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# follow Me.

THE STORY OF  
DISCIPLESHIP

**SMALL GROUP LESSONS**  
NAPERVILLE CAMPUS

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## INTRODUCTION

Andrew was Simon Peter's brother, and they were called to follow Jesus at the same time (Matthew 4:18). The Bible names Andrew as one of the twelve apostles (Matthew 10:2). Like Peter, Andrew was a fisherman by trade; they made their living on the Sea of Galilee. Peter and Andrew were from the city of Bethsaida (John 1:44) on the northwest coast of Galilee (John 12:21).

The call of Andrew in the Bible is a memorable story. Andrew and John were originally disciples of John the Baptist. They were present when John the Baptist pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:35–36), and they followed after Jesus (verse 37). Jesus noticed Andrew and John following and invited them to come spend the day with Him (verses 38–39). After spending time with Jesus, Andrew became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, and he took action: "Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus" (verses 40–42). Thus Andrew was one of Jesus' first two followers and the first to bring another person to Him.

In leaving behind the family business, Andrew sets a good example for all who would follow Christ; we are all called to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33), and we should not let anything get in the way of following Jesus' call. When Jesus told Andrew and Peter they would be "fishers of men," He promised that He would use them to save men's souls. And that's exactly what the apostles did.<sup>1</sup>

## OPEN IT

1. **Andrew seemed to love inviting people into great moments and experiences. When did someone invite you to an amazing moment, event, or experience? How did this invite make you feel?**

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt taken from Got Questions: "Who was Andrew in the Bible?"  
Found at: [www.gotquestions.org/Andrew-in-the-Bible](http://www.gotquestions.org/Andrew-in-the-Bible)

## READ IT

## John 1:35-42

## John 6:1-11

## APPLY IT

2. Even though Andrew didn't exhibit the same level of boldness or recklessness as his older brother Peter, it's crucial to avoid portraying Andrew as the "milder" or "frailer" sibling. How are you different from your other siblings? Did you see these differences as positives or negatives growing up?
3. Andrew was willing to leave his livelihood as a fisherman to follow Jesus. What are some things in your life that you might need to give up in order to follow Jesus more closely? What steps can you take to make this a reality?

*Andrew also played a role in bringing others to Jesus. In the Gospel of John, he brought his brother Peter to meet Jesus, which led to Peter's own calling as an apostle. Andrew's willingness to share the gospel and bring others to Christ is a powerful example of evangelism and discipleship.<sup>2</sup>*

- 4. Who are some people in your life that you would like to introduce to Jesus? What steps can you take to begin building a relationship with them and sharing the gospel with them?**

*Andrew was also instrumental in the feeding of the five thousand. In the Gospel of John, when Jesus asked Philip how they would feed such a large crowd, Andrew brought to Jesus a boy with five barley loaves and two fish. Jesus then miraculously fed the entire crowd with this small offering (John 6:1-14).<sup>3</sup>*

- 5. Andrew saw a need and took action by bringing the boy with the five loaves and two fish to Jesus. What needs do you see around you, and how can you take action to bring them to Jesus?**

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<sup>2</sup> Study notes written by Pastor Tim Badal.

<sup>3</sup> Study notes written by Pastor Tim Badal.

*Andrew's character and actions are exemplified in the scriptures and in historical accounts. He is often depicted as a humble, selfless, and courageous disciple who was willing to serve Jesus and his fellow believers at all costs. Andrew's missionary work is also worth noting. According to tradition, he traveled extensively throughout the Black Sea region, preaching and spreading the gospel. He faced persecution and danger, but he remained steadfast in his faith and his commitment to sharing the message of salvation.*

*Andrew's death is also a testament to his faith and courage. According to tradition, he was martyred for his beliefs, but he continued to preach and minister even as he faced his execution. His steadfastness and commitment to the gospel have inspired generations of Christians to remain faithful in the face of persecution and adversity. Overall, Andrew's life and legacy are a powerful reminder of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. He lived a life of service, evangelism, and unwavering faith, and his example continues to inspire and challenge believers today.<sup>4</sup>*

- 6. Andrew faced persecution and even martyrdom for his faith in Jesus. How can we prepare ourselves for the possibility of persecution? What can we do to support and encourage fellow believers who are facing persecution around the world?**

- 7. Andrew seemed to be content working in the background and out of the limelight. In what areas does serving in this way bring even greater joy and satisfaction than when one's service is done in front of others?**

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<sup>4</sup> Study notes written by Pastor Tim Badal.

This study was compiled and questions were written by Tim Badal (Sugar Grove Campus) —[www.villagebible.church/smallgroup](http://www.villagebible.church/smallgroup)



## INTRODUCTION

Jesus had two disciples named James: James the son of Zebedee and James the son of Alphaeus. Another James, the half-brother of Jesus, was never one of the twelve disciples but was a leader in the early church of Jerusalem (Acts 15:13) and wrote the epistle of James. There's not much in Scripture about James the son of Alphaeus, so this week we'll focus on the other disciple, James the son of Zebedee.

When Jesus called James to follow Him, he was in a boat mending fishing nets with his father, Zebedee, and his brother, John. "[Jesus] called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him" (Matthew 4:21–22). From then on, James was in full-time ministry with Jesus.

James was one of Jesus' "inner circle." James, John, and Peter are frequently mentioned together as the only apostles to witness some of Jesus' miracles: the raising of a young girl from the dead (Mark 5), for example. Jesus took James up a mountain along with Peter and John, where James saw Jesus' transfiguration and watched Him talk with Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:1–9). James, along with John, Peter, and Andrew, privately asked Jesus for clarity after He told the disciples the temple would be destroyed (Mark 13:2–3). Because of their desire to understand Jesus' words better, the four received some prophetic words from their Lord regarding the near future and also the end times (Mark 13:5–37).

James and his brother, John, were given a nickname by Jesus, who called the two "Boanerges," which means "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). This name gives us a clue to James' personality. Both he and his brother were characterized by zeal, passion, and ambition.

Later, James and John showed their zealous, thunderous personalities when Jesus sent messengers before Him into a Samaritan village. The people of the village refused to welcome Jesus, however, because they knew He was journeying to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51–53). James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy the village (verse 54). This impetuous, vindictive desire earned Jesus' rebuke, and He reminded the sons of thunder that His mission was to save lives, not destroy them.

As Jesus had predicted, James experienced persecution soon after the church began. King Herod decided to arrest some believers, and he had James killed (Acts 12:2). James thus became the first apostle to be martyred.<sup>5</sup>

## READ IT

**Scriptures:** Matthew 20:20–28; Luke 9:51–56; Acts 12:1–19

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<sup>5</sup> Excerpt taken from Got Questions: "James the Apostle"  
Found at: [www.gotquestions.org/James-the-apostle](http://www.gotquestions.org/James-the-apostle)

## OPEN IT

1. James and his brother John are called the “sons of thunder.” What’s a nickname you or someone you know has ever had that reflected something about who they are?

## APPLY IT

James and his brother John earned their nickname “sons of thunder” when they asked Jesus if they should call down fire to consume some Samaritans (Luke 9:51-56). The Samaritans and Jews didn’t like each other at all. Among other disagreements, the Samaritans believe God should be worshiped in their land, not in Jerusalem. When the Samaritans learn that Jesus is headed to Jerusalem for worship, they “did not receive him” as a guest (Luke 9:53). This was a great sign of disrespect.

James and John probably thought Jesus would be impressed with their zeal for Him. After all, in the Old Testament, Elijah called down fire to consume Samaritan troops who were sent to arrest him (2 Kings 1:9-14). However, instead of praising them, Jesus rebukes James and John. Why?

James and John had the wrong motives. There is a ton of arrogance evident in the way they asked the question. Do you want *us* to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did? Of course, they did not have the power to call down fire from heaven. Christ was the only one in their company who had such power. If that were an appropriate response, He could well have done it himself. No, Jesus’ mission was very different from Elijah’s. Christ had come to save, not to destroy. Therefore, He responded to James and his brother with a strong rebuke. Jesus will one day judge the world. In the meantime, His people are expected to reflect His love, kindness, and mercy.<sup>6</sup>

2. James and his brother are called “sons of thunder” because of their zeal for the Lord. What are some ways you can increase your passion for Christ and His mission each day?

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<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 81–89.



- 3. James and his brother needed an attitude adjustment. Describe an area of your life where unhealthy negativity or arrogance reigns.**

- 4. Why is it often difficult for you to reflect Jesus' love, kindness, and mercy?**

The Bible not only shows that James was fervent, passionate, zealous, and insensitive; but in Matthew 20:20-28 we also see he was ambitious and overconfident. He and his brother tried to get elevated status over the other apostles.<sup>7</sup> And their mother tried to help them get it! Jesus hints at His future suffering and the suffering they will face too, but He won't assure them of any elevated status in heaven.

Ambition isn't bad, but when it's greedy, when it hurts and uses people, when it exalts us over others, and when it is prideful, it is sin. James was ambitious. He wanted to make something of his life. He wanted to be significant. These are strengths when used in the right way, but liabilities if used for any purpose other than God's.<sup>8</sup>

- 5. Jesus' rebuke probably stung James and His brother, but He rebukes His people because He loves them. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin as a way of rebuking us. Why should we praise God for this?**

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<sup>7</sup> MacArthur, Twelve Ordinary Men, 89.

<sup>8</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, Matthew, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 678.

James is connected to other disciples in every Bible passage, except when he is martyred (Acts 12:1-2). He's one of Jesus' closest followers, but we almost always read about him when he's part of the group. James is killed while Peter gets miraculously released from prison (Acts 12:6-19). The fact that Luke puts these events side-by-side in the book of Acts helps us to see that sometimes God removes hardship and sometimes He doesn't.<sup>9</sup>

**6. It is becoming less popular to be a Christian in our country. It is unlikely that we will be killed for our faith, like James was, but there can still be challenges in relationships, opportunities, and the exercise of our rights. How should we react when facing these challenges?**

**7. Describe a time when God either removed hardship from your life or chose not to. How did this impact your relationship with God?**

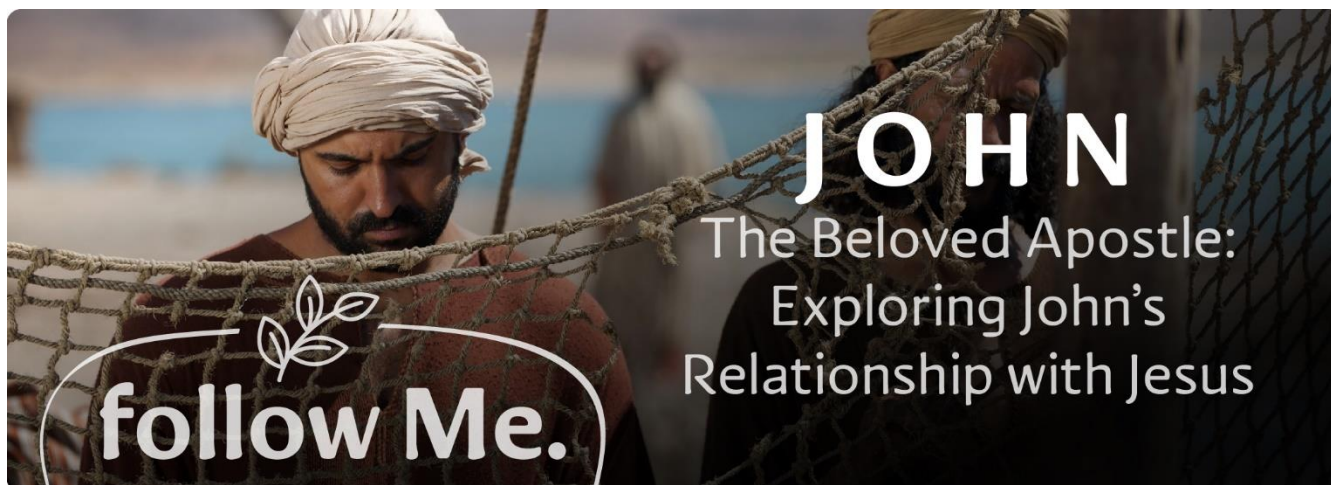
The life of James the apostle shows us that Jesus knows our nature: He identified James as a “son of thunder” right away. Also, Jesus patiently works with us to conform us to His will, just as He did with James. We also learn from the life of James that courage in our service to Christ is a valuable asset in spreading the gospel—although it can make us the target of persecution. At the same time, boldness should not be allowed to descend into brashness. Our zeal must be tempered with grace, and impetuosity must be curtailed by a steady commitment to the will of God.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, 77.

<sup>10</sup> Got Questions: “James the Apostle”

This study was compiled and questions were written by Cisco Cotto (Naperville Campus)—[www.villagebible.church/smallgroup](http://www.villagebible.church/smallgroup)



## INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of John is the only Gospel which mentions “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” John 13:23 tells us, “One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to Him.” John 19:26 declares, “When Jesus saw His mother there, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son.’” John 21:7 says, “Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’” This disciple is never specifically identified, but the identity of the disciple whom Jesus loved is clear. The disciple whom Jesus loved self-identifies as the author of the gospel (John 21:24), whom most scholars believe to be the apostle John, the son of Zebedee and brother of James.

First, only the Gospel of John mentions the “disciple whom Jesus loved.” Second, John 21:2 lets us know who was fishing with Peter: “Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together...” The apostle John was a son of Zebedee (Matthew 4:21). Third, there were three disciples who were especially close to Jesus: Peter, James, and John (Matthew 17:1; Mark 5:37; 14:33; Luke 8:51). The “disciple whom Jesus loved” could not be Peter, as Peter asks Jesus a question in regards to this disciple (John 21:20–21). That leaves us with James or John. Jesus made a statement about the possible “longevity” of the life of the disciple whom He loved in John 21:22. James was the first of the apostles to die (Acts 12:2). While Jesus did not promise the disciple whom He loved long life, it would be highly unusual for Jesus to say, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?” if the disciple whom He loved was going to be the first disciple to die.

Church history tells us that the apostle John lived into the A.D. 90s and was the last surviving apostle. Early church tradition was unanimous in identifying John as the disciple whom Jesus loved. It seems that John had a closer relationship with Jesus than any of the other disciples. Jesus and John were essentially “best friends.” Jesus entrusted John with the care of His mother, gave John the vision of the transfiguration, allowed John to witness His most amazing miracles, and later gave John the Book of Revelation.<sup>11</sup>

## READ IT

**John 13:23–25: The disciple whom Jesus loved**

**John 19:26–27: Jesus entrusting his mother to John**

**John 21:20–23: The disciple's conversation with Jesus about his future**

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<sup>11</sup> Excerpt taken from Got Questions: “Who was the disciple whom Jesus loved?”  
Found at: [www.gotquestions.org/disciple-whom-Jesus-loved](http://www.gotquestions.org/disciple-whom-Jesus-loved)

## OPEN IT

1. What is a special relationship or friendship that you have that has been significant in your life?

## APPLY IT

2. What is John referred to as in John 13:23-25? What do you think this means and why do you think John is described in this way?

3. What responsibility does Jesus entrust to John in John 19:26-27? What does this reveal about Jesus' relationship with John and the trust he had in him?

What has Jesus given you responsibility for today? What does faithfulness to that responsibility look like?

4. Throughout the Gospel of John, we see the theme of love emphasized. It was John's relationship with Jesus that influenced his understanding of love. How has your relationship with Jesus influenced your own understanding of love?



In John's letters, he writes about the importance of loving one another and keeping God's commandments. Take a few moments to read through 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John (don't worry, they aren't very long!).

**5. How can we apply some of John's key teachings to our own lives and relationships with others?**

**6. What do you think we can learn from John's example of discipleship and his relationship with Jesus?**



## INTRODUCTION

Judas Iscariot is typically remembered for one thing: his betrayal of Jesus. He was one of the twelve disciples who lived with and followed Jesus for three years. He witnessed Jesus' ministry, His teaching, and His many miracles. He was the treasurer for the group and used this trusted position to steal from their resources (John 12:6).

Judas was a common name in that era, and there are several other Judases mentioned in the New Testament. One of the other disciples was named Judas (John 14:22), and so was one of Jesus' own half-brothers (Mark 6:3). To differentiate, John 6:71 and John 13:26 refer to Christ's betrayer as "Judas, son of Simon Iscariot."

Scholars have several ideas about the derivation of the surname. One is that Iscariot refers to Kerioth, a region or town in Judea. Another idea is that it refers to the Sicarii, a cadre of assassins among the Jewish rebels.

The possible association with the Sicarii allows for interesting speculation about Judas' motives for his betrayal, but the fact that he made a conscious choice to betray Jesus (Luke 22:48) remains the same. The surname Iscariot is useful, if for no other reason, in that it leaves no doubt about which Judas is being referred to.

Matthew 27:6–8 reports that the chief priests took the "blood money" from Judas and bought a potter's field as a place for burying foreigners (thus fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 11:12–13). Acts 1:18–19 continues the story of what happened after Judas' death and gives some additional information. Luke reports, "With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, "Field of Blood." The additional detail we learn from Luke is that, after Judas hanged himself, his dead body fell into the very field purchased with his ill-gotten gains.<sup>12</sup>

## READ IT

**Matthew 26:14–16, 47–50**

**Mark 14:10–11, 43–46**

**Luke 22:3–6, 47–48**

**John 12:1–8, 13:21–30**

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<sup>12</sup> Excerpt taken from Got Questions: "Who was Judas Iscariot?"  
Found at: [www.gotquestions.org/Judas-Ischariot](http://www.gotquestions.org/Judas-Ischariot)

## OPEN IT

1. What is something that you have done in your life that you regret? How did you learn from it?

## APPLY IT

Given the fact of Judas' close proximity to Jesus during three years of ministry, it is hard to imagine how he could follow through on such a dastardly betrayal. Judas' story teaches us to guard against small, gradual failings that gain strength and power in our lives and that could open the door to more deadly influences. His story is also a great reminder that appearances can be deceiving. Jesus taught, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:22–23).<sup>13</sup>

2. How did Judas end up becoming a betrayer? What factors may have contributed to his decision to turn against Jesus? (Matthew 26:14–16, Luke 22:3–6)
3. What do we learn about Judas' character from his actions, both before and after his betrayal of Jesus? (John 12:1–8, 13:21–30)

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Money was important to Judas. As already mentioned, he was a thief, and, according to Matthew 26:13–15, the chief priests paid him “thirty silver coins” to betray the Lord.<sup>14</sup>

- 4. What does the story of Judas teach us about the dangers of greed and the love of money? (Matthew 26:14–16, 27:3–10)**

Jesus knew from the very beginning what Judas Iscariot would do. Jesus told His disciples, “Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” (John 6:70). And at the Last Supper, Jesus predicted His betrayal and identified the betrayer: “Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.’ Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon” (John 13:26).<sup>15</sup>

- 5. How did Jesus respond to Judas' betrayal? What can we learn from his example about how to respond to those who hurt us? (Mark 14:43–46, Luke 22:47–48)**

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Jesus said that Judas Iscariot was not “clean”; i.e., he had not been born again and was not forgiven of his sins (John 13:10–11). In fact, Judas was empowered to do what he did by the devil himself: “As soon as Judas took the bread [that Jesus had given him], Satan entered into him” (John 13:27).

The other disciples had no clue that Judas Iscariot harbored treacherous thoughts. When Jesus mentioned a betrayer in their midst, the other disciples worried that it was they who would prove disloyal (John 13:22). No one suspected Judas. He was a trusted member of the Twelve. Even when Jesus told Judas, “What you are about to do, do quickly,” (John 13:27), and Judas left the Last Supper, the others at the table simply thought Judas had been sent to buy more food or to give something to charity (verses 28–29).<sup>16</sup>

- 6. What can we learn from Judas' story about the importance of accountability and the danger of isolation? How can we ensure that we have healthy relationships and community in our own lives? (Proverbs 27:17, Ecclesiastes 4:9–12)**

Judas Iscariot betrayed the Lord with a kiss, perfectly in keeping with his brazen duplicity (Luke 22:47–48). After committing his atrocious act, Judas “was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders” (Matthew 27:3). But we learn that remorse does not equal repentance—rather than make amends or seek forgiveness, “he went away and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:5).<sup>17</sup>

- 7. At the end of his life Judas felt remorse, and then he killed himself. Is there a difference between remorse and repentance? (Matthew 27:1–10)**

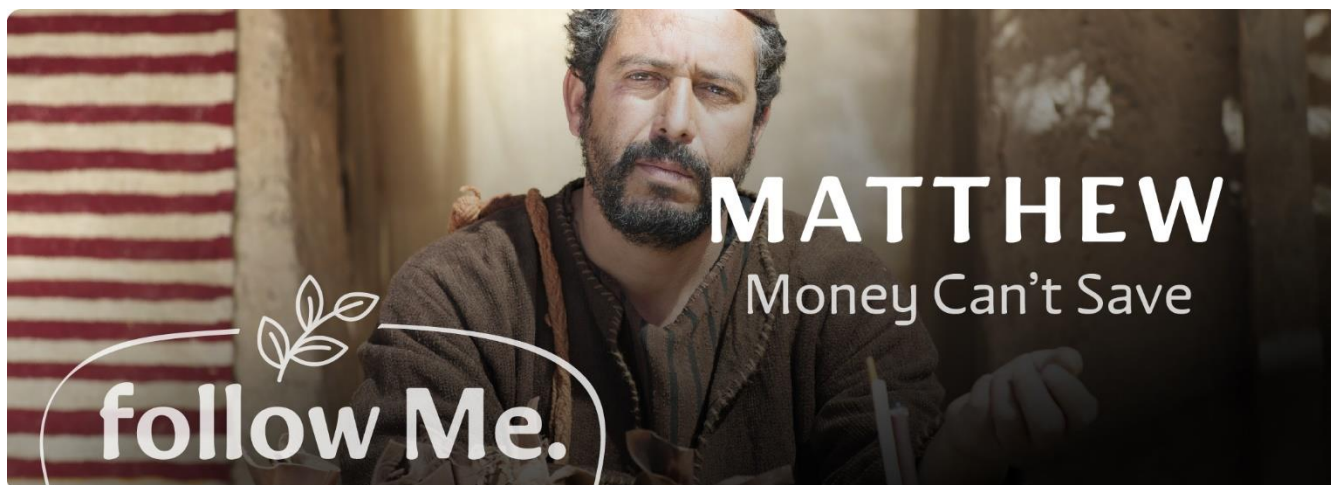
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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

This study was compiled and questions were written by Steve Lombardo (Plano Campus) —[www.villagebible.church/smallgroup](http://www.villagebible.church/smallgroup)





## INTRODUCTION

Before Matthew became a disciple of Christ, he was a tax collector or “publican” in the town of Capernaum (Matthew 9:9; 10:3). Matthew is also called Levi, the son of Alphaeus, by Luke and Mark (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). Although Luke and Mark do not come out and say, “Levi and Matthew are the same person,” we can deduce the names refer to the same individual because of context. Matthew’s account of his call matches exactly the accounts of Levi’s call in Luke and Mark, both in terms of language and chronological placement. Also, it is not uncommon for a person to be given a different name after an encounter with God. Abram became Abraham, Jacob became Israel, Simon became Peter, and Saul became Paul. It is likely that Matthew (meaning “gift of God”) was the name Jesus gave to Levi after his conversion.

Tax collectors were absolutely despised by their own culture because they worked for the Roman government and enriched themselves by collecting taxes from their own people—often dishonestly collecting excessive amounts (see Luke 19:8). It is likely that Matthew was well-to-do, since Luke says that Levi hosted “a great banquet for Jesus” with “a large crowd” in attendance (Luke 5:29).

Tax collectors such as Matthew were seen by the religious elite as very sinful people, so sinful that even spending time with them could immediately tarnish a good person’s reputation (Matthew 9:10–11). When Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, with many other tax collectors and sinners present, the Pharisees questioned the disciples about Jesus’ choice of companions. Jesus’ response is one of the clearest explanations of God’s heart and His gospel to man: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. . . . I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:12–13). Jesus came to save not the “good,” self-righteous people, but those who knew they were not good—the people who admitted freely that they needed salvation (cf. Matthew 5:3).

It is impossible to save a person who claims not to need saving. Many of Jesus’ followers were from the poor, the rejected, the sick, the sinful, the weary (Matthew 11:28). He never condemned those people; He forgave them and encouraged them. Jesus’ harshest condemnations were to the Pharisees, the teachers of the Law, and the scribes who thought themselves good, worthy, and better than the “tax collectors and sinners” around them (Matthew 9:10; 23:13–15).

Matthew was one of the tax collectors whom Jesus saved. When called by Jesus, Matthew immediately left his tax collection booth and followed the Lord (Matthew 9:9). He left behind the source of his riches; he left his position of security and comfort for traveling, hardship, and eventual martyrdom; he left his old life for a new life with Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

## READ IT

**Matthew 9:9–13.**

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<sup>18</sup> Excerpt taken from Got Questions: “Who was Matthew in the Bible?” Found at: [www.gotquestions.org/Matthew-in-the-Bible](http://www.gotquestions.org/Matthew-in-the-Bible)

## OPEN IT

1. What was your first job? What motivated you to start working?

## APPLY IT

2. What parts of Matthew's story sound like part of your story? A sinful past? Social rejection? A swift conversion? Leaving your past behind? Celebrating your salvation?
3. How did Matthew's outlook on money seem to change after he followed Jesus? How has your outlook on money changed after you decided to follow Jesus?

### ***The Self-righteous Need the Gospel Too***

Jesus' desire to enjoy fellowship with the unclean defied the religious leaders' way of understanding purity. Here was a religious man who socialized with the irreligious. "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Matt. 9:11) This was not a request for clarification; it was a criticism. Much is revealed about the nature of Jesus' mission in his rebuke to the Pharisees. The eternal Son of God is not impressed with their self-righteousness, nor does he congratulate their self-promoting deeds. Pharisees were content to judge the sin they saw in others. Jesus' instruction to "go and learn" (v. 13) is a call to understand God's desire to show loving kindness (Hos. 6:6).

Lest we be quick to judge the Pharisees, we should remember that our own self-righteousness separates us from God, too. The irony is that the Pharisees' mistake can quickly become ours, as we consider ourselves better than the Pharisees and look down on them. By God's grace we need to see ourselves in light of his radiant holiness—sinful beyond hope, except for his saving grace.<sup>19</sup>

- 4. What can help us remember our great need for the gracious gospel of Jesus? Do any verses about this come to mind?**

### ***Who Needs to Hear How Much Jesus Changed You?***

Who might hear the gospel more clearly because they heard from you, in your house, in the context of your story? Who might relate to your unique weaknesses, sins, and failures? Throw a party for them, put your past on display, and invite them to walk with you out of slavery and death and into the kind of happiness they will never find in money, or sex, or entertainment, or family, or work. Invite them to follow you as you follow Christ.

If we have left our life of sin to follow Christ, we are free from our past, never to be defined or constrained by it again. But we never completely leave it behind, because God says something uniquely stunning about himself through our past — our tax collecting, our fits of anger, our quiet jealousy and envy, our drunken self-pity, our sexual immorality, our self-righteous morality (or whatever you were freed from).

Someone you know — someone struggling with the same sins you once committed against God — needs to hear what God has done for you.<sup>20</sup>

- 5. It might sound intimidating, but what could a Matthew-style feast to introduce others to Jesus look like in your context?**

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<sup>19</sup> Segal, Marshall. Don't Check Your Baggage: Why We Never Leave Our Past Behind. August 16, 2017. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/dont-check-your-baggage>

<sup>20</sup> Furman, Gloria. ESV Women's Study Bible, Follow Me. Crossway. 2020.

6. What is one sentence about your salvation transformation that you could share with someone this week?



## INTRODUCTION

Bartholomew is listed as one of the twelve disciples of Jesus in each of the four references to the group (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13). In the Gospel of John, however, he is always referred to as Nathanael (John 1:45–49; 21:2). Bartholomew is a Hebrew surname meaning “son of Tolmai.” So Nathanael is the son of Tolmai, or Nathanael Bar-Tolmei.

In each of the listings of the disciples, the names of Philip and Bartholomew are linked, which could mean they were good friends or even related. What we know about Bartholomew/Nathanael comes primarily from the account of his call by Jesus (John 1:45–49). After Jesus called Philip to follow Him, Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (verse 45). This would seem to indicate Philip and Nathanael were students of the Law and the Prophets and that Philip recognized from their study that Jesus was the Messiah they had been waiting for.

The next verse gives us true insight into the character of Bartholomew. When Jesus saw him coming, He said, “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.” The Greek word for “false” means “deceitful, crafty, or full of guile.” Jesus knew Nathanael’s heart, just as He knows what is in every heart. Jesus’ assessment of Bartholomew was that he was a “true” son of Abraham, that is, a man who worshiped the true and living God without any of the deceit or hypocrisy that characterized the religious leaders of that day.

What follows is a declaration of Jesus’ divine nature and power. Bartholomew/Nathanael asked Jesus how He knew him, and Jesus replied, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you” (John 1:48). Jesus wasn’t present when Philip called Nathanael, yet He had seen and heard their conversation, evidence of His omniscience. He knew not only Nathanael’s words but his heart and sincere character as well. Nathanael (Bartholomew) saw the attributes of divine omniscience and the ability to discern hearts in the Man who stood before him. Nathanael’s familiarity with Old Testament prophecies caused him to recognize Jesus for who He was, the promised Messiah, Son of God and King of Israel (verse 49).<sup>21</sup>

## READ IT

**John 1:43-51**

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<sup>21</sup> Excerpt taken from Got Questions: “Who was Bartholomew in the Bible?”  
Found at: [www.gotquestions.org/Bartholomew-in-the-Bible](http://www.gotquestions.org/Bartholomew-in-the-Bible)



## OPEN IT

1. **Where is your favorite place to “get away from it all” and relax?**

## APPLY IT

We don't know much about Nathanael, but we can tell from his call as a disciple that the Scriptures mattered to him a great deal. It's interesting that when his friend Philip came to tell him about this Jesus, he didn't say, "I found a man who has a wonderful plan for your life." He didn't say, 'I found a man who will fix your marriage and your personal problems and give your life meaning.' He didn't appeal to Nathaniel on the basis of how Jesus might make Nathanael's life better. Philip spoke of Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, because he knew that would pique Nathanael's interest. Nathanael, as an eager student of the Old Testament, was already a seeker after divine truth."<sup>22</sup>

2. **What is your favorite story from the Old Testament that alludes to or points your attention to Jesus?**

3. **What role has Scripture played in your own discipleship journey with Jesus?**

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<sup>22</sup> MacArthur, John. Twelve Ordinary Men. Thomas Nelson, 2002. p. 137.

*Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"*

"This is not a reference to his physical descent from Abraham. Jesus was not talking about genetics. He was linking Nathanael's status as a true Israelite to the fact that he was without deceit. His guilelessness is what defined him as a true Israelite. For the most part, the Israelites of Jesus' day were not real, because they were hypocrites. There were phonies. They lived life with a veneer of spirituality, but it was not real, and therefore they were not genuine spiritual children of Abraham. Nathanael, however, was real." <sup>23</sup>

**4. What might characterize "phony Christianity" today?**

**5. If someone were to be characterized as a "Christian indeed" today, what would that mean? What would be some markers or indicators of genuine Christian discipleship?**

*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."*

"If one simple statement about the fig tree was enough to convince Nathanael that this was the Son of God and the King of Israel, he had not seen anything yet. From here on out, everything he would see would enrich and enlarge his faith." <sup>24</sup>

**6. How has Jesus continued to enrich and enlarge your faith since you initially started following Him?**

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<sup>23</sup> MacArthur. p. 143.

<sup>24</sup> MacArthur. p. 147.

“He was pure-hearted from the beginning. Certainly, he was human. He had sinful faults. His mind was tainted by a degree of prejudice. But his heart was not poisoned by deceit. He was no hypocrite. His love for God, and his desire to see the Messiah, were genuine. His heart was sincere and without guile.” <sup>25</sup>

7. **What do you think it says about discipleship that Nathanael was a standup guy and yet was called to follow Christ personally and in greater ways? How does this example move discipleship beyond simple moralism?**

“That’s all we know about Nathanael from Scripture. Early church records suggest that he ministered in Persia and India and took the gospel as far as Armenia. There is no reliable record of how he died. One tradition says he was tied up in a sack and cast into the sea. Another tradition says he was crucified. By all accounts, he was martyred like all the apostles except John.

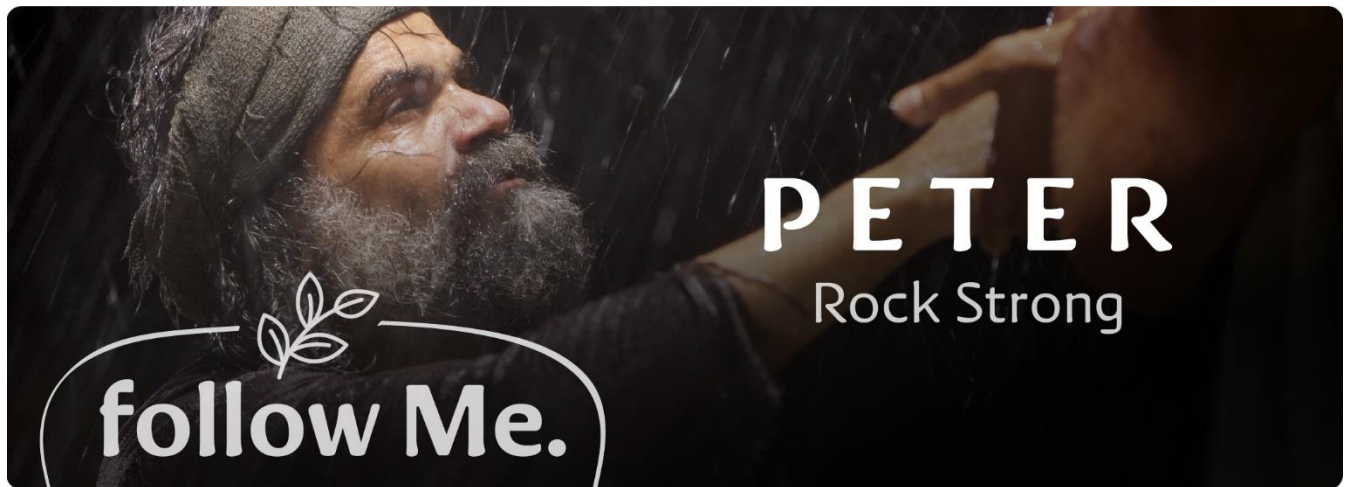
**What we do know is that Nathanael was faithful to the end** because he was faithful from the start. Everything he experienced with Christ and whatever he experienced after the birth of the New Testament church ultimately only made his faith stronger. And Nathanael, like the other apostles, stands as proof that God can take the most common people, from the most insignificant places, and use them to His glory.” <sup>26</sup>

8. **We don’t know much about Nathanael beyond his faithfulness to follow Christ to his last breath. What does faithfulness look like for you in your current season of life?**

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<sup>25</sup> MacArthur. p. 142-143.

<sup>26</sup> MacArthur. p. 148.



## INTRODUCTION

Simon Peter, also known as Cephas (John 1:42), was one of the first followers of Jesus Christ. He was an outspoken and ardent disciple, one of Jesus' closest friends, an apostle, and a "pillar" of the church (Galatians 2:9). Peter was enthusiastic, strong-willed, impulsive, and, at times, brash. But for all his strengths, Peter had several failings in his life. Still, the Lord who chose him continued to mold him into exactly who He intended Peter to be.

Simon was originally from Bethsaida (John 1:44) and lived in Capernaum (Mark 1:29), both cities on the coast of the Sea of Galilee. He was married (1 Corinthians 9:5), and he and James and John were partners in a profitable fishing business (Luke 5:10). Simon met Jesus through his brother Andrew, who had followed Jesus after hearing John the Baptist proclaim that Jesus was the Lamb of God (John 1:35-36). Andrew immediately went to find his brother to bring him to Jesus. Upon meeting Simon, Jesus gave him a new name: Cephas (Aramaic) or Peter (Greek), which means "rock" (John 1:40-42). Later, Jesus officially called Peter to follow Him, producing a miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:1-7). Immediately, Peter left everything behind to follow the Lord (verse 11).

For the next three years, Peter lived as a disciple of the Lord Jesus. Being a natural-born leader, Peter became the de facto spokesman for the Twelve (Matthew 15:15, 18:21, 19:27; Mark 11:21; Luke 8:45, 12:41; John 6:68, 13:6-9, 36). More significantly, it was Peter who first confessed Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," a truth which Jesus said was divinely revealed to Peter (Matthew 16:16-17).

Later in life, Peter spent time with John Mark (1 Peter 5:13), who wrote the gospel of Mark based on Peter's remembrances of his time with Jesus. Peter wrote two inspired epistles, 1 and 2 Peter, between A.D. 60 and 68. Jesus said that Peter would die a martyr's death (John 21:18-19)—a prophecy fulfilled, presumably, during Nero's reign. Tradition has it that Peter was crucified upside down in Rome, and, although such the story may be true, there is no scriptural or historical witness to the particulars of Peter's death.<sup>27</sup>

## READ IT

**Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 5:4-8; John 13:36-38; John 21:15-19**

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<sup>27</sup> Excerpt and commentary below taken from Got Questions: "Who was Peter in the Bible?" Found at: [www.gotquestions.org/life-Peter.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/life-Peter.html)

## OPEN IT

1. Peter is generally known as the “open mouth, insert foot” or “ready, fire, aim” guy. Do you have a humorous illustration of a time you fell into this category?

## APPLY IT

2. Based on the bio above, what do you find to be most surprising about Peter’s rise to prominence among the 12?

In several instances, Peter showed himself to be impetuous to the point of rashness. For example, it was Peter who left the boat to walk on the water to Jesus (Matthew 14:28-29)—and promptly took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink (verse 30). It was Peter who took Jesus aside to rebuke Him for speaking of His death (Matthew 16:22)—and was swiftly corrected by the Lord (verse 23). It was Peter who suggested erecting three tabernacles to honor Moses, Elijah, and Jesus (Matthew 17:4)—and fell to the ground in fearful silence at God’s glory (verses 5-6). It was Peter who drew his sword and attacked the servant of the high priest (John 18:10)—and was immediately told to sheath his weapon (verse 11). It was Peter who boasted that he would never forsake the Lord, even if everyone else did (Matthew 26:33)—and later denied three times that he even knew the Lord (verses 70-74).<sup>28</sup>

3. How is brashness like Peter’s a double-edged sword for followers of Jesus?

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<sup>28</sup> Got Questions: “Who was Peter in the Bible?”

**4. How should we be like Peter in the above illustrations and how should we not be like him?**

Even as an apostle, Peter experienced some growing pains. At first, he had resisted taking the gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile. However, when he saw the Romans receive the Holy Spirit in the same manner he had, Peter concluded that “God does not show favoritism” (Acts 10:34). After that, Peter strongly defended the Gentiles’ position as believers and was adamant that they did not need to conform to Jewish law (Acts 15:7-11).<sup>29</sup>

**5. Read the account of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10. How can this interaction help believers today think about and have a heart for those who do not yet know Jesus? What does it say about connecting with people who are not like us?**

While Peter defended Gentiles as believers, he was not always consistent. Another episode of growth in Peter’s life concerns his visit to Antioch, where he enjoyed the fellowship of Gentile believers. However, when some legalistic Jews arrived in Antioch, Peter, to appease them, withdrew from the Gentile Christians. The Apostle Paul saw this as hypocrisy and called it such to Peter’s face (Galatians 2:11-14).<sup>30</sup>

**6. What does Peter’s lapse and subsequent repentance in the above episode say to us today about the possibility of error and our needed response?**

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<sup>29</sup> Got Questions: “Who was Peter in the Bible?”

<sup>30</sup> Got Questions: “Who was Peter in the Bible?”

Jesus uses unlikely heroes. Peter was a fisherman from Galilee, but Jesus called him to be a fisher of men (Luke 5:10). Because Peter was willing to leave all he had to follow Jesus, God used him in great ways. As Peter preached, people were amazed at his boldness because he was “unschooled” and “ordinary.” But then they took note that Peter “had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Being with Jesus makes all the difference.<sup>31</sup>

**7. How does Peter’s unlikeliness encourage you as a believer today? How does it challenge you?**

**8. If “being with Jesus makes all the difference”, what is one thing you can put into practice to be with him more?**

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<sup>31</sup> Got Questions: “Who was Peter in the Bible?”

This study was compiled and questions were written by Kevin O’Brien—[www.villagebible.church/smallgroup](http://www.villagebible.church/smallgroup)



## INTRODUCTION

The disciple named Philip was, along with Peter and Andrew, from Bethsaida in Galilee (John 1:44; 12:21). Jesus called Philip, who had been a disciple of John the Baptist's (John 1:43), and then Philip went and found Nathanael and told him about Jesus. Nathanael also became Jesus' disciple. The Bible does not contain much biographical detail about Philip or any of the other disciples, but John records several times when Philip spoke to Jesus.

Philip's first recorded act as a disciple of Jesus was to go and tell his friend Nathanael. Later, Philip was approached by some Gentiles, more specifically, Greeks from Bethsaida who asked Philip to introduce them to Jesus (John 12:20–22). Philip was the disciple who calculated the amount of money it would take to feed the 5,000 (John 6:7). After the Last Supper, Philip requested that Jesus show them the Father, leading to Jesus' statement, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:8–9). The last time the Bible mentions the disciple Philip is as one of those gathered in Jerusalem to pray after the Lord's ascension (Acts 1:13). Tradition states that Philip went to Phrygia (in modern-day Turkey) as a missionary and was martyred there in Hierapolis.<sup>32</sup>

## READ IT

**Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; John 1:43–44; John 1:45–46; John 6:5–7; John 12:20–22; John 14:8–11; and Acts 1:13.**

## OPEN IT

1. If you could ask Jesus one question, what would it be and why?

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<sup>32</sup> Excerpt taken from Got Questions: "Who was Philip in the Bible?" Found at: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Philip-in-the-Bible.html>



## APPLY IT

2. Reflecting on Philip's interactions with Jesus and his actions as a disciple that are listed above, what can we learn about the value of curiosity, seeking understanding, and sharing our faith with others?

*"Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward 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 worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little."  
- John 6:57*

3. In this story of the feeding of the 5,000, how does Philip's initial response to Jesus' question demonstrate his practical mindset? How can we balance our practical thinking with trust in God's ability to do the impossible?

*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." - John 1:43-46*

- 4. When Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael to follow Him, what can we learn from Philip's eagerness to share his discovery of the Messiah with Nathanael? How does this inspire us to share our faith with others?**

*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'?" - John 14:8-9*

- 5. In John 14:8-9, Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father. How does Jesus' response clarify the relationship between Himself and God?**

6. What does this exchange show us about how to seek knowledge and understanding in our faith? What are some attributes that Philip models for us in this?
7. What's something you are currently working on growing in your knowledge and understanding in your relationship with Christ? What are you doing to grow in that area?



## INTRODUCTION

The Gospels give us their names but not much more: James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas son of James. Many scholars think of them as the outer ring of the disciples, “Group C”. If Peter, James, John and Andrew were the inner circle, Philip, Matthew, Thomas, and Bartholomew the next, then these three, always grouped together, along with Judas Iscariot are always last. One of them is given two entirely different names depending on the list. How is that for a record? Always last, never known, always connected to the betrayer. It’s enough to give one a complex.

James the son of Alphaeus, sometimes known as James the Less, is always listed in 9<sup>th</sup> position in the lists of the apostles in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Many scholars believe this means he was some kind of leader of the third group in the 12. However, other than his name in the lists of Apostles, there is no other mention of James. The Father of Levi (Matthew) is listed as Alphaeus in Mark 2:14 leading some to speculate that they may have been brothers, but this is a guess at best. If James the less (or younger) in Mark 15:40 is the same James, he had a brother named Joses and his mother Mary was at the crucifixion of Jesus. In John 19:25, we read that Mary the wife of Clopas was at the crucifixion too. If this is the same Mary, could it be that James was a cousin of Jesus? We don’t know. The accounts of his martyrdom are late and inconsistent. Some have him stoned in Jerusalem, which seems to confuse him with James the brother of Jesus, and others state that he was crucified. There is a very late tradition (9<sup>th</sup> century) that says he brought the Gospel to Spain, but this is doubtful. The one thing that we can say for certain is that James the son of Alphaeus was obscure.

We do not know much more about Simon the Zealot than we do James. In some ways we know less. There is no mention of family at all. No information that could shed light on any broader connections to Jesus. Nothing except that he was a zealot. While the word could simply mean he was zealous, by the time of Jesus it was particularly associated with a specific political group—the Zealots. Most of our information about them comes from the Jewish historian Josephus. He calls them the “fourth sect” (the others being the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes) who were completely committed to the violent overthrow of Rome. In Acts 5:37 the Jewish leader Gamaliel refers to “Judas the Galilean” whom Josephus identifies as the founder of the movement. Judas’s rebellion was crushed but the Zealots didn’t die out. Many were no better than terrorists and one subset, the Sicarii, would assassinate Roman officials and sympathizers (including tax collectors) with easily concealed, short, curved daggers, then fade into the crowd. Later, the Zealots were highly involved in the Jewish revolt that led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. It is unclear how Simon died, various traditions have him traveling to Persia, Armenia, and even as far as Britain. Several have him being crucified. In any case, from the very beginning through to the upper room and the selection of the replacement for Judas Iscariot, Simon was included in the 12. He might seem an obstinate and unlikely candidate for apostleship, yet Jesus chose him and sent him into the world as his witness.

Thaddeus. Judas son of James. Judas not Iscariot. Jerome, a fourth century biblical scholar, called him “trinomious”—the man with three names. Sean McDowell, in his doctoral dissertation, notes that “There is early textual evidence that ‘Lebbaeus’ should replace the name ‘Thaddaeus.’ Some Greek manuscripts even combine the

two forms of the text: ‘Thaddaeus who was called Lebbaeus’ or ‘Lebbaeus who was called ‘Thaddaeus.’”<sup>33</sup> John MacArthur, in *12 Ordinary Men*, notes that Thaddeus means “breast child” and Labbaeus means “heart child”. His conclusion is that both are nicknames, perhaps identifying him as the youngest child, and likely refer to a tender, childlike heart.<sup>34</sup> The placement of Thaddeus in Matthew and Mark’s lists of the 12 make it virtually certain that they refer to the same person Luke identifies as Judas son of James both in his gospel and in Acts. Unlike James and Simon, we do have one brief but insightful interaction between Judas and Jesus in John 14 during the Upper Room Discourse. As for what happened after Pentecost, church tradition is split with accounts of Judas traveling to various places around the middle east. In some accounts he is martyred and in others he dies peacefully. The fact that Jesus’ half-brother, who wrote the book of Jude, shares his name makes untangling the accounts even more difficult. In any case, as we will see, he is clearly an apostle concerned for others.

## READ IT

**Matthew 10:2-4**

**Mark 3:16-19**

**Luke 6:12-16**

**John 14:18-26**

**Acts 1:13**

## OPEN IT

1. Does the thought of working in obscurity for most of your life sound depressing or just about right? Why?

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<sup>33</sup> Sean McDowell, “A Historical Evaluation of the Evidence for the Death of the Apostles as Martyrs for Their Faith,” PhD Diss., (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014) 376.

[https://repository.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/4857/McDowell\\_sbts\\_0207D\\_10221.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://repository.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/4857/McDowell_sbts_0207D_10221.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>34</sup> John MacArthur, *12 Ordinary Men*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002) 178.

## APPLY IT

2. Based on the short biographies above, it is clear that we don't know a whole lot about these disciples, yet all were among the 12 selected and sent out by Jesus. What does their relative obscurity teach us about the roles we may be asked to play?

All three of these disciples were regularly connected with Judas Iscariot. It is likely when they were sent out, they went in pairs. In Matthew and Mark's list Simon the Zealot would have been paired with Judas. Luke connects him with Judas, son of James.<sup>35</sup>

3. How do you think being associated with the traitor might have affected them?

4. How can we be unfairly judged for our own actions today?

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<sup>35</sup> Study notes written by Kevin O'Brien.

Simon was probably a political rebel, quite possibly a part of a group that were one part religious conservative, one part patriot, and one part terrorist. Yet he joined Jesus' band, believing him to be the Messiah, and putting away his violent tendencies—even counting a Roman collaborator (Matthew) as a close companion and fellow worker.<sup>36</sup>

- 5. What does Simon's example tell us about the need to put aside our own, sometimes obstinate, beliefs and proclivities on behalf of Jesus and his Kingdom?**

Judas, son of James, is the only one of these three with a recorded conversation with Jesus. Read John 14:18-26 and notice both the heart of Jesus' message and the heart of Judas.<sup>37</sup>

- 6. How would you summarize both of their hearts?**

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



## INTRODUCTION

Thomas. Doubting Thomas. That's how we know him. One of the 12, but he was the guy who wasn't there. The one who didn't believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead until he saw. But what else do we know about Thomas? What else do the Scriptures say?

The possibly surprising answer is “not much.” Matthew, Mark and Luke only give Thomas' name. Interestingly, while the lists change in order a bit and some of the names seem different, three groups of four disciples emerge. Peter is always named first, Philip is always fifth, and James the Son of Alphaeus is always ninth. Thomas is always in the second group, seemingly led by Philip, and is usually listed next to Matthew. John gives us a better sense of the man in three key passages as well as by his presence at Peter's restoration in chapter 21. He also provides us with a bit of personal information: both John 11:16 and 20:24 indicate that Thomas had a nickname—Didymus—which meant “twin.”

While many are familiar with Thomas' doubt about Jesus' resurrection because he was not with the other ten remaining disciples on Easter Sunday in the upper room, we often forget that he appears in two other incidents surrounding the approach to Jerusalem before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. In John 11, Jesus and the disciples had left Jerusalem because of the danger presented by the authorities. When Jesus decided to go to Bethany (just outside of Jerusalem) because Lazarus had died, Thomas says “let's go die too” (Jn. 11:6). In John 14, during Jesus' upper room discourse after the Last Supper, Jesus says he is going away to prepare a place for them (14:1-5). It is Thomas who says “We don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (14:6), prompting Jesus' famous response “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” in verse 6.

Church tradition and apocryphal writings indicate that after Pentecost, Thomas traveled east, evangelizing several places. The stories are not all consistent, but they include Parthia and Persia (which include much of modern-day Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan) and all say that Thomas went to India. The southwestern state of Kerala in modern India is known to have had a Jewish colony in the first century. It is believed by modern St. Thomas Christians that Thomas visited them to preach Jesus, and Christian churches were born from that ministry. To this day, many Indian Christians from several denominations trace their roots to the churches he set up.<sup>38</sup>

## READ IT

**John 11:1-16—the raising of Lazarus**

**John 14:1-7—the Way to the Father**

**John 20:19-29—Jesus appears to the 12**

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<sup>38</sup> Written by Kevin O'Brien.



## OPEN IT

1. Have you ever felt pigeon-holed or judged for one particular incident in your life? How has that experience affected you?

## APPLY IT

2. From the biography section, what stands out or surprises you?

Read John 11:1-16 which relates the background information to the raising of Lazarus. Pay attention to the flow of events and who says what. Keep in mind the events of chapter 10. Jesus had been asked if he was the Messiah at the festival of Dedication in verse 24. They did not like his answer and were going to stone him. Jesus retreated from Jerusalem, going across the Jordan at least a day's journey and possibly as many as three (verses 40-42). All of this is occurring only a matter of weeks before Jesus is crucified. Clearly the tensions are very high.<sup>39</sup>

3. Given the background and the events leading up to the raising of Lazarus, what is your take on Lazarus' mindset and commitment to Jesus? How does this story connect to or modify your understanding of "doubting" Thomas?

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<sup>39</sup> Study notes written by Kevin O'Brien.

Read John 14:1-7. This event takes place in the upper room, the night that Jesus was betrayed. Tensions have been building throughout the week, no doubt carrying over to the gathering this night. Jesus has already washed their feet (vv.1-20) and the Last Supper has taken place, Judas' betrayal has been predicted (v. 26), the new command to love one another has been given (vv.31-35), and Peter's denials have been proclaimed. After all of this, Jesus begins "Don't let your hearts be troubled . . ." (v.1)<sup>40</sup>

4. **Do you think that Thomas was alone in his question or was he simply the one who asked it? What do you think his asking says about him as a person? Given the circumstances, how does this episode modify your view of Thomas?**

Read John 20:19-31. Here we find the event that gives Thomas his famous nickname. The trauma of Jesus' crucifixion is fresh. All of the disciples except John had scattered and abandoned Jesus. Now they have come back together in both fear and hope because of the testimony of Mary and Peter. Still, they are no doubt confused and hurting.<sup>41</sup>

5. **How is Thomas' response in verse 25 different from the responses of the other disciples in verses 19-20?**

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<sup>40</sup> Study notes written by Kevin O'Brien

<sup>41</sup> Study notes written by Kevin O'Brien

6. What does Thomas' turnaround say about his character?

7. How is Thomas an example for us today?