles. (Acts 10.)
- Advocates the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles in the hearing of the apostles and elders. (Acts 11:1-18; 15:7-11.)
- Imprisoned and delivered by an angel. (Acts 12:3-19.)
- Wrote two epistles which were included in the New Testament canon: 1 and 2 Peter.
- Dies a martyr's death.

Through the infilling of the Holy Spirit and taking hold of Jesus' heart we can do our mission. We can't forget that the Holy Spirit is there to help us fulfill our calling (Acts 1:8). Whatever power you need to transform you and fulfill your call, cry out for it.

We can't go to places and try and catch an anointing from people. **No one can give you what they've got. No one can give you a love for God.** You can have an encounter with God but does something change? How do you get up off the floor? You need to grab the heart of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is not there to make us look good and prop up what we're doing. he's there to help us fulfill the mission of seeking and saving the lost!

How do you know your calling? It's actually not complicated. We have our calling already - to seek and save the lost. Start there and it'll come together.

This season isn't one where we stare at ourselves and make sure we're okay. God is demanding a people that are firmly in love with Jesus, who understand the Holy Spirit and his role, so we can change our world! **Throughout history, people like Wilberforce, Wesley or Whitfield had a heart for Jesus and seeking and saving the lost. That cannot be denied. That's how we do it.**

If we're a community who hunger and thirst for Jesus it's going to be contagious. We're in a world where there are too many bad examples and that breaks our heart. We need to get over that. **Let's not worry about what others are doing and selling, let's worry about what Jesus has called us to do and let's get on with it.**

A RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

We must have this. The disciples were able to follow Jesus and go with him. If you're desperate to save the lost and move into God's calling, how's your relationship with God? How well do you know Him? How desperate are you for God to work in your life? When we fall in love we pursue the person we love. Some of us take God and our relationship with him for granted. We need this again to fulfill what God has called us to do. We need to get to times when we're on our knees crying out for the lost and to seeing justice come.

In terms of signs and wonders, I know that Jesus is doing a lot of things

in the scriptures we're looking at and we can look at these scriptures and try and make formulas out of them - for example, if we want to see blind people healed, we need to spit in their eyes and get the spit-mud ratio right. When we do that we miss it. The point of the miracles was to show Jesus is the saviour. Let's not miss that.

Often people look at Christianity and know there is a sacrifice - and then they give up. Here's what Jesus says in **Matthew 11: 28 - 30:**

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Give up your yoke and let Jesus take charge. The picture here is Jesus being the second ox in the yoke, doing all the work for the other one - carrying the load. It's not a picture of Jesus driving the oxen who are under the yoke! Too many of us strain around this massive yoke of who we think we are and who we think we should be. But Jesus is saying we must relax, give that up, and let him take the load.

Matthew 16 : 24 - 28

*Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.**"*

Yes, there is a giving up to become more like Him but if we truly understand what discipleship is, we'll know that even though we get corrected on the way, it's still easy and light. Jesus wants to carry the yoke. He is the main attraction. Let him carry the load!

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Are we aware of the purposes of discipleship (being Christ followers)?

To produce character (becoming like Christ) and mission (doing what Christ did).

2. Are we teachable, mouldable, grow-able and willing to change, so that we can be shaped for mission?

3. Are we using our talents (Matthew 25:14-30) or minas (Luke 19:11-27)?

If we are, more will be added to us - greater trust, responsibility and influence, AND rewards later! God uses us as we are, but the more faithful we are in using what He gave us and our submission to Him shaping us, will give us greater spheres of influence. Always for the Kingdom!

JAMES & JOHN

The Sons of Thunder

Name(s): James and John. Jesus nicknamed them 'Boanerges', the sons of thunder.

Marital Status: Unknown

Home town: Zebedee, (the father of James & John), was a fisherman of Lake of Galilee, who probably lived in or near Bethsaida, perhaps in Capernaum

Profession: Fisherman

Age(s): James 30 years old, John 16-18 years old

Relatives: Zebedee was their father, Salome was their mother.

Social status: Uneducated and had a fishing business with their father, and in partnership with Peter and Andrew. The fishing business was considerable as they owned several boats and employed servants (Luke 5:11; Mark 1:20).

Personality: Both brothers were loud, passionate (at times over the top), eager, fervent, forceful, self-centred.

General facts: We know little of James's interaction with Jesus, except those incidents with his brother. John was intimately associated with Jesus; he was the "disciple whom Jesus loves" (John 13:23-2), John leaned on Jesus (John 21:20). When Jesus was on the cross, He committed his mother to the disciple he loved, John (Luke 19:26-27). John is also credited with five books of the Bible, the Gospel of John, 1, 2 and 3 John and Revelation. These brothers, like with Peter and Andrew, left everything to follow Jesus!

Position amongst the twelve: Along with Peter, the brothers were part of Jesus' smaller ministry team. He would select this smaller group to accompany Him, exposing them to more than the rest of the disciples, because later they would play leading roles in the church. The healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29); the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37); the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28); with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:37; Mark 14:33). Jesus prepares these three uneducated but passionate fishermen for three very different leadership roles in the church.

Death: James became the first to be martyred amongst the twelve and the only one recorded in scripture. **Acts 12:1-3** - "About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also."

Herod wanted to destroy the church. He would not have gone after James if he wasn't a threat. The influence he had was known by the Jews, so much so that it pleased them when Herod killed him. It seems like James had a prominent leadership role amongst the twelve.

James was the first to die, John the last. John was never martyred, according to a large part of church tradition - he died as an old man in Ephesus around 98AD, after having being exiled to the island of Patmos because of his faith.

MEET THE BROTHERS

In this study we're learning how to be Christ-followers by looking at the lives of Jesus' twelve disciples. We integrate into a local church to become Christ-followers. It would be sad if we would become followers of the leaders in a church and not followers of Christ. You might recall that Paul rebuked the Corinthians for being followers of Apollos and Paul and forgetting about Jesus (1 Corinthians 3:4). Leaders may have a part of your life but we need to be desperately following Jesus.

We're looking at the disciples and seeing their humanity and watching how Christ dealt with them and transformed them. This then points to what we can expect and how we can develop the right character and develop the mission of God in our lives.

James and John were called the "Sons of Thunder" in the scriptures (or the Sons of Zebedee). See their bio above. Why were they called Sons of Thunder? Because they seemed to be loud-mouths, always having an opinion. And look at their age - James was probably around 18 years old! God is bringing young guys and girls into ministry. Why should we wait? When God gets hold of a life it doesn't matter the age.

We will look at John in detail later in this study, but focusing on these two brothers together provides many lessons. The brothers were both a positive and negative influence on each other.

LESSONS WE LEARN FROM JAMES AND JOHN

There are three lessons we want to focus on. These will be valuable to us as Christ-followers.

1. Jesus' revelation of Kingdom

2. Servant-hearted leadership

3. The need for passion or zeal

Here's the scripture we are going to start off from:

Matthew 20 :20 - 28

“Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” He said to them, “You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers.”

The utter arrogance of these two boys! What's even worse is this

account says mommy did the asking! They thought Jesus was going to establish an earthly Kingdom and Salome wanted to make sure her boys were not left out.

*“But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be **great among you must be your servant**, and whoever would be **first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve**, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

Here we can see some of the principles of being followers of Christ.

1. Jesus' revelation of Kingdom

If you don't have a good picture of God's Kingdom you're not going to fully realise your potential and the desire God has for you in his Kingdom. There is always going to be a battle between your kingdom and the world's kingdoms and systems versus the Kingdom of God.

Jesus taught the disciples to pray that his Kingdom come. Not that our Kingdom come. **Much of what is preached today as “Gospel” in Christianity has been reduced to consumerism.** It goes something like this: *If you come to church we can make you better.* It's a self-betterment programme. We'll make your marriage better and we'll make you better. And why drive around in an Audi A3 when God has an Audi A5? It's become all about the values of the world and how we can improve ourselves and find success, but God never said that - he called us to die and sacrifice and suffer on his part, because there is

his Kingdom - a Kingdom not of this world, a Kingdom this world knows nothing about.

As we go through the Gospels Jesus progressively disciples his twelve disciples in the values of his Kingdom. There were bad examples around at the time (see Matthew 9: 35 - 38) and Jesus came teaching, preaching and demonstrating the Kingdom. Notice that He didn't come establishing *Jesus Christ Ministries International*. Jesus pointed to His Father, working under authority, on mission, being sent by God. Very soon in their ministry the disciples were exposed to the fact that when he spoke it was about the Kingdom.

Jesus preached and challenged people with the value of this Kingdom and its message - that you need to be born again. **This isn't about membership to a political party or a cause.** This is a life changing set of values coming from heaven via Christ and paid with by his blood. Jesus preaches and teaches and elaborates and demonstrates God's Kingdom, something that they hadn't seen in a very long time. What they had seen were the Pharisees on the streets, praying grand prayers, with fancy clothes and demanding respect. But there was no power, it was fake. We don't want our Christianity to slip into that with temporal values. It must be about God and his Kingdom demonstrations of power.

Matthew 13 is great to read as it's a chapter devoted to the subject of the Kingdom. Christ was teaching and raising the twelve up so that when they were released to minister they wouldn't look to establish an earthly Kingdom but be there as ambassadors for this amazing Kingdom that Jesus died for.

After Christ's teaching in Matthew 13 we see the request of James and John and their mom above. We're in good company, aren't we? Sometimes God's ways are as clear as day but we still look at temporal things and prominence - things that satisfy the immediate. But it's about something far bigger than all that.

So we might think that James and John missed it here and they did; but even worse - after Jesus has died and risen again, the disciples still ask him in Acts 1:6 if he's going to restore the Kingdom to Israel!

Acts 1 : 6 - 8

“So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

This is after three and a half years of Jesus demonstrating the Kingdom and they still ask this question! Progressively, we need our minds and hearts renewed and refreshed in our understanding of Kingdom. Jesus tell them that, “It's not for you to know times or seasons” and then gives his last word to the disciples before ascending into heaven.

You would imagine that these parting words are going to be his most important. It's his last challenge to them. They thought he was going to finally overthrow the Romans, sort out the Jews who were traitors, and establish himself as King of Israel. But what does Jesus say? What are his last words? (**Vs 8**)

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

See, right now something is being established. One day, the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of God (Revelation 11 : 15) but right now this Kingdom is being established. We need to know this.

Why were they thinking of the Kingdom coming in a physical, earthly sense? **Because we always think it's about power - we want to be in power.** And Jesus promises them power, but not the kind they're thinking, saying that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon them. That promise is for every one that is born again. **And what is the power for? To be His witnesses** - you go out and preach, teach and demonstrate his Kingdom and establish it throughout the world.

This starts to make sense to the disciples in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit comes and they see demonstrations of power, people turning, people being born again, the systems of this world changing, and the world being turned upside down. From that moment onwards they have the ability to establish the Kingdom of God all over the world. That's where we also come in.

Therefore, along with the apostles, we must have the same revelation of God's Kingdom. It's not about earthly power. The Romans ruled then and gave orders and lived in privilege, and the Pharisees too. **Titles and prominence are not important,** Jesus says we will not build like that. Earthly Kingdoms are here and now and self-seeking, God's

kingdom is eternal and servant-hearted. It's other-centred. Christ did not come to be served but to serve. The currency of earthly Kingdoms is money, but in God's Kingdom we're rich towards God. God challenges us financially in local church with tithes and offerings so that we're rich towards God. Fill your treasure house in heaven! Earthly Kingdom's talk about stocking it up here.

God's kingdom is about glory to God, not prominence. When we get the privilege of doing something great we give glory to God. Earthly Kingdoms are physical, God's Kingdom is spiritual. Earthly kingdoms satisfy the sensual pleasures and appetites, God's spiritual Kingdom satisfies the spiritual aspects - forgiveness, love, peace, hope. Earthly kingdoms are about happiness - a good exchange rate, a full back pocket. But it's temporal. With God there's always a source of joy, it doesn't matter the bank balance or the season, we choose joy.

It's about the King and Kingdom. We must grow in that revelation.

2. Servant-hearted leadership

Mark 10 : 35 - 45

“And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?” And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism

*with which I am baptised, you will be baptised, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “**You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**”*

The world looks for heroes. It's something our fallen human nature defaults to. We want to know about Kim Kardashian's latest breast operation and Jay-Z's house. Many people want to watch and know about every nappy change of Prince George's! The press oppress these folk who can't go anywhere without a photograph of them being taken. We want to see them when they're fat, thin, when they marry, when they fall. Our magazine racks are full of this! We want heroes and we love it when they fall. We follow every quote and tweet from so many people all over the world. Isn't it strange that those with the most are the most important? Some rich people in this world can't even go the toilet unless it is decorated in gold! They can't even go to the toilet without extravagance! Why are *they* the heroes?

But Jesus is the only hero. Every knee will bow and tongue confess that he is Lord. Rather do that now because one day it will be too late. Jesus deserved worship yet he didn't look for prominence. Even right at the end he washes his disciples' feet. He even washed Judas Iscariot's feet, serving him! See, Jesus is the hero, he is the focus. We

need to strip our lives from personalities and hero worship. It's a delusion.

The disciples died in obscurity. We don't live for the rewards here but our rewards in heaven. Jesus showed this to them. Leaders – it's about servant-heartedness! **As long as Christian leaders demand respect and subservience people will never be set free.** When it's always about coming to watch the one guy or coming to applaud the ministry, no one will be set free. Leaders are about setting the people free! The very nature of every believer is servant-heartedness (or it should be). You think it's about you, but it's not. It's not about any of us – it's about Jesus!

3. The need for passion or zeal

Luke 3 : 15 - 17

“As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, “I baptise you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

This fire of heaven is our inheritance. James and John were disciples of John the baptiser and they must have remembered what John said here about Jesus. Fire certainly suited their temperament. And they saw in Jesus' ministry a demonstration of power. He spoke and people were astounded; he prayed and people were healed. They could see

God's authority in him.

Luke 9 : 51 - 56

“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (Some manuscripts add, “as Elijah did”). But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village.”

This was their nature, their passion and enthusiasm. In their ignorance and immaturity they show raw passion. At least Jesus had something to work with! There was conviction! Has Jesus got something to work with in our lives? Is it going to take atomic bombs before we get any sort of passion? There's an old saying that says, “If you don't stand for something, you're going to fall for anything.” Do you have a conviction?

Jesus was single-minded. He was passionate about seeing the Gospel go out and help people understand the Kingdom. He was passionate about moulding the disciples and giving them the kind of character that would see them season through season and not trip them up along the way. Because character can so badly disqualify us. And he was passionate about putting a sense of mission in them, so much so that he passionately chose the cross and died - and then he commissions us to go to the nations.

James had passion. He became the first martyr as a result. Later on

we'll see how John, the other Son of Thunder, becomes the apostle of love. He suffers for the Gospel and fathers an incredible amount of churches.

Passion flows from an inner-heart conviction for Jesus. It's not about stirring the crowd and hyping things up! **Hype doesn't change the world!** We're not cheer-leaders for Jesus! You can't give out what you haven't got. In those times when you find yourself confronted with situations where you know you should be passionate, your heart must change. Because it comes from the heart. If it's not passion it's just some kind of performance.

Romans 12 : 11

“Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”

Psalm 103

*“Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!”*

We must instruct our souls to bless the Lord, to take joy in him. This isn't about feelings and waking up on the wrong side of the bed. We instruct our hearts. Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Do I understand that God's Kingdom is a spiritual Kingdom of power and redemption?

2. Am I servant-hearted?

3. Am I lacking in zeal?

These are big questions. So big in fact that it's possible to do nothing about them at all. The reason is that they are just too searching and vast – however, they are good to ask. Let's expand on these:

1. Kingdom

- What kind of boss are you?
- What kind of employee are you?
- What would they say about you if we interviewed your peers at work?
- Are you more concerned with profit or the people that actually do the work?
- What do you consider to be spiritual power?
- How much of it have you got?
- Honestly, how much does the amount you have bother you?
- Do you think the kingdom is more concerned with the kind of person you are or kind of work that you do?

2. Servant-hearted

- Can you list three people with issues you know you could help?
- When will you get to doing it?

- What kind of boss are you?
- Do you see some of your role to help the people that work for you?
- Do you think that telling someone about Jesus is helping them?
- Why do you find it so hard to do then?

3. Zeal

- How are zeal and youthful passion different?
- What steals your zeal the easiest and quickest? Do you still do it?
- What encourages zeal and passion? Do you still do it?
- Many people are seriously cause driven these days. If you were honest - what is your cause?

MATTHEW & SIMON

Bio: Matthew the tax collector

There is not much information we have on Matthew from reliable sources, outside of a few biblical references.

Name: Levi, then Matthew, after he was called to be a disciple.

Marital Status: Unknown

Home town: Galilee

Profession: Tax collector (publican). The tax collectors were, as a class, detested not only by the Jews but by other nations as well, both on account of their employment and of the harshness, greed, and deception with which they did their job. They paid the taxes to the Roman authorities up front and then extorted from the people way more than was due to them. They were therefore especially despised by their own nation!

Age: 20-30 years old

Relatives: Son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27)

Social status: A tax collector, despised by his own nation, the Jews, but had a standing amongst the Roman authorities because of his ill-gained wealth

Personality: Because of his profession as a tax collector, Matthew was probably an accurate record keeper and keen observer of people. In today's terms he was a 'bean counter' with sly tendencies. But he became a Christ-follower!

General facts: Matthew left everything to follow Jesus and had a party to celebrate his new life. (Matthew 9:9-13)

Position amongst the 12: There is no mention of Matthew in the Gospels outside of his call and on the list of Jesus' disciples. But from Jesus choosing opposites on his team - a tax collector (Matthew) and a zealot (Simon), we infer that there must have been a need to work out their relationships!

Ministry and death: Tradition has Matthew spreading the Gospel in Persia and Ethiopia. Unconfirmed historical sources disagree about Matthew's martyrdom. One source has him stabbed to death somewhere in Ethiopia while preaching the Gospel there.

Bio: Simon the zealot

There is even less information about Simon the zealot except for his mention in the list of apostles.

Name: Simon the zealot

Marital Status: Unknown

Home town: He is referred to as Simon the zealot (Luke 6:15; Act1:13), or Simon the Canaanite (Matthew 10; Mark3:18). He probably stayed somewhere in Galilee, because the Zealot movement was based there.

Profession: Unknown, but he was a political activist, wanting to see Israel restored to its own rule. This obviously ceased after he was called by Jesus.

Age: Upper teens or lower twenties

Relatives: None mentioned.

Social status: According to traditional accounts and drawing inference from his name, we believe he was probably a member of the Zealot

sect which was in Galilee and Judea around the time of Christ. The Zealots were a fanatical religious sect, very similar to the Pharisees (religiously conservative and with mostly literal understandings of scripture) but absolutely radical in their opposition to Roman rule to the point of terrorism. Therefore there was potential for conflict between him and Matthew. He probably would have been a 'Pharisee' in his religious views before coming to follow Jesus.

Personality: Presumably radical and an extremist - zealous. His name, 'Zealot' possibly referred to both his personality and his membership in the Zealot sect.

General facts: We know nothing of Simon's interaction with Jesus or the other disciples. We infer certain things and rely heavily on inaccurate history.

Position amongst the 12: No significance. He is mentioned eleventh in the Matthew and Mark lists of the apostles and tenth in Luke and Acts. It's not clear whether the order of these lists have any significance although they are very similar in all accounts.

Ministry and death: Initially in Jerusalem and then we have no sure Biblical account. Tradition puts him in various places, including having traveled north to reach the British Isles, in Egypt, in Asia Minor (Turkey), and in Persia. It is unlikely that any of these accounts are correct. There are no reliable accounts of his death. He possibly died in Pella, Armenia or Suanir, Persia or Edessa, Caistor or Babylon (Iraq). Probably martyred, possibly crucified.

MEET MATTHEW THE TAX COLLECTOR AND SIMON THE ZEALOT

We've put Simon and Matthew together because they couldn't be more different. They were at opposite ends of the spectrum in their ideologies, value systems, and much more.

Matthew was a tax-collector and therefore worked for Rome, Simon was a zealot and therefore hated Rome. Matthew was hated by the Jews and Pharisees, Simon was loved by the Jews and Pharisees. Simon was a political freedom fighter (that's what the zealots were) while Matthew was seen as a traitor - so much so that the words "tax-collector" and "sinner" were synonymous terms. Simon wouldn't mind putting a dagger into someone's back while Matthew was sneaky and underhanded.

So, knowing this, how could two men from such opposite dispositions and loyalties be found serving and working on the same team? In our modern day scenario, you could think of one being a hardcore socialist and the other a hardcore capitalist. How is it possible that they could work together?

The answer is Jesus. Before Christ, Simon would have hated Matthew - and for good reason. Matthew would have feared Simon - and for good reason. But here the Lion of Judah had tamed these two snarling and fighting bears and got them focused on a call and mission that was way beyond themselves, their priorities, their desires and personal missions. Jesus had shown both of them that whatever their cause or drive was, their hearts were sinful. Repentance and forgiveness had come into their lives, which is always followed by reconciliation - and

you see that happening as these two men of opposite extremes work together.

We've even seen this happen in our own NCMI circles. We've seen freedom fighters of opposite causes come together in our very own NCMI team. We see this power of Jesus demonstrated clearly in these two men of Matthew and Simon.

THEIR CALLS

Remember we're not presenting a historical account of these disciples, rather we want to learn from their lives and mistakes and their victories. We want to learn from their failures and successes. If we can learn from these men we are learning from Christ and following Him more effectively.

Matthew's call

Matthew 9 : 9 - 13

"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.

"And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn

what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

It's good to place this in context and note what happened before this in vs 1 - 9. Jesus heals a paralytic and says to him, "Your sins are forgiven." There's no doubt that Matthew had often seen Jesus as much of Jesus' ministry took place in Matthew's home town. He would have heard the teachings and seen the miracles. But what might have intrigued him above everything else was this claim of Jesus to forgive sins. According to the Pharisees, forgiveness had to be earned. A man had to cease to be a sinner. So the Pharisees, like much of the world today, had no idea of a forgiveness that's free; it could only be earned by a good life. If that was true then Matthew was excluded from his sins being forgiven. But Matthew might have very possibly witnessed this event where Jesus claims to forgive sins and afterwards Jesus only had to look at him and speak a few words and Matthew was never the same.

Unlike the religious leaders of the day, Jesus was welcoming, reassuring and, above all, forgiving. Just two words were sufficient: "Follow me" and Matthew became a totally different person. When Christ calls, determined to save, no one and nothing can stand against him. We might not think our call to discipleship was as dramatic as Matthew's was, but it was. However long or short the period of preparation, one moment we were a hell-bound sinner and the next a disciple of Jesus. The circumstances may have been different but the result exactly the same. The effective call of Christ sooner or later comes to all appointed to eternal life. Matthew didn't argue about this - He simply followed the irresistible call of Christ.

Simon's call

Simon's call would have been just as dramatic but very different. Maybe he was drawn to Jesus' declaration of Kingdom, but it wouldn't take long for him to realise that Jesus wasn't a political liberator. Rather, Jesus taught of an eternal Kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Jesus took an incredible risk in calling Simon as part of the twelve. The authorities may have already been watching him and how would it have potentially discredited Jesus' ministry if Simon was arrested? What if Simon couldn't break away from his ideology and his intense hatred of Rome? But we must realise that Jesus took the same risk by calling people like you and I to be His disciples, with very vast and different backgrounds, dark pasts, many failures, many idiosyncrasies, many things we'd love to hide from everyone. But Jesus knows full well what he can do with every man or woman who he calls out of darkness and into his wonderful life. He makes no mistakes when he makes disciples.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN FROM MATTHEW AND SIMON

1. Discipleship is about transformation

As we've seen, God calls all kinds of people, no matter their background or how different they are. And he wants to transform every one of us. **He doesn't call the qualified but qualifies the called.** With the twelve disciples we see that he called fishermen, doubters, people who loved money, Sons of Thunder and a despised tax

collector - despised by his own people - who wrote a Gospel (the Gospel of Matthew) to those same people who despised him; Jesus called a desperate terrorist, once driven to see liberty from occupied forces and transformed him. He has the power to transform all of us into what He has purposed for us.

2 Corinthians 3 : 18

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

When we look at these disciples we're filled with hope - if God can use them, he can use any one of us. God can use anyone to partner with him in his mission. Despite appearances, lack of education, our socio-economic standing, or anything you can think of, God can and wants to use every one of his people. God calls us like he called Matthew and he changes us like he changed Simon into being a Christ follower; a person of character and witness.

For Matthew and every disciple, the proviso is leaving everything and following him. We can't be true Christ followers unless we are prepared to leave what controlled us and owned us and determined our life and values. Matthew left everything; Simon left his ideologies. No matter our past or the things we are grappling with today, God wants to release us of them so that we can be those of his character and witness.

There could be no going back for Simon and Matthew. Christ never offered Himself to his disciples as saviour and friend with an added option that they might consider him Lord as well. No, his message was

clear - *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?”* (Mark 8: 34 - 27.)

He doesn’t call us just to friendship, he calls us to surrender to him. He wants to be Lord of our lives and he needs to be. Being a disciple of Jesus is being prepared to deny ourselves, pick up our cross - which is God’s purpose for our life - and follow him with everything we have; and anything that gets in the way needs to be denied and pushed aside. Whatever our ambition or pursuit or over-riding goal in life is, it must be given to the rule of Christ. When we do that he changes those pursuits and lifts us from the small-minded dreams of this world to something far more important and everlasting. Our eyes are now fixed on eternity and all that God has purposed and prepared for us, which is the only thing that lasts through the end of this age.

Discipleship only comes about through transformation. Without Christ truly transforming us there will be, and cannot be, true discipleship. Jesus doesn’t say “follow me” just for repentance; it’s a call to discipleship. God wants to transform us not just from darkness or light but into true disciples who leave all else to follow him. You can allow him to do this or fight it.

2. A stark difference between religion and Christianity

Religion is dead. Christianity full of life. We see this difference when Jesus has a meal at Matthew’s house after he calls the man (Matthew 9: 10 - 12 as above) as the Pharisees ask how Jesus can associate

himself with tax collectors and sinners. They were concerned with the externals and an outward performance but not the heart.

What does Jesus say? *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”* (Verse 12.)

Christianity is about mercy and not sacrifice. Mercy in Christianity is about love and compassion for sinners, those who are sick, knowing that these are the ones Jesus the Great Physician has come for. The challenge to us is that we don't just maintain what God has for us and given us. We don't adopt a type of monastery mindset where everything is just about us and our church and how we can be blessed. Jesus gave an incredible demonstration by sitting amongst the tax collectors and sinners. He never isolated himself, knowing these were the people who needed his words of life.

Many of them must have left Matthew's house and been transformed. Let's break away from our religious mindsets and understandings. We need our hearts broken for those who are lost, because God's heart breaks for them. As soon as we get religious we point fingers at them; as soon as we get the heart of Christ we embrace them.

We're not a cut above the sinners in the world. God has put you where you are today because those sinners around you need Christ and must become his disciples.

3. The need for relational integrity and maturity

As we look at these two men and the twelve in general, only in Christ could this have been achieved. These disciples didn't always get it right - remember how angry they were with James and John in our previous study? This all reminds us that we ought to be humble. Despite how much they got wrong, the disciples became a team under Jesus, united around the one they were becoming like and the one they were following. United around Jesus' mission of seeking and saving the lost - the mission he has for us today. To be effective in this mission, relational integrity and maturity must be a priority.

God's anointing is poured out where there is unity. This means we have to work on our relationships no matter how different others are. It's in our relationships that our Christianity is effectively worked out.

Proverbs 27 : 17

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

We need others around us who are willing to sharpen us. This is painful but when people rub you up the wrong way see them as sharpening you. Don't climb your "miff tree"! Rather thank God for bringing those types of people into your life, because it's for your good. Discipline, hardships and challenges are good for us. Don't fight each other, God puts others in our lives because he wants us sharp for the mission he has called us to.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1. Am I aware that God calls and disciples all types?**
- 2. Am I caught in a rules and regulations understanding of discipleship?**
- 3. Is relational maturity and integrity a priority to me?**

Some questions from Matthew 9: 9-13

1. What do you think the two characteristics are that make a person a true follower of Jesus?

- You have abandoned any other spiritual aspirations and trust Jesus alone for all spiritual matters.
- You determine to live your life for Jesus alone

2. Why do you think sinners felt so comfortable around Jesus? Do you think they feel comfortable around you?

3. Jesus was very comfortable around sinners.

- Why do you think this was?
- How do you think the Scripture “bad company corrupts good character” (1 Corinthians 15:33) ties in here?

- Are you comfortable around sinners? Why or why not? Do you think you should be?

4. What do you think made the Pharisees think Jesus was in the wrong for eating with sinners?

5. Do you see any of those traits in you?

6. How do you think we can have the same priority of Jesus with regards to 'the sick'?

- Which comes first - getting busy with reaching out, or waiting for the heart of wanting to do this to come?

JUDAS ISCARIOT

BIO

Name: Judas Iscariot - Judas means “praise” or “God leads”.

Marital Status: Unknown

Home town: Kerioth. The Hebrew word for Iscariot means 'man of the village of Keriyyoth'. Kerioth was about 25 km south of Hebron, in southern Judea, Israel. Judas was from the tribe of Judah, the same as Jesus.

Profession: Unknown

Age: 25-30 years old (unreliable source)

Relatives: Father: Simon Iscariot (John 6:71)

Social status: Unknown, but again certain unreliable sources state that he must have been an educated man for him to be trusted as the treasurer.

Personality: Devious, underhanded, sold out to money and greed, despicable, a coward, untrustworthy, hypocritical, a disappointment and a betrayer.

Best remembered for: Selling Jesus out for 30 pieces of silver and betraying Jesus with a kiss.

Position amongst the twelve: His name is always mentioned last in the list of disciples and is accompanied by the statement that he betrayed Jesus. He was appointed by Jesus to be the treasurer. (John 12:6; 13:29)

Death: After realising what he done to Jesus, he hung himself.

LESSONS WE LEARN FROM JUDAS' LIFE

Acts 1 : 17 - 20

For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) “For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’; and “‘Let another take his office.’

There are three things we can pick out from the Scriptures about Judas that are relevant for us today:

- 1. He never responded to correction**
- 2. We have a choice over our future**
- 3. The love of money destroys**

Let's take a look at each of these.

1. He never responded to correction

Correction is part of the discipleship process. When we look at the Gospels we see that Peter seems have more character flaws than Judas. Without knowing the story, we could easily say that if any one of the disciples was going to fall away, it was going to be Peter. He seems so unstable, always putting his foot into his mouth, doing the wrong thing, and receives repeated correction and rebuke. Jesus rebuked Peter by saying, "Get behind me Satan!" while Judas received only a mild rebuke in John 12 when Mary anoints Jesus' feet.

John 12 : 3 - 8

"Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

Judas knew that he could get the money from the perfume if it had come into the treasury. He reacts to this mild rebuke from Jesus and later on (after the Last Supper) runs to the Jewish authorities to sell Jesus out for just one months' salary (30 pieces of silver). It's not like

he could live luxuriously or pay off any debts with that much money! Why is it that Peter could take such hard correction but Judas can't even handle the mildest of correction?

Judas reacts while Peter responds. Peter sticks with it. After correction he always comes back, he always puts up his hand to do what's necessary, and he loved the presence of the Lord (Matthew 17:1-7). The challenge in the process of being Christ-followers here is this: can you be corrected? Only you and God know the answer to that question. Can you be challenged? When you connect with people with Biblical values, do you find yourself challenged? Do you duck and dive or do you respond to God? When leaders come alongside you and challenge you about what's in your life, how do you react? The challenges will come.

John 13 : 27 - 30

“Then after he had taken the morsel, satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.”

Judas' state got so bad because he never knew how to take correction and then Satan himself entered him - not a minion but the CEO of evil himself! The enemy's plan was to get Jesus killed, not knowing that God's plan was to turn that into a victory; but we see that possession was the end result of not responding to Jesus' correction.

Correction goes against our human nature. Nevertheless, we must respond to it. When a leader confronts you on something, what are you going to do? Leave your church for another where they just leave you alone? If you have stuff in your life that needs to be corrected you need to submit and respond, otherwise you will always be running.

Judas chose disobedience! At most, he only ever changed his mind about betraying Jesus and his response was hanging himself. There was no real repentance and therefore no restoration.

James 1 : 12 - 18

“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

“Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.”

2. We have a choice over our future

Ephesians 1 : 3 - 14

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

Are we like lab-rats put in a maze? Are we nothing but biological robots? We must ask this question otherwise none of us have hope for a future. Our hope today is that we can change through Christ giving

us the strength and power and understanding. Paul encouraged Timothy this way - in 2 Timothy 2 he tells him to flee youthful lusts and become a vessel of gold. We can't let our life's work be wood, hay and stubble.

In Christ we are all chosen for salvation. The whole world is chosen for salvation but not all accept salvation. We have to understand that God chooses and man has free will. These are both true. We cannot believe that people are chosen for salvation and others for destruction. There is a brand of teaching that says that but this is when the idea of predestination is taken to an ungodly conclusion.

Here's the thing - God knows, he foreknows it all. He knows everyone's decision and wills that all men be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). Does that confuse you? Actually, it should. The key issue is that we need to choose the destiny God has for our lives - if salvation is offered to you, what should you do? You should choose salvation.

Do you feel that you're chosen to be the Judas in your group of friends? You're wrong. We've got to take hold of the opportunities God gives us. None of us have been chosen for insignificance. Every single one of us have been chosen in Christ for something specific. We all have a destiny in God.

Was Judas made to betray Jesus? Jesus picked him out as one of his disciples to turn the world upside down for the Gospel. Jesus saw potential in him for the Gospel, but *Judas* chose destruction.

"If I find it taught in part of the Bible that everything is foreordained, that is true; and if I find in another Scripture, that

man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and is only my folly that leads me to imagine that these two truths can ever contradict each other. I do not believe they can ever be welded into one upon any earthly anvil, but they certainly shall be one in eternity. They are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the human mind that pursues them farthest will never discover that they converge, but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth springs.” - Charles Spurgeon

What's interesting is that Judas never called Jesus “Lord” like the other disciples. He only called him “Rabbi” which means “teacher.” He simply never accepted Jesus as Lord. We cover this a little more below. This gives us reason to assume that Judas may have never made it to heaven, but hopefully in the throes of death he reached out to Jesus.

3. The love of money destroys

Who is this relevant to? Us. Think about how Johannesburg was founded - because of a gold rush. Lots of bad things happened because of money. That spirit lives here and we need to overcome it. In this city we can all get into that hamster wheel and have to keep pedalling otherwise we're going to get smacked in the back of the head. So we need to constantly address this issue of finances - Jesus continuously spoke about it, with some commentators saying that two thirds of his teachings included something about money and stewardship!

The love of money corrupts and destroys. Judas obviously showed an aptitude for good stewardship, which is why Jesus put him in charge of

the treasury, but he didn't overcome his love for money.

1 Corinthians 4 : 2

“Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.”

Every one of us has been given some sphere of influence. Whatever comes your way, God is requiring you as a steward to be found faithful.

2 Corinthians 8 : 20 - 21

We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, for we aim at what is honourable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.

Judas allowed the slow rot of entitlement and privilege to take place. At first you dip into the bag because no one will notice and you're in need of something, believing you're in control. But eventually, the bag is in control of you and owns you!

Truth ignored is disobedience. Judas chose to walk in the dark, disobeying and rebelling against God's word. It's not just about not doing the wrong thing, it's also about doing the right thing. You can't not act on the truth. Judas should have gone to Jesus and told him that the burden of being the treasurer was too much. That would have been a respond to Christ and would have gotten his heart sorted out. And he had plenty of moments to do that - he heard every teaching Jesus taught on money! He was there!

Matthew 6 : 19 - 24

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and

rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Judas was there when Jesus taught this, but never responded.

Matthew 19 : 21 - 23

"Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

"And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven."

Judas was there when this happened, but never responded. Judas would have seen how money owned the rich man in the event above, but never responded.

The challenge from this is this: whatever you think owns you, can you give it away?

1 Timothy 6 : 6 - 10

“But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.”

Judas didn't have a real relationship with Jesus. He never called Jesus “Lord” like the other disciples but only ever “teacher” (Matthew 26). The only way we can counter a love for money is by having a real relationship with Jesus where he is Lord. We cannot allow what we have to own us - so therefore let's handle finances God's way! This will test our hearts like nothing else.

Obedience is the best way to condition your heart. Tithes is Old Testament - it was law and if you didn't do it there were consequences. Today we don't respond to it as Law but we do use it as a guideline to discipline our heart. God provides to every one of us and we must be good stewards of what he's given us.

2 Corinthians 8 : 7

But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you – see that you excel in this act of grace [the context is GIVING] also.

We need to excel in the grace of generosity. When it comes to

followership this is going to be one of the biggest issues which are always going to distract us. The cares of this world and riches of this life can easily drag us down. Do you want to be free? Then don't let money own you.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1. Do we respond to God in the discipleship process and can we be corrected?**
- 2. Are we intentional in choosing God's best for our lives? Or have we become fatalists?**
- 3. Has the love of money gripped our hearts?**

An interview with Judas:

(This works well in a group discussion - ask people how they would answer these questions if they were Judas)

- 1. Judas, were you born to betray the Son of God or were you just like anyone else?**

I wasn't predestined to do it. I chose. It doesn't start off so black and white. People are totally mistaken about sin and wrongdoing. Some think it's a little naughtiness and a little pranking that never hurts anyone. The problem was essentially me. I rejected Jesus; I rejected his words, over and over and over again.

2. When did the idea of betraying Jesus come to you?

It wasn't like I planned it from the beginning. No-one does that. It happened little by little. One bad decision after the next. That's how it happens with all of us.

3. You and Peter seem quite similar. Why did you end up so differently?

I didn't listen to Jesus. I heard his words but never actually listened. I never responded. I got so angry when Jesus did things I didn't like. It was all fine as long as it didn't affect me. I mean, I agreed with a lot of what he said, but when it required something of me I was out. No chance, I wasn't going there. I heard, I saw, I tasted, but I didn't take it seriously. In Matthew 13:51 Jesus asks, "Have you understood these things"? Not, "did you enjoy the parables?"

4. Was there some kind of root issue that you can point to that pushed you in the wrong direction?

Either money owns you or you own it. There are only two options. It doesn't matter how much you have. Make no mistake, money has tremendous power. With me it was hidden and secret. No one knew; money just mattered so much to me and I couldn't bear the thought of asking Jesus or anyone for help.

FOUR DISCIPLES

Philip | Thomas | James son of Alpheus | Jude

BIO: PHILIP

Home town and general facts: Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. He was called by Jesus to follow him the day after Peter and Andrew.

Martial status: Unknown

Profession: Unknown

Age: Unknown

Death: A second century Ephesian tradition believes he died at Hierapolis, roughly one hundred miles inland of Ephesus. Another tradition says Philip was crucified; and as a result, medieval art often depicts Philip on a cross.

BIO: THOMAS

Name: Thomas, or Didymus, meaning “the twin”.

Profession: Unknown. Possibly a fisherman. He was fishing with six other disciples (Peter, James, John, Nathanel and two others that are unnamed) on the Sea of Tiberias after Jesus’ resurrection when Jesus appeared to them. Here the second miraculous catch of fish happened and Jesus cooked them breakfast. It seems as though these men had gone back to their old job in the absence of clear direction from Jesus after his resurrection.

Hometown: Unknown. Traditionally somewhere in Galilee.

Married: Unknown.

Age: Unknown. Probably young. Most sources say Peter or James were probably the oldest of the twelve, being between 20 and 25 years old. It is quite possible that he was still in his upper teens or low twenties.

Post-ascension ministry: There are many different accounts but they generally seem to agree that he first travelled through the near east: Turkey and Iran (Persia in those days) before reaching India sometime between 49AD and 52AD. He is generally credited with being the first to take the gospel to India and beginning the church which then became the Orthodox church in India. His time in India is surrounded with legend with claims that he ministered to kings, built many great buildings, and evangelised many people. Historical evidence does seem to indicate that the Orthodox churches in India (including southern India) are old enough to make the spread of the gospel there in the first century plausible. Certainly Christianity is one of the oldest religions in India - older than Islam.

Death: Most traditional accounts claim that he was martyred in India sometime about 72AD, possibly at Mylapore near Chennai. There is a tomb in Chennai which is claimed to be the tomb of Thomas. A Catholic Church, San Thome Basilica, was built over this tomb in the 16th century. Other traditional accounts claim that he was martyred in Persia. Still others claim that he died a natural death in Edessa. The last account is an account from the explorer Marco Polo from the 13th century: he claimed that Thomas was accidentally killed by an arrow near Chennai - that the arrow was shot by a man hunting peacocks.

BIO: JAMES SON OF ALPHEUS

Name: James son of Alpheus

Father's name: Alphaeus

Town of Origin: Unknown

Other names/nicknames: Possibly 'James the Less' or 'James the Younger.' This is a result of a possible correlation with the James referred to in Mark 15.40 who may or may not also be the James (the son of Mary) referred to in Luke 24.10 and (more probably) Mark 16.1. Meaning of nickname: The Less would probably have referred to a younger age or a shorter height - not importance or status.

Profession: Unknown

Hometown: Unknown.

Married: Unknown.

Age: Unknown. Probably young. Most sources say Peter or James were probably the oldest of the twelve, being between 20 and 25 years old. It is quite possible that he was still in his upper teens or low twenties.

Best remembered for: Being one of the twelve.

Relatives: Possibly the brother of the apostle Matthew (Levi) who is also referred to as the son of Alphaeus. Otherwise unknown. Some dubious traditional sources claim he was a member of Jesus' family - usually his brother, half-brother or cousin.

Social status: Unknown.

Personality: Unknown.

General facts: None known.

Post-ascension ministry: Very little known.

Death: Tradition maintains that he was martyred by crucifixion in Lower Egypt at Ostrakine.

BIO: JUDE

Name: Jude, also known by several other names: Judas (not Iscariot) and Thaddeus. In lists of the twelve, he is called Thaddeus, a surname for the name Lebbaeus (Matthew 10:3, KJV) which means “heart” or “courageous.” He wrote the book called Jude in the New Testament.

Marital Status: Unknown

Home town: Unknown

Profession: Unknown

Age: 16-18

Relatives: Father - Alphaeus , Brother - James the Less

Social Status: Unknown

Personality: A man of unwavering conviction

Death: He was crucified at Edessa, A.D. 72 while on a missionary trip to Persia, according to tradition.

THEY LAID THEIR LIVES DOWN

The twelve disciples learned Jesus’ trade, which was to seek and save the lost. We need to learn this trade and that’s the point of this study.

We don’t know much about these four disciples. When it comes to Peter, James and John we see them often encouraged and rebuked and a lot of scripture mentions them. It’s been difficult finding things about these four men, we’ve had to look at church history in a big way for this to see how they influenced the world.

What’s significant about all four of these disciples is that they laid their

lives down for the Gospel. That's the key here and what we will focus on.

A FEW SCRIPTURES OF EACH OF THESE DISCIPLES

John 14 : 8 - 11

“Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.”

Philip's request is valid (hoping for a physical manifestation) because Jesus is teaching them this. Again Philip voices the general attitude and thoughts we all have about Jesus being God. But Jesus says he himself is a revelation of the Father and obedience to further revelations from God by the coming of the Holy Spirit will lead to further revelations of the Father.

Too many of us may have given our hearts to the Lord but we're saying, "God, where are you?" and we see him as an imagery being. If we know Jesus we know the Father. If you want a revelation of God then go back to your first love - Jesus. Don't lose sight of Jesus, make sure you

keep your eyes on him and makes sure you have a fresh revelation of him.

John 20 : 19 - 29

“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

“Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Thomas had been doubting that Jesus had been raised. See how Thomas answers Jesus – “My Lord and my God!” He had a revelation of who Jesus is. We also see that Jesus met Thomas where he was, in his doubting. If we’re desperate enough, Jesus will reveal himself to us.

While we don’t see anything of James the son of Alpheus in the Bible, we know that he laid his life down – his business and everything that he was doing – to follow Jesus and impact this world. That’s good enough, he is still a hero.

In the book of Jude we see an amazing doxology of Jesus and how much he loves Jesus. In Jude 3 we see him defend the Gospel, he can unpack it and he is desperate for people not to lose sight of their first love, to go back to the basics. Jude 20 – 21 he encourages them to be full of the Spirit and 20 – 23 he describes a love for the lost.

Jude 1 : 24 - 25

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

Jude 3

“Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Jude 20 - 21

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.”

Jude 22 - 23

And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

SEEKING AND SAVING THE LOST IS THE FOCUS

We need to have hope in the Gospel. It's not a second plan. It's what Jesus laid his life down for, why Jesus came to this earth. It was to give us hope and salvation. We need to go back to that and we need to figure it out (Luke 9:19). Seeking and saving the lost is the main call. This is what we were created for and why we were born again.

THIS IS THE GROUP WHERE MOST OF US FIT

We're dealing with four ordinary people here - four men chosen by Jesus to follow him. These were men with a revelation of Jesus and sent out from the first church to preach the Gospel and lay their lives down, to places we're even scared to go to.

This is where most of us fit in – we’re not front runners. These guys are the unsung heroes, the nameless and faceless who never made the front page. But they counted for God and were noticed by God. They fulfilled the call on their lives and therefore are not inconsequential or irrelevant. Whether we are noticed or not, we must fulfill our destiny in God.

Many people are waiting for God to tell them what his call in their life is – should they pursue accounting or becoming a pastor? Let’s be set free – we all, if you believe in Jesus, have a call of God on our lives. Seek and save the lost – it’s as simple as that. We don’t need to wait for writing on the wall, we already know what we’re called to. Writing on the wall only happened once in the Bible. Only once a donkey spoke in the Bible. We’re all trying to look for some extraordinary way where God will speak to us but we miss the essence of what becoming a disciple is, which is to seek and save the lost.

It’s time for the priesthood to rise up and take hold of God’s call to seek and save the lost. These were four ordinary men who understood that and did it.

Jesus loves the ordinary. He called ordinary people. He calls ordinary people today! We need to get back to a place where we’re happy to be ordinary – when we have bigger views of ourselves and think we’re greater than we should be, God humbles us. What God wants is ordinary men and women who are in love with Jesus, that is the clincher. That’s what makes us different as Christians; our love for Jesus; and that we seek and save the lost wherever we are. We need to be satisfied that we’re ordinary.

These disciples sat and saw Peter and John's story and might have thought, "What do we have to do to be recognised? Why can't we be significant and preach to three thousand people?" That's not recorded in the Bible and that's possibly because they didn't really do that. A true revelation of who Jesus is means we'll lay our lives down for the Gospel and its mission of seeking and saving the lost.

THE SAD STATE OF AFFAIRS TODAY

We're all too impressed by leaders in our culture today. We default to Christian entertainment and turn Christianity into a spectator sport. At best we are happy to respond to the call for partnership from the tele-evangelists, where the only response is "send me your money, buy my merchandise and watch me do it for you!"

Seeking and saving the lost isn't the responsibility of elders only. In society we get fed with a Gospel that is about, "Come lay the money at my feet and I'll go preach the Gospel." That's a misconception of what Jesus has told us to do. All of us are called to preach the Gospel wherever we are - we're all called to take hold of God's call in our lives. Church on Sunday is not our Christianity. We need to mobilise and get hold of this Gospel and get passionate about seeking and saving the lost.

We don't like seeking. We basically want people to just come to church and be preached at. But over and over again you see Jesus was led by the Spirit, going to places, where he healed and preached. Throughout Acts we see it too. We need to be filled with the Spirit - none of the apostles could do what they did without being filled with the Spirit.

Jesus sees value in relationship before function. What makes you great is not if you are a certain type of person (an extrovert, charismatic ...etc.) or if you have an amazing skill set (can sing, preach ... etc.) but that you are a faithful Christ-follower, using the talents God has given you and living the call God has given you.

HUMAN NATURE

Acts 4 : 13

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognised that they had been with Jesus.

God wants ordinary people in his Kingdom. He doesn't want people who think they're greater than they are. Ordinary people have pioneered the Gospel into places many of us are scared to go to. Any of the well known people in Christian history were all ordinary people who met Jesus and that changed everything for them.

Many of us compare ourselves with others and feel inferior. Too often we look at the worship leaders or the preachers or whoever has the platform and say, "That's Christianity and I want that." No, you don't - what has God called *you* to do? That's what you do.

Society, the world and even church culture has put a significance on being a pastor or the visible gifts - as if these are the only gifts that are important. This is not the case! We are all called! We all need to rely on Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit! We can't let envy and

unhealthy ambition rule our lives. The world tells us that we need to be the hero, this is not the case!

If we understand what Jesus did and are desperate for the Holy Spirit, God is going to break mindsets. The devil wants you to believe that you can't do what God has called you to do and others are better than you at what it is God is calling you to do. We can't be envious of each other and talk of how one is better than the other - that's the way the world talks; that's its value system. Get over comparing yourself with others. We need to get on with what God's called us to do.

1 Corinthians 3 : 1 - 9

"But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building."

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1. Do I suffer from an over-inflated or under-inflated opinion of myself?**
- 2. Do I understand that what makes me great is that I'm a follower of Jesus?**
- 3. Do I know my God-given call and am I fulfilling it?**

All of us identify with feeling that we are not Peter, James or John – but some of us make the assumption that there is therefore no point in doing anything. "I am not an expert!" we say.

The following survey can help in understanding where you are with regards to these topics. It also works great in a group setting – let the group answer the questions, see where they're each at, and then correlate all the answers together to get an idea of where the group is at in general and what you should pray into and work on.

1. Christian maturity

If you asked a group of people, "What makes a person a mature Christian?" the answers will vary. Maturity is related to 'actually becoming who we were saved to be'. It is about our very lives being lived in a way that is more and more how Jesus would live. For some, however, maturity is merely information. Many people know a lot about the Christian faith but practice very little of it. That is immature.

Consider **John 13:17**:

"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them".

So for the survey, O means 'I thought maturity was something else and I am not mature'. IO means 'I know maturity is about godliness, I have room to grow, but am doing okay.'

2. View of Christianity

There are many who, if they were honest, see Christianity as something that mostly consists of church meeting attendance. Come, sing, listen, and pay.

Jesus wants us to learn to give out. For the survey, O means 'I honestly think and act like the Christian life is "come, sing, listen, pay."' IO means 'I know that serving Jesus is the life'.

3. Believing you are called

There are those who continue to feel as though they don't have a calling or don't know what they are to do for God. Philip's call should encourage everyone: Jesus found Philip! If we are saved, we are called to follow Jesus! Let us not make light of this.

Often people who 'grow up Christian' feel at a disadvantage, but this is not true. O means 'I battle badly here', IO means, 'I know God has called me'.

4. Feeling disqualified

Many passionate Christians battle with feeling guilty, unworthy, and powerless. They feel as if there is a disappointed finger from heaven

pointing at them. No wonder some do nothing, they think God is not interested in using them.

But this thinking has to go! The Gospel has to triumph! There has to be growth in believing the Gospel – Jesus is enough! O means ‘this is a big problem to me’ and IO means, ‘I don’t feel disqualified, Christ qualifies me’.

5. The kingdom of all surpassing value

Sadly, some people never get to living for God simply because they don’t really think it is worth it.

Be HONEST! O means ‘I care an awful lot about life now’, IO means, ‘I want spiritual honour and nothing else’.

6. Needing encouragement

Many people need to be affirmed. They need to know that they are valued and add value. Everyone wants to feel significant.

O means ‘I have a small view of what God can do with me’ and IO means, ‘I know God said he wants to use me, I am available’.

7. Doctrine issue

When Jesus told the parable of the master who gives out talents to workers, saying that he will return to see our work for him, some people don’t seem to live like this is in fact true. But there will most definitely be a reward at the last day – we are not competing against others but running our own race for a prize. This is certainly true.

O means ‘I don’t live like there is a reward to get’. IO means ‘I know that

Jesus wants me to work for Him and will reward me for it'.

8. Excuses

This is easy to do...very easy to do. Do you make excuses?

0 means 'big problem to me'. 10 means 'I have stopped making them'.

ANDREW & NATHANAEAL

BIO: ANDREW

Name: Andrew, meaning “manly”.

Hometown of origin: Came from a little fishing town on the north coast of Galilee called Bethsaida.

Relatives: Simon Peter’s brother

Profession: Fisherman, in partnership with his brother, Peter and their friends, James and John.

Married: Unknown.

Age: Unknown. Probably younger than Peter.

Best remembered for: Introducing people to Jesus; Peter his brother, the boy with the fish and loaves of bread and some Greeks.

Social status: Unknown.

Personality: Skeptical.

Position amongst the twelve: Seems to have been friends with Philip.

General facts: Andrew is not a startling character: there is no dash and activity like Peter, no strong determination and unpredictable character like James and John, and no dramatic conversion like Matthew. He appears to be quiet, thoughtful, persistent and unassuming – but his work was vital. He brought his brother to Christ and probably never realised what far-reaching results that would have. In fact, he seems to have learnt from John the Baptist that the most important task in life is not to make a name for oneself, but to bring people to Jesus: his brother, a little boy with some bread and fish, and a party of Greeks. There are no impressive exploits, no crowds

following him, no miracles recorded and no great preaching. But through Peter, thousands heard of Christ and millions have read his letters, through the young boy thousands were fed from one of Christ's most outstanding miracles, and through the Greeks our Lord finally revealed his purpose to reveal himself to the whole world as its only light.

Ministry after the ascension: According to Hippolytus (an early church father from Rome), Andrew preached to the Scythians (modern day Georgia) and Thracians (modern day Bulgaria, both Georgia and Bulgaria are adjacent to the Black Sea near Turkey).

Death: He was crucified - suspended on an olive tree at Patrae, a town of Achaia (Greece); and there too he was buried.

BIO: NATHANAEL

Name: Nathanael or Bartholomew. Nathanael means "gift of God".

Father's name: Unknown

Hometown of origin: Cana in Galilee

Profession: Unknown. Perhaps a fisherman. He was fishing with Peter, James and John and three others on the Sea of Tiberius when Jesus appeared to them after his resurrection, resulting in the second miraculous catch of fish.

Married: Unknown.

Age: Unknown. Probably young. Most sources say Peter or James were probably the oldest of the twelve, being between 20 and 25 years old. It is quite possible that he was still in his upper teens or low twenties.

Best remembered for: Being introduced by Philip to Jesus. Being seen under a fig tree.

Social status: Unknown. Perhaps slightly higher than others if his low opinion of Nazareth is considered.

Personality: Skeptical.

Position amongst the 12: No significance.

General facts: Often mentioned with Philip. Was skeptical about Jesus being the Messiah because he came from Nazareth. He obviously had a low opinion about Nazareth.

Ministry after the ascension: Initially in Jerusalem; and then we have no sure Biblical account. Tradition puts him in various places, including having traveled to India, Mesopotamia, Armenia, Parthia, Ethiopia and Lycaonia. He is said to have converted Polymius, the king of Armenia, to Christianity.

Death: Traditional accounts claim that he was martyred in Albanopolis in Armenia. Some say he was beheaded. Others say that he was flayed alive and then crucified upside down.

INTRODUCTION

When we look at Andrew and Nathanael, what we want to highlight is that it's about learning to become Christ followers. In this study there are two things God is putting his finger on: character and mission. And as we look at these two disciples we see how God developed their character.

Character is not an old fashioned idea that we no longer need. It's still extremely important to God. In fact, God looks at character more than he looks at gifts and callings. Whenever you read about the qualifications for leaders in the Bible, most of the time it focuses on character more than anything else.

There are times when God will shape us in a way that will hurt us. He will work in us and do whatever he needs to do so we can have godly characters. It may be painful and uncomfortable, but don't run away when God is dealing with you. He wants you to stand before him at the end of the age and declare over you, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." He wants you to become more like Jesus - that's what counts the most.

With godly character comes the mission. We're not just to have good character for the sake of character, but for the sake of God's mission and purposes.

LESSONS WE LEARN FROM THESE MEN

Andrew

There are three notable references to Andrew in Scripture, and in each he is introducing people to Jesus.

John 1: 35 - 42

“The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).”

So what do we see here?

Firstly, he was a man of character. Why? Because even though he came to Christ first and introduced Peter to Jesus, he seemed content to play “second fiddle” (as it were) to his more famous brother, Peter. John even refers to Andrew as Simon Peter’s brother even before

Peter had come on the scene.

Many of us might have been offended by that sort of thing if it were us. But we don't see any record of Andrew being offended by this. He passed the test of being seemingly overlooked.

How well do you do when you've been overlooked and aren't included in something, or are seemingly forgotten? Do you respond like Andrew, knowing that everything is in God's hands and you don't have to fight for everything? That God will make room for your gift and for you? Too many of us, because we seem to have been forgotten and overlooked, want to fight for our rights. But when we fight for something not of God we end up fighting God.

We need to realise that life, ministry and calling is not about us! If you feel forgotten and overlooked, settle this in your heart - God has not forgotten you but wants you to pass the test of loneliness and being seemingly overlooked or forgotten. At the right time and way he will open the door and bring you out.

Secondly, Andrew was an evangelist. The first thing he did was find his brother Peter and introduce him to Jesus. He had found the Saviour and wanted to share that with others, starting with those close to him. If you found an oncologist who had a hundred percent success rate in healing cancer, wouldn't you go and tell everyone who had cancer? Especially those closest to you? Well, we have the saviour of our souls, why is it that we wouldn't want to tell others about him and share this good news with them? Unless, of course, he isn't the pearl of great price to you; unless you haven't had a revelation of the awfulness of your own sin and how Jesus forgives that totally and completely. We

need to have that revelation.

Now we don't hear too much more about Andrew. He just appears thirteen times in the Gospels and Acts, as opposed to Peter whose name appears 160 times. But Andrew could never have known the legacy he was leaving for the church by introducing Peter to Jesus.

Who knows the far-reaching results that come about by the small actions of those hardly known? A Moravian missionary led John Wesley - the founder of the Methodist movement - to Christ. An elderly preacher led the teenager Charles Spurgeon - well known for his powerful preaching - to the Lord.

John 6 : 1 - 15

“After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to

those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"

"Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself."

Andrew's faith may not have been that great (see verse 9) according to how we might measure faith, but he was willing to go out on a limb and risk his reputation. At the back of his mind he might have thought, "These other guys are going to laugh at me, all I've managed to find are these five loaves and two fishes." But he must have had a confidence in Jesus' ability, otherwise he would have never offered these meager supplies to Jesus.

Later we know Jesus would teach about having faith as small as a mustard seed. It's not about how much faith we have but where that faith is placed. Only a mustard seed is needed! Today, many believers put their faith in many different things: their job, their career, their investments, their retirement plan, their pastor, their favourite Christian teacher etc. But when it comes to life and ministry and the call God has for us, the best place that we can put our lives and faith in is into his hands. We might not know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future and our lives are best in his hands. When we make decisions about life and need faith, let's ensure that our faith

is in the right hands.

John 12 : 20 - 22

“Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”

This was during Passover week, so there was a lot of activity. Philip approaches Andrew, perhaps not too sure if Jesus would have time for these Greeks. After all, Jesus had often made it clear that his primary ministry was to the “lost sheep of Israel”. But Andrew had no doubts about this - he had learned enough about Jesus to know that Jesus always has time for those who look for him.

Andrew had begun the Great Commission without Jesus having even given it yet. The foreigners mattered to Andrew as they mattered to Jesus. Jesus wanted to seek and save what is lost, this was Jesus’ mission statement as it were; if lost people matter to God they must matter to us. So one of the great lessons from Andrew is this - introducing people to Jesus should be and must be our highest priority in life.

Nathanael

There is only one passage of scripture that features Nathanael.

John 1 : 43 - 51

“The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

There needs to be a background understanding before the enormity of this passage can be grasped. Nathanael is sitting under a fig tree in prayer and meditation. His meditation is concerned with the life of Jacob - the swindler who God called Israel when his life changed. Nathanael was considering how Jacob's life had changed and is concerned with who he is in the story, the manipulator or a sincere

servant of God.

When Jesus proclaims to him that he is a sincere servant and he is not Jacob but 'Israel', instantly Nathaniel knows Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus just revealed to him what he was meditating on in the private thoughts of his mind.

Nathanael immediately follows Jesus even though he has some cultural prejudice with regards to Nazarenes.

So what can we learn here?

Firstly, we can see that Nathanael started out as a man of impeccable character, where Jesus said of him that there was 'no deceit'. But he still needed fine-tuning for the mission Jesus was calling him on.

Here is a simple lesson - it's not how well we start or how noble we are when we start, but it's about how we finish. It's not only about what we've done but how we've done it. Is the character of Christ more seen in us? It's about allowing Jesus to tune us and shape us and become what he has called and purposed us to be. That's a life-long journey. We must remember that no matter how well you may be doing right now, you haven't arrived.

In fact if we think we're standing firm we've got to be careful we don't fall. If we're going to live in the fullness of this call and mission God has for us, we have to be continually vulnerable to his dealings with us. Don't short-circuit the process and subsequently the purpose and plan God has for your life.

Secondly, we see here that it's possible to go from sceptic to true believer in a matter of seconds. That should give us hope for those we're holding out for, that they would come to know Jesus. One Holy Spirit encounter and a person's life can radically change. We need to grasp those opportunities to share Christ as they have eternal consequences. The most sceptical person can be transformed into the most passionate believer for Jesus with just one word spoken, one experience with the Spirit.

But are you willing to take those opportunities and speak that one word?

Thirdly, God uses people we think he couldn't or shouldn't use. Nathanael couldn't believe that the Messiah would come from Nazareth - surely national pride and religious zeal demanded he come from a place and city far more prominent. But that's not how Jesus operates and it's not how he wants us to think and operate.

Nathanael would learn that by spending his years in an unknown place, God was showing that he would choose the foolish and despised things of this world to achieve his great purposes. Why? So that those who feel they have it all together and have arrived would never be able to boast in their ability to see the purposes of God outworked. If we would choose to be foolish and ashamed for him, he'll use us. He wants to use you.

It is still God's purpose to choose ordinary people like us and choose those we think he shouldn't choose. He will use whoever is willing to be used of him. Are you willing? Because God wants to use you for his mission.

Fourthly, there is great blessing in store for those who walk with Jesus. See where Jesus talks about Nathanael seeing “the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” (vs 50, 51). Clearly this is a reference to Jacob’s dream at Bethel (Genesis 28). But in essence he was saying to Nathanael that he would see evidences of the Kingdom like Jacob did, but in a far greater way.

Jesus is the mediator between heaven and earth and God’s blessings come down to us by and through Jesus. It’s in Jesus that heaven meets earth - he is the staircase between heaven and earth; no one comes to the Father except by and through Jesus. The “you” here is plural in the original Greek - meaning it’s not just referring to Nathanael but to everyone who puts their faith in Jesus. Jesus opens up heaven for us. Because of Jesus we have abiding and constant fellowship with the Father. It’s because of Jesus that God hears our prayers.

Have you allowed Jesus to open heaven for you and give you access to the Father? Only Jesus is the way to God and the truth and the life of God. We can only come to the Father through Jesus. Outside of Jesus there is no eternal blessing or security; He is Lord.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1. As a Christ-follower, am I submitted to God's processes of transformation? (character)**
- 2. As a Christ-follower, am I one who introduces people to Jesus? (mission)**

Let's ask questions on three points in the material - *Call*, *Character* and *Mission*, in detail:

Call

Questions around calling are designed for us to realise that calling in the Bible is *not* a niched little area of activity that only special people take part in. Scriptures about calling only mention believers being called to fellowship with Jesus, peace, freedom, holiness, good work, works of faith, suffering and blessing others. This is what God wants us to do for him. These things are what we have been called to! This is for everyone a special, significant and personal calling. Let no-one play down the significance of this calling.

Q: What was Nathanael called to?

Answer - to follow Jesus and become his disciple

Q: Did Nathanael battle to find this calling?

Q: How would the word 'calling' be used today?

Answer - mostly used to mean that a person will be full time in ministry or has been given a special (often famous) task in the world-wide church.

But perhaps we use 'calling' the way the Bible uses 'leading'. By this it's meant that Paul was called to be a preacher of the Gospel. He was led to travel. There is a difference. Many people think they are not called because they don't have specific leading. We are called even without leading!

Q: List every reference you can find that speaks directly of the word "calling" in the NT

- How many words describe what we have been called to? (There are at least eight)
- Do you realise that those words are what God has called us all to?
- How would you feel if Jesus asked you for a cup of coffee and over the coffee table asked you to please do (those eight words) specially for him? That is calling.

Q: What is another way to describe calling?

- Mission, business, pursuit

Q: Do you think that everyone is called?

Q: Do you think that you are called?

- What do you think you are called to? (This question is a trap!)
We are called to the above no matter what we do or where Jesus leads us.

Q: How does the right perspective on calling encourage you?

Character

We live in a culture where, most of the time, what you can do matters more than who you are.

If you are studying this in a group, here is a practical exercise for those that are tech minded. Assign a person in the group to another person's Facebook profile. Get them to peruse the profile and write down a few things that stand out about the person in two categories: (1) what they do, and (2) who they are. Then give the papers to back to the person. How right were they?

Q: What is astounding about Jesus' interaction with Nathanael with regards to Nathanael's character? (John 1:43-51)

Answer - Jesus knows Nathanael's thoughts. He knows everything.

Q: What do you think 'without guile' / 'without deceit' actually means in John 1:43-51? Surely he wasn't perfect! He was just prejudiced against Nazarenes a few verses earlier.

Answer - it means a high level of honesty. Just honest about himself before God and people. A high level of integrity - a total non-deceiver.

Q: Can we be 'without guile'? How?

Q: If Jesus made a judgement call on your thoughts, what would He say to you?

Q: Which do you think matters more to Jesus: who we are or what we do?

Answer - a trick question, they both matter. Character and mission both count.

Mission

Andrew is seen on all three appearances in the scriptures bringing people to Jesus. This is what we are to do, just like him.

Consider 1 Corinthians 9 : 16, 17

"For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship".

This is a soul-searching text indeed. The questions will get the group to move through it slowly.

Q: What do you think 'preach' means in this context?

Answer - bring good news / declare the truth of God's mercy to mankind. Please realise that this is not talking of a Sunday morning sermon although it includes that as a format of preaching.

**Q: Why does Paul say he can't boast for telling people about Jesus?
Who placed this necessity on Him?**

Answer - he considers it to be 'necessity'. It must have been Jesus compelling him.

Q: What is a 'woe' and why does Paul pronounce one on himself if he does not preach?

Answer - a woe is an expression meaning 'not so much of final judgement but of a miserable condition in God's sight'.

God wants it done. Simple. That is all there is to it. Paul understood this. It matters not whether you are convicted - a special gift means nothing, and feelings mean nothing. God wants it done. To not do it is disobedience and being in a miserable condition according to God.

Q: There are two motivations for telling people about Jesus. What are they? What do they signify?

Answer - (1) of our own will / willing; (2) unwilling but necessary.

Notice disobedience is not an option for Paul here. Is it for you? It has to be done because God is God and can, after all, make demands on us. If we do it willingly we will enjoy it and so will God. If we are unwilling and do it, it still remains the right and therefore only thing to.

Q: Challenging?

We are used to being told that we should do things when we 'feel' it's right. Or in this case when 'we have a heart for the lost'. Paul says differently. Obedience shows our sincere love, or lack of it.

JOHN

Nickname: Together with his brother James they were known as the “Sons of the Thunder”

Marital status: Unknown

Hometown: Bethsaida (was living in Capernaum)

Profession: Fisherman

Age: 16-18 years old

Relatives: Father - Zebedee

Mother: Possibly Salome (according to some Church tradition)

Brother: James

Social Status: Uneducated. He was in partnership with Peter and James in a fishing business

Personality: Bold, loyal, zealous, intensive, passionate (“son of thunder”)

Death: He was never martyred according to tradition. He died in Ephesus around 98AD. Died as an old man, outlasting the other disciples.

General facts: According to many interpretations, he was, for a time, a disciple of John the Baptist and was called by Christ from the circle of John's followers, together with Peter and Andrew, to become Jesus' disciples (John 1:35-42).

The apostle John also is credited with writing five books of the New Testament: the gospel according to John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John and the book of Revelation.

INTRODUCTION

We can't talk about the twelve disciples without looking at the life of John in detail. Although we looked at him earlier along with his brother James, we need to also look at him specifically.

Remember, the point of this study is to bring back a clear understanding of discipleship and how Jesus did it. As we come to Jesus, some of us have run into dead ends, but we're given the Gospels in particular to go back and check and see what Jesus intended and find answers to the question of why he called us.

Why did he reach out to Matthew the tax collector? Why did he prophesy over Nathanael's life? Why did he work through the issue of faith with Thomas? Why did he call any of them? Jesus wants us to see these things and dwell in the truths we uncover. The church facilitates this discipleship and learning process - the Church is a mechanism used to bring out the Kingdom of God. We preach Jesus and the Church works with God the Holy Spirit in seeing his Kingdom come. But all of us must also take personal responsibility for our discipleship. We are all busy in the process of discipleship and we won't stop until we die.

For many of us this has become mechanical. There are many books out there to try and help us with formulas on the Christian life, but through the life of John we learn that discipleship is about love. It's about relationship. It's not that God saw that the purpose of our life was going nowhere so he sent his son. That may be true; and for many of us the mechanics of our Christianity may be like that, but the

bottom line is this: *God so loved the world*. This doesn't mean he loved the Outback or Kangaroos or Table mountain, but us, human beings. It was all about love. That's why he did what he did. If we move away from that we move away from the primary purpose of our relationship with God. His son did what he did to ensure we get all the benefits of what he did and the issue was so that we could be with him.

Before we look at John you must ask yourself: How is your relationship today? You would know straight away. When we wake up in the morning and glance at the pillow next to us, we know whether or not there are things that need to be sorted out.

We know when we're out of sorts with people. Don't neglect your relationship with God - that's what discipleship is about. John shows us through his life how we can have a loving relationship with God.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

All the Gospels are written to give us a unique perspective of Jesus, his life, death and resurrection. This is because each were written to different audiences for different purposes.

Matthew

- Was written for the Jews
- Written so we can see the link and the follow-on from the Old Testament to the New Testament
- Called "The Lion" Gospel - Jesus represented as the Lion (victorious)

Mark

- An Eyewitness account
- Full of action and purpose
- Called “The Ox” Gospel – Jesus represented as the Ox (a servant)

Luke

- Historically correct - more detailed. Luke was a historian and theologian.
- Written for the Gentiles – a history they can connect with.
- Called “The Son of Man” Gospel (we see this phrase repeatedly in the Gospel)

John

- This is the Gospel that’s totally different.
- It’s a spiritual Gospel – called “The Eagle” Gospel, as it gives us a heavenly perspective.
- An in-depth understanding of the Gospel message

John is not interested in so much historical detail, but more teaching about Jesus. He is meticulous and his soft character comes through, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. See, this Gospel came from a relationship of love. Where there’s a relationship of love there’s a revelation of things from a heavenly perspective. So we see salvation here, the spiritual message of the Gospel. John is interested in this perspective. It’s a pattern all throughout the book.

LESSONS WE LEARN FROM JOHN

1. Intimacy

It's all about Jesus wanting to have a relationship with us and, through that, he wants to reach the world. We are reminded of the imagery of the bridegroom and bride that we often see in the Bible - which represents our intimate relationship with God. The minute our relationship goes to "owner and subject" or "landlord and tenant" or "boss and servant" there's trouble! This relationship is about love and intimacy!

Amongst the twelve it is recorded that John had an intimate, loving relationship with Jesus. Four times in the Gospel of John it says of him that he was 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (John 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20). Of course Jesus loved the others but it's recorded that John was found on Jesus' bosom. That might seem weird for us today, but we can see that John was always close - he was right next to Jesus.

In Christ, you are the disciple whom Jesus loves. At that time, Christ was one man and stuck in human time, so he could only be in one place and one time. But now he is omnipresent, having that close relationship with every single one of us. John shows us that this is what discipleship is about - being the disciple whom Jesus loves. In those times we spend with Jesus we can lean on his chest.

Jesus asked John to look after his mother. This is his heart -

John 19 : 26 - 27

“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.”

There was an intimacy there. John was the only disciple who stayed with Jesus through everything – his trial, crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection. All the time, we see John is in the background. Intimacy is what we want for our lives. John shows us that the basis of following Jesus is a loving intimacy -

John 3 : 16

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Here John shows us the heavenly perspective. If you're asking about why there are so many religions or why we can't do it our way, it's simple: you need to be born again.

In this Gospel there are so many stories that show us the love of Jesus. The woman at the well; the adulterous woman; which demonstrate God's love and forgiveness. Jesus' sermon on the sheep and the shepherd; Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (with that famous verse, “Jesus wept” and he Jews replying, “See how he loved him!”); Jesus talking about not leaving us as orphans and praying the most amazing prayer in John 17. And those amazing verses where Jesus reinstates Peter – scriptures that are full of love and restoration and encouragement. We can see that love and intimacy is the central theme.

Here are some great passages in 1 John that show us the theme of John's life.

1 John 4 : 7 - 12

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”

1 John 4 : 19 - 21

“We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

The appeal of the Gospel is love! Remember the day you were saved? Don't lose your first love!

When you hear men criticising others and their ministry, biting Christians, hurting Christians, not handling issues, etc. or you are the one who does this, you need to remember: they are born again and you are born again, and this means you're going to spend eternity with

each other!

Think about that. Get on with each other! When you read 1 John it says “love one another”! **We are commanded to love and we should want to love!** We are a new species. We are not from this world which is full of damnation, cursing, criticism, ugliness, deceit etc. We’re not from here! We’re called to love each other! The Church is defined by this love in John 13:35. We are cynical, easy to criticise, easy to pass judgement. But we can’t have this amazing intimacy with Jesus and then have a degrading attitude towards each other. (See 1 John 4:19.)

Forgiveness pleases the heart of the Father. Let’s forgive to please him. He has forgiven us so let’s show him that that same love is in us. We can hurt each other so much just by the things we say. But we’re free from that. Choose to love.

John's life is also a record of one who loved because he was loved. His Saviour's love for him motivated him to loving service. His love for the Church is seen in Revelation, where he writes to the churches he cares for and loves, from the island of Patmos where he had been banished for the sake of the Gospel.

2. Sin

John teaches us that only through love do we overcome the weakness of the fallen sinful nature.

1 John 4 : 17 - 18

“By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence

for the day of judgement, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.”

As we learn to be followers of Christ we have to know how to deal with sin. It's important. Don't ignore it. Don't build up a hardness toward it - don't have an attitude of "I'll just do it and carry on." No, we have to know how to deal with sin.

If we read 1 John it helps us understand that we've been given everything in Christ to lead lives victorious over sin. Jesus suffered so that we might have victory over sin. The devil wants you to suffer under guilt and condemnation and constant temptation. But Jesus has given victory.

1 John 1 : 10

“If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

1 John 3 : 4 - 10

“Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one

born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."

1 John 1 : 9

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

There's a brand of teaching that says if you confess and repent once then you never need to do it again. This is an extreme grace message. We're always a child of God but we need to deal with sin when it comes and take responsibility and ask for forgiveness. This is about relationship, not a mechanical forgiveness! And immediately we are forgiven.

John encouraged Christian maturity:

1 John 2 : 12 - 14

"I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one."

3. Mission

John's life is a travelogue of mission. He is concerned that the Gospel goes out and that the church is healthy. His life is an example to us of commitment to the mission of the Gospel.

After Jesus' ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, John, together with Peter, took a prominent part in the founding and guidance of the church. He is with Peter at the healing of the lame man in the temple (Acts 3:1f); along with Peter he is also thrown into prison (Acts 4:3); he is also with Peter visiting the newly converted in Samaria, possibly planting a church (Acts 8:14). We hear of John again hosting Paul and Barnabas on the island of Cyprus (Acts 13:4).

Then, from church history and the book of Revelation, John ministered extensively into Asia Minor, and was probably based in Ephesus. For a while he led the church at Ephesus.

Because of his faith he was banished to the island of Patmos by the emperor Domitian. Tradition has it that John was miraculously saved from death when he was dipped into boiling oil in Rome during Domitian's persecutions. He then returns and carries on ministering into Asia Minor. He outlasts all the other apostles and dies at the age of 85-90 years old.

He was a true and loving father of the faith! As we end off this study about preparing for the mission with Jesus' disciples we must always remember that we partner with God in his mission in love, never compulsion or anything else. We are motivated by love and live our

lives out in love. We seek and save the lost because, like God, we love the lost.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Am I motivated by God's love?

2. Do I deal with sin biblically?

3. Am I committed to mission?

The above study on John consisted of three themes - *Intimacy*, *Sin* and *Mission*. We see these three themes throughout John's life and writings.

Here are some questions around this - these also work well in a group setting.

1. Intimacy

1. "God is love" (1 John 4:8). What does this mean?

God does not just 'do' love, he is love. But we can see what love He is by looking at what He does.

- He suffers and dies in our place (how do we practice that?)
- He accepts unconditionally in Christ (how do we practice that?)

- He challenges us (how do we practice that?)

2. What else do we see in the Bible on God's love and what do we know of God in our walk with him?

God's love is not sappy or sentimental and the word 'love' in this verse does not refer to romantic love. This is especially challenging, these days, when many people believe that any lifestyle is acceptable to God because he is 'love'.

God often practices "tough love" as he challenges us. He is able to accept us as we are, love us as we are, and at the same time challenge us to change.

- How does God's love contrast with the world's view of love?
- How do we practice God's kind of love?

2. Sin

Isn't it interesting that God loves us unconditionally yet is clear that he does not accept sin? In fact, one of the ways he shows his love for us is by promising to help us out of our sins.

1. How do we show people that God "loves the sinner" but "hates the sin"?

2. Is the Christian life all about sin management?

We can get sidetracked in our walk with God, believing that it's just all

about avoiding sin and therefore never moving to his mission and call, and never getting to enjoy God as much as we could either.

3. How do we avoid getting sidetracked and becoming all about sin while taking sin seriously and working with the Holy Spirit to become more like Christ? It would be good to learn from each other here.

3. Mission

This study has been about "preparing for the mission with Jesus' disciples."

God is on a mission in this world. He is actually doing nothing else except seeking and saving the lost. He keeps us, as his Church, in this world for this purpose, growing us as individuals into it in greater ways.

1. Are you on the same mission? How can you begin to respond to God in this and get on the same mission?

2. What are the things that are sidetracking you?

3. How will you help yourself, as it were, to keep this mission your focus and not get sidetracked with the "cares of this world"? (Matthew 13:22).

Lastly, never forget the Gospel! This isn't about measuring up or being qualified. God has already qualified you in Christ. Jesus has done it all! There are many things that can sidetrack us, even in Christian culture (sin management; self-improvement; unhealthy ambition;

successful living). *Let us never forget that this is about Christ's work, not our work, and this is about taking that truth to others in love and grace.*

Remind yourself of the Gospel as you end this study. Break bread - it's what Jesus gave us to remind ourselves of his love and work on the cross and his victory in his resurrection.