

31 DAY DEVOTIONAL

BY REV. DR. DAVID KIM

DISCIPLE

LIKE JESUS

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Devotion Booklet

31 Days of Meditation on 12 Disciples of Jesus

By Rev. Dr. David Kim

Adapted from Daily Readings for a Deeper Faith: DRAWING NEAR written from John MacArthur



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Day 1

THE MASTER'S MEN

"These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him." (Matt. 10:2-4).



God uses unqualified people to accomplish His purposes.

We live in a qualification-conscious society. Almost everything you do requires you to meet someone else's standards. You must qualify to purchase a home, buy a car, get a credit card, or attend college. In the job market, the most difficult jobs require people with the highest possible qualifications.

Ironically, God uses unqualified people to accomplish the world's most important task: advancing the Kingdom of God. It has always been that way. Adam and Eve plunged the human race into sin. Lot got drunk and committed incest with his own daughters. Abraham doubted God and committed adultery. Jacob deceived his father. Moses was a murderer. David was too, as well as an adulterer. Jonah got upset when God showed mercy to Nineveh. Elijah withstood 850 false priests and prophets, yet fled in terror from one woman—Jezebel. Paul (Saul) murdered Christians. And the list goes on and on.

The fact is, no one is fully qualified to do God's work. That's why He uses unqualified people. Perhaps that truth is most clearly illustrated in the twelve disciples, who had numerous human frailties, different temperaments, different skills, and diverse backgrounds, and yet Christ used them to change the world.

This month you will meet the disciples one by one. As you do, I want you to see that they were common men with a very uncommon calling. I also want you to observe the training process Jesus put them through, because it serves as a pattern for our discipleship as well.

I pray that you will be challenged by their strengths and encouraged by the way God used them despite their weaknesses and failures. He will use you too as you continue yielding your life to Him.

Suggestions for Prayer: Memorize Luke 6:40. Ask God to make you more like Christ.

For Further Study: Read **2 Timothy 1:3-5**, noting the weaknesses Timothy may have struggled with, and how Paul encouraged him. How might Paul's words apply to you?

"Having summoned His twelve disciples..." (Matt. 10:1).



A good example is the best form of teaching.

Matthew 10:1 is Christ's official commissioning of the twelve men He handpicked to serve beside Him during His earthly ministry. Mark 3:13 says He *"summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him."* In John 15:16 He tells them, *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit."* This is not their call to salvation but to service. With the exception of Judas, they were already saved. Before the foundation of the world God chose them to be redeemed in Christ, and they had responded accordingly. Now Jesus was calling them to a specific ministry.

God always chooses those who will be saved and serve within His church. But between salvation and service there must be a time of training. For the disciples it was a period of three years in which Jesus Himself trained them as they experienced life together from day to day. That's the best form of discipleship. Classrooms and lectures are helpful, but there's no substitute for having a living pattern to follow—someone who models Christian virtue and shows you how to apply Biblical principles to your life.

Paul understood the importance of such an example. In Philippians 4:9 he says, *"The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things."* He said to Timothy, *"Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe"* (1 Tim. 4:12). Peter followed suit, admonishing the church elders not to lord their authority over those in their charge but to be godly examples (1 Peter 5:3).

Whether you've been a Christian for many years or just a short time, you are an example to someone. People hear what you say and observe how you live. They look for a glimpse of Christ in your life. What do they see? How would they do spiritually if they followed your example perfectly?

Suggestions for Prayer: Thank the Lord for those who are examples of godliness to you.

For Further Study: What do the following verses indicate about your salvation? John 15:16; Romans 8:28; Ephesians 1:4; and 2 Thessalonians 2:13. According to Ephesians 2:10, why were you saved?

"Having summoned His twelve disciples..." (Matt. 10:1).



Jesus can overcome any inadequacy you might have.

Most people think of the disciples as stained-glass saints who didn't have to struggle with the faults and frailties of normal people. But they had inadequacies just like we all do. Seeing how Jesus dealt with them gives us hope that He can use us too. One inadequacy common to all the disciples was their lack of understanding. For example, Luke 18 tells us that Jesus gave them details about His future suffering, death, and resurrection, but they didn't understand anything He said (vv. 31-34). Jesus overcame their lack of understanding by constantly teaching them until they got it right.

Another inadequacy was their lack of humility. More than once they argued among themselves about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven (e.g., Mark 9:33-37). Jesus dealt with their lack of humility by His own example. He likened Himself to a servant, and even washed their dirty feet (John 13).

In addition to their lack of understanding and humility, they also lacked faith. Jesus often said to them, "O men of little faith." In Mark 16:14 He rebuked them for not even believing the reports of His resurrection. They also lacked commitment. Just prior to Christ's death Judas betrayed Him, Peter denied Him, and the others deserted Him. Jesus dealt with their lack of commitment by praying for them (e.g., Luke 22:31-32; John 17:15).

Finally, they lacked spiritual power, which Christ overcame by giving them the Holy Spirit. Those are significant inadequacies, but despite all that, the book of Acts tells us that the disciples turned the world upside-down with their powerful preaching and miraculous deeds. They were so much like Christ that people started calling them Christians, which means "little christs."

Jesus still transforms inadequacies into victories. He does it through the Spirit, the Word, and prayer. Don't be victimized by your inadequacies. Make those spiritual resources the continual focus of your life.

Suggestions for Prayer: Thank the Lord for your inadequacies because they help you realize your dependence on Him. Ask for grace always to rely on your spiritual resources rather than your human abilities.

For Further Study: Read Matthew 20:20-28. Who spoke to Jesus on behalf of James and John? What was His response? How did the other disciples respond? What was Jesus' concluding principle?

Day 4

CHOSEN TO BE SENT

"Having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these..." (Matt. 10:1-2).



Every disciple must also be a discipler.

Have you ever met someone who constantly absorbs what the church has to offer, yet never seems to plug into a ministry where he can give to others? I've met many people like that. Some have attended church for many years, and have even taken evangelism and other special training classes. But they never quite feel qualified to minister to others or even to share their testimony. Eventually that has a crippling effect on their spiritual lives and on the life of the church in general.

When Jesus called the disciples to Himself, He did so in order to train them for ministry. We see this in Matthew 10:1-2. The Greek word translated "disciples" means "learners." "Apostles" translates a Greek word meaning "to dispatch away from" or "to send." In classical Greek it refers to a naval expedition dispatched to serve a foreign city or country. Disciples are learners; apostles are emissaries. Jesus called untrained disciples, but He dispatched trained apostles. That's the normal training process.

In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus says, "Go... and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." Paul said to Timothy, *"The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also"* (2 Tim. 2:2).

As wonderful and important as it is to learn of Christ, you must never be content to be a disciple only. You must also be a discipler!

Suggestions for Prayer: Memorize Matthew 28:18-20. If you aren't currently discipling someone, ask the Lord for an opportunity to do so.

For Further Study: An important part of discipleship is spending time with Christ. One way to do that is to read through the Gospels on a regular basis. You might want to obtain a harmony of the Gospels to help in your study. Tell a friend of your plan so he or she can encourage you and hold you accountable.

Day 5

THE PRIORITY OF SPIRITUAL UNITY

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (Matt 10:2-4).



Unity in the Spirit is the key to a church's overall effectiveness.

Unity is a crucial element in the life of the church-especially among its leadership. A unified church can accomplish great things for Christ, but disunity can cripple or destroy it. Even the most orthodox churches aren't immune to disunity's subtle attack because it often arises from personality clashes or pride rather than doctrinal issues.

God often brings together in congregations and ministry teams people of vastly different backgrounds and temperaments. That mix produces a variety of skills and ministries, but it also produces the potential for disunity and strife. That was certainly true of the disciples, which, included an impetuous fisherman (Peter), two passionate and ambitious "sons of thunder" (James and John), an analytical, pragmatic, and pessimistic man (Philip), a racially prejudiced man (Bartholomew), a despised tax collector (Matthew), a political Zealot (Simon), and a traitor (Judas, who was in it only for the money and eventually sold out for thirty pieces of silver).

Imagine the potential for disaster in a group like that! Yet their common purpose transcended their individual differences, and by His grace the Lord accomplished through them what they never could have accomplished on their own. That's the power of spiritual unity!

As a Christian, you're part of a select team that is accomplishing the world's greatest task: finishing the work Jesus began. That requires unity of purpose and effort. Satan will try to sow seeds of discord, but you must do everything possible to heed Paul's admonition to be "of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose" (Phil. 2:2).

Suggestions for Prayer: Pray daily for unity among the leaders and congregation of your church.

For Further Study: Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-9, noting how Paul addressed the issue of disunity in the Corinthian church.

Day 6

Gaining Spiritual Stability (Peter)

The twelve apostles included "Simon, who is called Peter" (Matt. 10:2).



Jesus can make an impulsive and vacillating Christian as stable as a rock.

The first disciple Matthew's Gospel names is "Simon, who is called Peter." He was a fisherman by trade, but Jesus called him to be a fisher of men. John 1:40-42 records their first encounter: "One of the two who heard John [the Baptist] speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He found first his own brother Simon, and... brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, 'You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas' (which translated means Peter)."

"Peter" means "stone." "Cephas" is its Aramaic equivalent. By nature Simon tended to be impulsive and vacillating. Apparently Jesus named him Peter as a reminder of his future role in the church, which would require spiritual strength and stability. Whenever Peter acted like a man of strength, Jesus called him by his new name. When he sinned, Jesus called him by his old name (e.g., John 21:15-17). In the Gospel of John, Peter is called "Simon Peter" seventeen times. Perhaps John knew Peter so well, he realized he was always drifting somewhere between sinful Simon and spiritual Peter.

For the next few days we will see how Jesus worked with Peter to transform him into a true spiritual rock. It was an amazing transformation, but not unlike what He desires to do in every believer's life.

You might not have the same personality as Peter, but the Lord wants you to be a spiritual rock just the same. Peter himself wrote, "You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). That occurs as you "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Make that your continual aim.

Suggestions for Prayer: List the areas of your Christian walk that are inconsistent or vacillating. Make them a matter of earnest prayer, asking God for wisdom and grace as you begin to strengthen them.

For Further Study: First Peter was written to Christians in danger of severe persecution. Read that epistle, noting the keys to spiritual stability that Peter gives.

Day 7

Building a leader: the Right Raw Material (Peter)

The twelve apostles included "Simon, who is called Peter" (Matt. 10:2).



God can use your natural abilities as a basis for your spiritual service.

Peter is a good illustration of how God builds a spiritual leader. He begins with a person's natural traits and works from there. Natural traits alone don't make a spiritual leader; the person must also be gifted and called by the Holy Spirit to lead in the church and to be a model of spiritual virtue. But often God endows future leaders with natural abilities that constitute the raw materials from which He builds spiritual ministries. That was certainly the case with Peter, who demonstrated the leadership qualities of inquisitiveness, initiative, and involvement.

Peter was always asking questions. In fact, the Gospel records show that he asked more questions than all the other disciples combined! People who aren't inquisitive don't make good leaders because they're not concerned about problems and solutions.

Initiative was another indicator of Peter's leadership potential. He not only asked questions, but also he was often the first to respond when Jesus asked questions (e.g., Matt 16:15-16; Luke 8:45).

Also, Peter loved to be in the middle of the action, even when it got him into trouble. For example, we might criticize his lack of faith when he sank after walking on water, but remember, the rest of the disciples never even got out of the boat.

Peter was inquisitive, showed initiative, and sought to be involved. How about you? Are you inquisitive about God's truth? Do you take the initiative to learn about Him? Do you want to be involved in what He is doing? If so, you have the raw material for spiritual leadership. Continue to cultivate those qualities, allowing the Spirit to use you for God's glory.

Suggestions for Prayer: Pray for your spiritual leaders. Ask God for opportunities to lead others in the way of righteousness. Use every opportunity to its fullest.

For Further Study: Read the following verses, noting the kinds of questions Peter asked: Matthew 15:15; 18:21; 19:27; Mark 13:2-4; John 21:20-22.

The twelve apostles included "Simon, who is called Peter" (Matt 10:2).



Your present experiences contribute to your future leadership ability.

Stan Carder is a dear brother in Christ and one of the pastors on our church staff. Before coming to Grace Church he pastored a church in Montana. While there, he was riding one night in a truck that was involved in a very serious accident. Stan suffered a broken neck and other major injuries. As a result he underwent months of arduous and painful therapy.

That was one of the most difficult periods in Stan's life, and yet God used it for a specific purpose. Today, as pastor of our special-ministries department, Stan ministers to more than five hundred physically and mentally handicapped people. God needed a man with unique qualifications to show love to a group of very special people. He chose Stan and allowed him the necessary experiences to fit him for the task.

God doesn't always permit such serious situations, but He does lead each of us into life-changing experiences that heighten our effectiveness in ministry.

Peter had many such experiences. In Matthew 16:15-16, for example, God gave him special revelation about the deity of Christ. In Acts 10 God sent him to preach the gospel to Gentiles—something unheard of at the time because Jewish people resisted any interaction with Gentiles. Perhaps the most tragic experience of Peter's life was his denial of Christ. But even that only increased his love for Christ and his appreciation of God's grace. After His resurrection, Christ forgave him and restored him to ministry (John 21:15-19).

Peter's many experiences helped prepare him for the key role he was to play in the early church. Similarly, your experiences help prepare you for future ministry. So seek to discern God's hand in your circumstances, and rejoice at the prospect of becoming a more effective Christian.

Suggestions for Prayer: Thank God for both the good and bad experiences you have, knowing that each of them is important to your spiritual growth (cf. James 1:2-4).

For Further Study: Read Acts 10, noting what Peter learned from his experience. What vision did Peter have? What was the point of the vision?

Day 9

Building a leader: The Right Lessons (Peter)

The twelve apostles included "Simon, who is called Peter" (Matt. 10:2).



Peter learned five lessons that every believer must also learn.

We have seen that God uses our experiences to mold us into more effective Christians and leaders. Using Peter as our example, let's briefly look at five lessons we can learn from our experiences—submission, restraint, humility, sacrifice, and love.

Leaders tend to be confident and aggressive, so they must learn to submit to authority. Jesus illustrated that by telling Peter to go fishing and to look for a coin in the mouth of the first fish he caught (Matt 17:24-27). He was to use that coin to pay their taxes. Peter was a citizen of God's Kingdom, but he needed an object lesson in submitting to governmental authorities.

When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Peter grabbed a sword and would have fought the entire group if Jesus hadn't restrained him. Peter needed to learn to entrust His life to the Father, just as Christ was doing.

Peter bragged that he would never leave or forsake Christ—but he did. Perhaps humility was the most painful lesson he had to learn. Jesus told Peter that he would die as a martyr (John 21:18-19). From that day forward Peter knew his life was on the line, and yet he was willing to make the necessary sacrifice and minister anyway.

Leaders tend to be task-oriented and often are insensitive to people. Peter was that way, so Jesus demonstrated love by washing his feet and by instructing him to do loving deeds for others (John 13:6-9,34).

Submission, restraint, humility, sacrifice, and love should be characteristic of every believer—no matter what role he or she has within the Body of Christ. I pray they are characteristic of your life, and that you will constantly seek to grow in those graces as God continues His work in you.

Suggestions for Prayer: Spiritual lessons are sometimes painful to learn, but God is patient and gracious. Thank Him for His patience, and thank Him also for Christ, who is the perfect example of what we should be.

For Further Study: Peter learned his lessons well. Read 1 Peter 2:13-18, 21-23; 4:8,16; and 5:5. What can you learn from Peter's instructions on submission, restraint, love, sacrifice, and humility?

Day 10

Building a Leader: The Right Results (Peter)

The twelve apostles included "Simon, who is called Peter (Matt. 10:2).



God knows how to get results.

God makes leaders by taking people with the right raw material, putting them through the right experiences, and teaching them the right lessons. That's how He trained Peter, and the results were astonishing. In the first twelve chapters of Acts we see Peter initiating the move to replace Judas with Matthias, preaching powerfully on the Day of Pentecost, healing a lame man, standing up to the Jewish authorities, confronting Ananias and Sapphira, dealing with Simon the magician, healing Aeneas, raising Dorcas from the dead, and taking the gospel to the Gentiles. In addition, he wrote two epistles that pass on to us all the lessons he learned from Jesus. What a leader!

Peter was as much a model of spiritual leadership in death as he was in life. Jesus told him he would be crucified for God's glory, and early church tradition tells us that Peter was in fact crucified. But before putting him to death, his executioners forced him to watch the crucifixion of his wife. As he stood at the foot of her cross, he encouraging her by saying over and over, "Remember the Lord, remember the Lord." When it was time for his own crucifixion, he requested that he be crucified upside-down because he felt unworthy to die as his Lord had died. His request was granted.

Just as God transformed Peter from a brash and impulsive fisherman into a powerful instrument for His glory, so He can transform everyone who is yielded to Him.

You will never be an apostle, but you can have the same depth of character and can know the same joy of serving Christ that Peter knew. There's no higher calling in the world than to be an instrument of God's grace. Peter was faithful to that calling. May you be a faithful tool!

Suggestions for Prayer: Praise God for the assurance that He will perfect the work He has begun in you (Phil. 1:6). Ask Him to use the experiences you have today as instruments that shape you more into the image of Christ.

For Further Study: Read John 21:18-23. How did Jesus describe Peter's death? What was Peter's reaction to Christ's announcement? What misunderstanding was generated by their conversation?

The twelve apostles included "Andrew" (Matt. 10:2).



Leading others to Christ should be a top priority in your life.

Andrew was Peter's brother and a native of Bethsaida of Galilee. From the very start we see him leading people to Christ—beginning with his own brother.

The Gospel of John records his first encounter with Jesus: "John [the Baptist] was standing, and two of his disciples [Andrew and John], and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.... One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He found first his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated means Christ). He brought him to Jesus" (John 1:35-37, 40-42). Later Jesus called both Andrew and Peter to become His disciples, and they immediately left their fishing nets to follow Him (Matt 4:20).

Our next glimpse of Andrew is in John 6:8-9. It was late in the day, and thousands of people who were following Jesus were beginning to get hungry, but there wasn't enough food to feed them. Then Andrew brought to Jesus a young boy with five barley loaves and two fish. From that small lunch Jesus created enough food to feed the entire crowd!

Andrew also appears in John 12:20-22, which tells of some Greeks who were traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast. They came to Philip and requested to see Jesus. Philip took them to Andrew, who apparently took them to Jesus.

Andrew didn't always know how Jesus would deal with a particular person or situation, but he kept right on bringing them to Him anyway. That's a characteristic every believer should have. Your spiritual gifts might differ from others, but your common goal is to make disciples (Matt 28:19-20), and that begins with leading sinners to Christ. Make that your priority today!

Suggestions for Prayer: When was the last time you told an unbeliever about Jesus? Pray for an opportunity to do so soon.

For Further Study: Do you know how to present the gospel clearly and accurately? As a review read Romans 3:19-28, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, Ephesians 2:8-10, and Titus 3:4-7.

The twelve apostles included "Andrew" (Matt. 10:2).



Andrew is a picture of all believers who humbly minister behind the scenes.

It's been said that no one likes playing second fiddle, but that wasn't Andrew's perspective at all. Growing up in the shadow of an aggressive, outspoken brother like Peter would be a challenge for anyone. Even in the Biblical record Andrew is known as "Simon Peter's brother" (e.g., John 1:40). Yet when Andrew met Jesus, his first response was to tell Peter, knowing full well that once Peter became a disciple he probably would run the group. But Andrew was a truly humble man who was more concerned about bringing people to Christ than about who was in charge.

Andrew's faith and openness prompted him to take advantage of every opportunity to lead others to Christ. He knew that the Lord's primary mission was to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:6), but he led Gentiles as well as Jewish people to Christ (John 12:20-22). He had seen Jesus change water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11), so he knew Jesus could do much with very little. That must have been on his mind when he brought the boy with five barley loaves and two fish to Jesus, knowing it would take a miracle to feed the huge crowd with such a small offering (John 6:8-9).

Tradition tells us that just prior to his death, Andrew preached in a province in which the governor's wife heard the gospel and was saved. The governor demanded that she reject Christ, but she refused. In anger he had Andrew crucified on an X-shaped cross, on which Andrew hung for two days before dying. Even then his courage didn't fail. He preached the gospel from that cross-still trying to bring others to Christ.

Andrew symbolizes all those humble, faithful, and courageous Christians who labor behind the scenes. They're the backbone of every ministry and the ones on whom every leader depends. You might never be a prominent leader like Peter, but you can be a faithful, courageous servant like Andrew.

Suggestions for Prayer: Thank the Lord for all the humble, faithful servants in your church. Ask Him to teach you greater openness and courage so you can serve Him more effectively.

For Further Study: Read Philippians 2:25-30, noting how Epaphroditus ministered to Paul.

Day 13

Being Zealous For the Lord (James, Son of Zebedee)

The twelve apostles included "James the son of Zebedee" (Matt. 10:2).



God can use overzealous and ambitious people for His glory.

Like Peter and Andrew, James and John were fishermen. One day as Jesus walked the shores of the Sea of Galilee, He saw them in a boat with their father Zebedee and some hired servants. When Jesus called them to follow Him, they immediately left the boat and went with Him (Mark 1:19-20).

James and John were zealous and ambitious men—so much so that Jesus nicknamed them "Boanerges," which means, "Sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). At times their great zeal got the better of them. In Luke 9:54, for example, after a Samaritan village had rejected some of the disciples, James and John asked Jesus for permission to call down fire from Heaven to incinerate the whole village! On another occasion they sent their mother to ask Jesus to give them the most prominent places in His Kingdom (Matt 20:20-28). They wanted power, prestige, and honor, but Jesus promised them suffering and, in James's case, a martyr's grave.

James was probably the eldest of the two brothers. His name is listed first whenever their names appear together in Scripture. Perhaps he was also the most zealous and passionate of the two, since he was the first apostle to be martyred. When King Herod decided to persecute the early church, he had James put to death with a sword (Acts 12:2). When he saw how much that pleased the Jewish people, he had Peter arrested but didn't kill him. Apparently James was a bigger threat than Peter. That tells us something about the powerful ministry he must have had.

Like James and John, some Christians have a zeal that prompts them to run ahead of the Holy Spirit. If that's true of you, be thankful for your zeal, but also be careful to allow the Spirit to govern what you do and say. However, if you've slipped into spiritual complacency and your life isn't much of a threat to Satan's kingdom, you need to repent and become more zealous for the Lord!

Suggestions for Prayer: Ask God to give you a holy zeal that's motivated by love and governed by His Spirit.

For Further Study: Read John 2:12-22. How did Jesus demonstrate His zeal for God's house? Why were His actions necessary?

Day 14

Tempering Zeal with Sensitivity (James, Son of Zebedee)

The twelve apostles included "James the son of Zebedee" (Matt. 10:2).



Zeal without sensitivity can destroy your life and ministry.

There's the story of a Norwegian pastor whose motto was "All or nothing!" His life and preaching were stern, strong, powerful, uncompromising, and utterly insensitive. Reportedly the people in his church didn't care much for him because he didn't care much for them. In his zeal and ambition to advance the Kingdom and uphold God's standard, he neglected everything else—including his own family. One day his little daughter became so ill, the doctor warned him that if he didn't move her out of the cold Norwegian air to a warmer climate she would die. He refused, telling the doctor, "All or nothing!" Soon his little girl died. His wife was so grief-stricken she would sit for hours holding her daughter's garments close to her heart trying somehow to ease her pain.

When the pastor saw what his wife was doing, he gave the clothes to a poor woman in the street. All that remained was a little bonnet, which his wife had hidden so she would have some reminder of her precious daughter. When the pastor found it, he gave that away too, lecturing his wife on giving "all or nothing." Within a few months she too died—of grief. Now that's an extreme example of insensitive zeal, and yet there are many pastors, evangelists, and other Christian workers who are so zealous for the Lord and so task-oriented, they don't see the pain their own families and congregations are suffering.

James could have been like that if he hadn't yielded his life to Christ. He began as a zealous and insensitive disciple, but God refined his character and used him in a marvelous way. Examine your own ministries and motives. Are you sensitive to your family and the people with whom you serve? Zeal can be a wonderful quality, but it must be tempered with love and sensitivity.

Suggestions for Prayer: If you have been insensitive to those around you, confess that to them, and ask the Lord to give you a greater sensitivity from now on.

For Further Study: Eli the priest was negligent and insensitive to his family. Read 1 Samuel 3:1-4:18. What did the Lord tell Samuel concerning Eli? What was the outcome of Israel's battles with the Philistines? How did Eli and his sons' die?

The twelve apostles included "John " (Matt. 10:2).



Seek to maintain a proper balance between truth and love.

Some people picture John as overly sentimental and egotistical, lying with his head on Jesus' shoulder and constantly referring to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." But that's not an accurate characterization of this "Son of thunder"! He loved Jesus deeply and was amazed that Jesus loved him-especially after he wanted to burn up the Samaritans and then secure a prominent place for himself in Christ's Kingdom. Calling himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (e.g., John 21:20) was simply his way of marveling over God's grace in his life.

As much as he loved Jesus, John never allowed his love to deteriorate into mere sentimentalism. In fact, the proper balance between truth and love is the Hallmark of his ministry. In his writings we find the word *love* more than eighty times and *witness* nearly seventy times. His profound love for Christ compelled him to be a teacher of love and a witness to the truth. To him, obedience to the truth was the highest expression of love. As 1 John 2:5 says, "Whoever keeps [God's] word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected."

John's greatest joy was to know that his spiritual children were "walking in the truth" (3 John 4). He firmly denounced anyone who attempted to divert them from that goal by denying or distorting God's Word.

Today media talk shows and other influences have blurred the lines between opinion and truth. One man's opinion is purported to be as good as the next, and mere's little talk about what's right or wrong.

Truth suffers even within the church, because many Christians are willing to compromise it to avoid upsetting people. They forget that true love flourishes only in the atmosphere of Biblical truth (Phil. 1:9).

Amid such confusion, God calls you to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). The world doesn't need another opinion—it needs God's absolute and authoritative Word!

Suggestions for Prayer: Thank God for the gift of His love and the power of His truth. Ask Him to make you a person of ever-increasing Biblical integrity.

For Further Study: Read Revelation 2:1-7. What strengths did the church at Ephesus have? What did it lack? What did Jesus require of it?

The twelve apostles included "Philip" (Matt. 10:3).



Friendships can provide the most fertile soil for evangelism.

Philip was probably a fisherman who was acquainted with Peter, Andrew, James, John, Nathanael, and Thomas prior to them all becoming disciples. We first meet him in John 1:43-46, which says, "The next day [after Jesus encountered Peter and Andrew], He purposed to go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip, and Jesus said to him, 'Follow Me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of 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.... Come and see.'"

Those brief verses reveal two things about Philip. First he had a seeking heart. Apparently he and Nathanael had studied the Scriptures in anticipation of the Messiah's coming. When Jesus said, "Follow Me," Philip was ready. Jeremiah 29:13 describes such a person: "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."

Second, he had the heart of an evangelist. The first thing he did after his own conversion was to lead Nathanael to Christ. Imagine his joy as he told his friend about the One for whom they had searched so long! I believe friendships usually provide the best context for evangelism because you're introducing Christ into an already established relationship of love, trust, and mutual respect. After all, it's only natural to share the joy of your salvation with someone you love.

I pray that your joy overflows to those around you and that they are drawn to Christ because of your testimony.

Suggestions for Prayer: Do you have unsaved friends? If so, be faithful in praying for their salvation and asking the Lord to use you as an instrument of His grace. If not ask the Lord to bring unsaved people into your life so you can tell them about Christ.

For Further Study: The Samaritan woman Jesus met at Jacob's well spoke of Him not only to her friends but also to the entire city. Read John 4:1-42. What analogy did Jesus use in presenting the gospel to her? How did Jesus describe true worshipers? What was the reaction of the city people to the woman's testimony?

The twelve apostles included "Philip" (Matt. 10:3).



Pessimism will blind you to the sufficiency of God's resources.

It's been said that an optimist sees a glass half full, while a pessimist sees it half empty. An optimist sees opportunities; a pessimist sees obstacles. In one sense Philip was an optimist. He recognized Jesus as the Messiah and immediately saw an opportunity to share his discovery with Nathanael. In another sense, Philip was a pessimist because on occasions he failed to see what Christ could accomplish despite the apparent obstacles.

On one such occasion Jesus had just finished teaching and healing a crowd of thousands of people. Night was falling, and the people were beginning to get hungry. Apparently Philip was responsible for the food, so Jesus asked him, "Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?" (John 6:5). Philip said, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for every one to receive a little" (v. 7). In other words, "We don't have enough resources in our whole savings account to buy enough food for a group this size!" Philip's calculating, pragmatic pessimistic mind could reach only one conclusion: this is an utter impossibility.

Jesus knew all along how He was going to solve the problem, but He wanted to test Philip's faith (v. 6). Philip should have passed the test because he had already seen Jesus create wine from water at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11). Despite Philip's failure, Jesus didn't give up on him. Instead, from five barley loaves and two fish He created enough food to feed the entire crowd, thus replacing Philip's pessimism with a reaffirmation of divine sufficiency.

There's a little of Philip in each of us. We've experienced God's saving power and have seen Him answer prayer, and yet there are times when we let pessimism rob us of the joy of seeing Him work through obstacles in our lives. Don't let that happen to you. Keep your eyes on Christ, and trust in His sufficiency. He will never fail you!

Suggestions for Prayer: Memorize Ephesians 3:20-21. Recite it often as a hymn of praise and an affirmation of your faith in God.

For Further Study: Read Numbers 13-14.4 What kind of report did the pessimistic spies bring back from the Promised Land? How did the people react to their report? How did God react to their report?

The twelve apostles included "Bartholomew [Nathanael]" (Matt 10:3).



Prejudice can destroy relationships and prevent people from coming to Christ.

Prejudice is an uncalled-for generalization based on feelings of superiority. It is an ugly sin that has fueled hatred and conflicts for centuries, dividing entire nations and bringing untold misery. But prejudice is most damning when it blinds people to God's Word. The prophet Jonah was so prejudiced against the Assyrians, he refused to go to Nineveh to preach to them. Even after God convinced him to obey, he wanted to die because the people of Nineveh had repented and God had spared them.

Prejudice also reared its ugly head in Nathanael, whose last name was Bartholomew (meaning "son of Tolmai"). John 1:45-46 says, "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.' And Nathanael said to him, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?'" Nathanael was a student of the Word and was looking for the Messiah, but he couldn't understand how the Messiah could come from Nazareth.

Nazareth lay on the fringes of the Jewish world—the last stop before Gentile territory. Perhaps the people of Cana, Nathanael's hometown, were more refined and educated than the people of Nazareth. Whatever the cause, Nathanael's perspective seemed to be that nothing but trouble could come out of Nazareth.

Prejudice has blinded many people to the gospel. The Jewish religious leaders rejected Jesus because He didn't fit their idea of a Messiah, wasn't from Jerusalem, and wasn't trained in their synagogues. Fortunately, Nathanael's desire for truth overpowered his prejudice, and he came to Jesus.

Perhaps you have family or friends who are resisting the gospel because of prejudice. If so, don't be discouraged, and don't give up! Jesus broke through Nathanael's prejudice and redeemed him, and He has done the same for millions of others.

Suggestions for Prayer: Pray for those you know who are blinded by prejudice, asking God to open their spiritual eyes to His truth. Confess any prejudice you might have in your own heart.

For Further Study: Practicing unity and humility is the best way to overcome prejudice within the Body of Christ. Read Ephesians 4:1-6 and Philippians 2:1-8. What attitudes did Paul encourage? Discourage? Whose example of humble service on behalf of others are we to follow?

The twelve apostles included "Bartholomew [Nathanael]" (Matt 10:3).



God knows your heart and will honor your search for truth.

Despite Nathanael's prejudice, Jesus knew he was an honest, sincere Jewish believer in whom there was no religious hypocrisy or deceit (John 1:47). He truly sought after God and looked forward to the Messiah's coming. Most of the Jewish people of Jesus' day believed that every circumcised descendant of Abraham was a true Jew and a beneficiary of the Abrahamic Covenant. But in Romans 2:28-29, Paul explains that salvation is an issue of the heart, not of national origin: "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart." Nathanael was such a man.

He was shocked when Jesus described him as "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile" (John 1:47) because they had never met before. He was equally shocked when Jesus said He saw him under a fig tree because Jesus was nowhere near that tree. Nathanael immediately realized that Jesus was omniscient-He knew everything! That's why he exclaimed, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel" (v. 49). He had found the Messiah for whom he had searched so long!

The Lord's mention of the fig tree is significant. In that region fig trees were commonly used as a source of shade and outdoor shelter. Many of the houses in Palestine had only one room, so fig trees became a place to be alone for prayer and meditation on the Scriptures. Quite possibly Nathanael was under the fig tree searching the Scriptures and communing with God when Jesus saw his open heart and his desire to find the Messiah. Jesus personally answered Nathanael's prayer.

When Jesus looks into your heart, does He see a true believer in whom there is no hypocrisy? Nathanael wasn't perfect, but he loved God and was a diligent student of the Word. And the Lord did great things through him. I pray that is true of you as well.

Suggestions for Prayer: Ask the Spirit to reveal and deal with any hypocrisy you might be harboring. Ask God to increase your desire and capacity to know and love Him.

For Further Study: Memorize Romans 12:1-2 as a defense against hypocrisy.

The twelve apostles included "Thomas" (Matt 10:3).



The follower of Christ will have an intense desire to be in Christ's presence.

When you think of Thomas, you probably think of a doubter. But if you look beyond his doubt, you'll see he was characterized by something that should mark every true believer—an intense desire to be with Christ. John 10:39-40 tells us Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem because of threats on Jesus' life. While they were staying near the Jordan River, Jesus received word that His dear friend Lazarus was sick. He delayed going to Lazarus because He didn't want merely to heal him, but to raise him from the dead.

Lazarus lived in Bethany—just two miles east of Jerusalem. So when Jesus decided to go there, His disciples were deeply concerned, thinking it would surely be a suicide mission (John 11:8). Despite the danger, Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (v. 16). That's a pessimistic attitude, but it also shows his courage and his desire to be with Christ whether in life or death. An optimist would expect the best, making it easier to go. Thomas expected the worst but was willing to go anyway.

I believe Thomas couldn't bear the thought of living without Christ. He would rather die with Him than live without Him. That's also evident in John 14, where Jesus told the disciples He was going away to prepare a place for them. Thomas responded by saying in effect "Lord, we don't know where you're going or how to get there. Please don't go somewhere we can't go!" (v. 5). He didn't understand what Jesus was going to do. All he knew was that he didn't want to be separated from his Lord.

Can you identify with Thomas? Is Christ such an integral part of your daily decisions and activities that life without Him is unthinkable? Do you love Him so much you long to see Him? That was Thomas's passion. May it be yours as well.

Suggestions for Prayer: Thank the Lord for His presence and power in your life. Demonstrate your love for Him by communing with Him often.

For Further Study: Read John 14:1-31. What did Jesus say about His return? Who would comfort and instruct the disciples in Christ's absence?

The twelve apostles included 'Thomas' (Matt. 10:3).



Jesus can replace your doubts with hope.

When Jesus was crucified, Thomas was shattered. He loved Jesus deeply and wanted always to be with Him. He'd even been willing to die with Him, but now his greatest fear had been realized: Jesus was gone.

Thomas was not with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them after His resurrection. John 20:25 says, "The other disciples therefore were saying to [Thomas], 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.'" Thomas was emotionally spent and was unwilling to subject himself to any further pain. So he retreated behind a wall of empiricism, saying in effect, "I'm not going to believe this on your word alone. I need proof! I must see Jesus myself."

Because of that, people have labeled him "Doubting Thomas," but remember, none of the disciples believed the resurrection until Jesus appeared to them. Thomas wasn't a compulsive doubter—he was a loving pessimist.

As it turned out, Thomas didn't need as much proof as he thought. When Jesus finally appeared to him and invited him to touch His hands and side, Thomas didn't do either. Instead he immediately cried out "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28)—which is the greatest single confession of faith ever made.

Thomas struggled with doubt because he didn't understand what Jesus had said about His own death and resurrection, and he wasn't with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared to them. He failed to understand God's Word and forsook the company of believers—two common mistakes that can lead to doubt.

Jesus doesn't condemn you when you have doubts. Instead, He gives you His Spirit, His Word, and the fellowship of His people to encourage and strengthen you. So, commune with the Spirit in prayer, know the Word well, and never forsake the fellowship of believers. That's how to change your doubts into hope!

Suggestions for Prayer: Thank God for the presence of His Spirit, the power of His Word, and the fellowship of His people.

For Further Study: Read Luke 24:13-35. Why didn't the two disciples recognize Jesus? How did Jesus change their doubts to hope?

The twelve apostles included "Matthew the tax-gatherer" (Matt. 10:3).



God can use you despite your sinful past.

I remember reading a notice in a local newspaper announcing the opening of a new evangelical church in our community. It gave the date and time of the first services, then added, "Our special guest star will be..." and named a popular Christian celebrity. In its attempt to appeal to unbelievers or simply draw a large crowd, the church today commonly uses that kind of approach.

Jesus, however, used a different approach. None of His disciples were famous at all. In fact, rather than drawing a favorable crowd, some of them might have repelled or even incited anger and hatred among His Jewish audience. Matthew was such a man because he was a despised tax-gatherer—one of many Jewish men employed by Rome to collect taxes from his own people. As such he was regarded as a traitor by his own countrymen.

The Roman tax system allowed tax collectors to keep anything they collected in excess of what was owed to Rome. That encouraged bribes, extortion, and other abuses.

To compound the issue, Matthew was among those who had the prerogative of taxing almost anything they wanted to tax—roads, bridges, harbors, axles, donkeys, packages, letters, imports, exports, merchandise, and so on. Such men could accumulate enormous wealth for themselves. You might remember another tax-gatherer named Zaccheus, who is described in Luke 19:2 as a wealthy man. His salvation was evidenced by his offer to repay those he had defrauded fourfold (v. 8).

Some people think God can't use them because they're not famous or because of their past sins. But God has used Matthew, Zaccheus, and millions of others like them. Concentrate on your present purity, and let God bless your ministry as He sees fit.

Suggestions for Prayer: Thank God that he has made you a new person in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Minister in light of that reality!

For Further Study: Read Luke 19:1-10. Where was Zaccheus when Jesus first spoke to him? What was the reaction of the crowd when Jesus went to Zaccheus' house? What prompted Jesus to say that salvation had come to Zaccheus?

Day 23

Marveling at God's Forgiveness (Matthew)

The twelve apostles included "Matthew the tax-gatherer" (Matt. 10:3).



Never lose your sense of awe over Christ's forgiveness.

Matthew describes himself as "Matthew the tax-gatherer" (Matt 10:3). He is the only apostle whose name is associated here with an occupation. Apparently Matthew never forgot what he had been saved from and never lost his sense of awe and unworthiness over Christ's forgiveness.

Matthew 9:1-8, where he sets the scene of his own conversion, tells us Jesus forgave the sins of a paralytic man and then healed him of his paralysis. When the Jewish scribes accused Him of blasphemy for claiming to have the authority to forgive sins, He said to them, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, and walk?' He wanted them to know that His miracles testified to His deity. As God, He could as easily forgive sins as He could heal diseases.

Immediately after that account Matthew gave the account of his own call. It's as if he wanted his own salvation to serve as an illustration of Christ's ability to forgive even the vilest of sinners. Matthew 9:9 says, "As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man, called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, 'Follow Me!' And he rose, and followed Him."

When the Pharisees questioned Jesus' practice of associating with tax-gatherers, He said to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are ill.... I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (w. 12-13). The Pharisees were sick with sin but thought they were healthy. Matthew and his associates knew they were sinners who needed a Savior.

Do you share Matthew's humility and sense of awe at receiving Christ's precious gift of forgiveness? I pray that you do and that you are continually praising Him for it.

Suggestions for Prayer: Thank God for the wonder of forgiveness. If you have lost your sense of awe over God's forgiveness, perhaps you're taking His grace for granted. Confess your apathy, and ask Him to give you a deep appreciation for the enormous price He paid for your salvation.

For Further Study: As a reminder of what Christ endured for you, read Matthew 26:17-27:56, which chronicles the events of His betrayal and crucifixion.

Day 24

Saluting an Unknown Soldier (James, Son of Alphaeus)

The twelve apostles included "James the son of Alphaeus" (Matt. 10:3).



God often uses ordinary people to accomplish great things.

Like most Christians, James the son of Alphaeus is an unknown and unsung soldier of the cross. His distinguishing characteristic is obscurity. Nothing he did or said is recorded in Scripture—only his name.

In Mark 15:40 he is called "James the Less," which literally means "Little James." That could refer to his stature (he might have been short), his age (he might have been younger than James the son of Zebedee), or his influence (he might have had relatively little influence among the disciples).

In Mark 2:14 Matthew (Levi) is called "the son of Alphaeus." Alphaeus was a common name, but it's possible that James and Matthew were brothers, since their fathers had the same first name. Also, James's mother is mentioned in Mark 15:40 as being present at Christ's crucifixion, along with other women. She is referred to as the wife of Clopas in John 19:25. Since Clopas was a form of Alphaeus that further supports the possibility that James and Matthew were related.

From those references we might conclude that James was a small, young man whose personality was not particularly powerful. If he was Matthew's brother, perhaps he was as humble as Matthew, willing to serve the Lord without any applause or notice. Whichever the case, be encouraged that God uses obscure people like James and rewards them accordingly. Someday James will sit on a throne in Christ's millennial Kingdom, judging the twelve tribes of Israel—just like the other, more prominent disciples (Luke 22:30).

No matter how obscure or prominent you are from a human perspective, God can use you and will reward you with a glorious eternal inheritance.

Suggestions for Prayer: Thank the Lord for all those people unknown to you whom He has used to shape your life for His glory. Seek to be more like James, serving Christ faithfully without applause or glory.

For Further Study: Read Luke 9:23-25. What did Jesus say is necessary to be His disciple? Read Luke 9:57-62. What were those men unwilling to give up to follow Christ?

The twelve apostles included "Thaddaeus" (Matt. 10:3).



Victorious Christian living requires great courage.

Thaddaeus was a man of many identities. In the King James translation of Matthew 10:3 he is called "Lebbeus, whose surname was Thaddeus." He is also called "Judas the son of James" (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13) and "Judas (not Iscariot)" (John 14:22). Judas, which means "Jehovah leads," was probably the name given him at birth, with Thaddaeus and Lebbeus added later as nicknam to reflect his character. Apparently Thaddaeus was the nickname given to him by his family. It comes from a Hebrew root word that refers to the female breast. Basically it means a "breast-child." Perhaps Thaddaeus was the youngest child in the family or was especially dear to his mother. Lebbeus comes from a Hebrew root that means "heart" Literally it means a "heart-child" and speaks of someone who is courageous. That nickname was likely given him by his friends, who saw him as a man of boldness and courage.

Early church tradition tells us that Thaddaeus was tremendously gifted with the power of God to heal the sick. It is said that a certain Syrian king named Adgar was very ill and sent for Thaddaeus to come and heal him. On his way to the king, Thaddaeus reportedly healed hundreds of people throughout Syria. When he finally reached the king, he healed him and then preached Christ to him. As a result the king became a Christian. The country, however, was thrown into chaos, and a vengeful nephew of the king had Thaddaeus imprisoned, then beaten to death with a club. If that tradition is true, it confirms that Thaddaeus was a man of great courage.

It takes courage to die for Christ but it also takes courage to live for Him. That's why Paul said that God hasn't "given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). Each day trust in God's promises and rely on His Spirit. That's how you can face each new challenge with courage and confidence.

Suggestions for Prayer: Thank God for the courage He has given you in the past, and ask Him to help you face future spiritual battles without retreat or compromise.

For Further Study: Read Daniel 3:1-30. Why were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego punished by King Nebuchadnezzar? How did God honor their courage?

The twelve apostles included "Thaddaeus" (Matt. 10:3).



If you love Christ, you will receive His Word and obey it.

Radio signals are fascinating. At any given moment every room in your house is filled with voices, music, and numerous other sounds; yet you can't hear them unless your radio is tuned to their frequency. That's a modern parallel to a spiritual truth Jesus taught in John 14:21: "He who has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him." In effect Jesus was saying, I reveal Myself to those who love Me--those whose spiritual receivers are tuned to My frequency. They receive My Word and obey it."

In the Biblical record Thaddaeus is a man of few words. His question in John 14:22 is the only thing he ever said that is recorded in Scripture. It was prompted by his perplexity over Jesus' statement in verse 21 to disclose Himself only to those who love Him. Thaddaeus asked, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us, and not to the world?"

Thaddaeus didn't understand Christ's statement because it wasn't consistent with his concept of the Messiah. Like the other disciples, he expected Jesus imminently to vanquish Roman oppression, free God's people, and establish an earthly kingdom wherein He would sit on the throne of David, reigning as Lord and Savior. How could He do that without revealing who He was to everyone?

In verse 23 Jesus responds by reiterating that only those who love Him will be able to perceive Him, and they are the ones within whom He and the Father would dwell.

That brief conversation between the Lord and Thaddaeus addresses the very heart of Christianity. It isn't those who say they love God who are true believers, but those who receive Christ and obey His Word. As Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word" (v. 23).

Does obedience to the Word characterize your life? I pray it does. Remember, your obedience to Christ is the measure of your love for Him.

Suggestions for Prayer: Thank God for His Word, by which the Spirit instructs you and empowers you to live an obedient life.

For Further Study: Read John 8:31-47. To whom was Jesus speaking? Why were they seeking to kill Him? How did Jesus characterize the Devil?

Day 27

From Terrorism to Discipleship (Simon The Zealot)

The twelve apostles included "Simon the Zealot" (Matt. 10:4).



Even people of vastly different backgrounds can minister together for Christ.

During the time between the Old and New Testaments, a fiery revolutionary named Judas Maccabaeus led the Jewish people in a revolt against Greek influences on their nation and religion. The spirit of that movement was captured in this statement from the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees: "Be ye zealous for the law and give your lives for the covenant" (1 Maccabees 2:50). That group of politically-oriented, self-appointed guardians of Judaism later became known as the Zealots.

During the New Testament period, Zealots conducted terrorist activities against Rome to free Israel from Roman oppression, prompting Rome to destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and to slaughter people in 985 Galilean towns.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, the few remaining Zealots banded together under the leadership of a man named Eleazar. Their headquarters was at a retreat called Masada. When the Romans laid siege to Masada and the Zealots knew defeat was imminent, they chose to kill their own families and to commit suicide themselves rather than face death at the hands of the Romans. It was a tragedy of monumental proportions, but such was the depth of their fiery zeal for Judaism and their hatred for their political enemies.

Before coming to Christ Simon was a Zealot. Even as a believer, he must have retained much of his zeal, redirecting it in a godly direction. We can only imagine the passion with which he approached the ministry, having finally found a leader and cause transcending Judaism and political activism. It's amazing to realize that Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax-gatherer ministered together. Under normal circumstances Simon would have killed a traitor like Matthew. But Christ broke through their differences, taught them to love each other, and used them for His glory.

Perhaps you know believers who come from totally different backgrounds than yours. Do you have trouble getting along with any of them? If so, why? How can you begin to mend your differences? Be encouraged by the transformation Christ worked in Simon and Matthew, and follow their example.

Suggestions for Prayer: Pray for a spirit of unity in your church.

For Further Study: According to Romans 12:9-21, what attitudes should you have toward others?

The twelve apostles included "Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him"(Matt. 10:4)



God works all things together for His purposes.

At one time the little town of Kerioth was a relatively obscure Judean town, but all that changed when it produced the most hated man who ever lived--Judas Iscariot.

The first mention of Judas is here in Matthew's list of disciples. We have no record of his call, but we know Jesus did call him along with the others, and even gave him authority to minister in miraculous ways (Matt 10:1). His first name, Judas, is despised today, but it was a common name in the days of Christ. It is the Greek form of Judah—the land of God's people. Iscariot literally means, "a man from the town of Kerioth."

People commonly ask why Jesus would select such a man to be His disciple. Didn't He know how things would turn out? Yes, He did, and that's precisely why He chose him. The Old Testament said the Messiah would be betrayed by a familiar friend for thirty pieces of silver, and Jesus knew Judas was that man (John 17:12).

Some people feel sorry for Judas, thinking he was simply misguided or used as some kind of pawn in a supernatural drama over which he had no control. But Judas did what he did by choice. Repeatedly Jesus gave him chances to repent, but he refused. Finally Satan used him in a diabolical attempt to destroy Jesus and to thwart God's plan of salvation. The Devil's attempt failed, however, because God can use even a Judas to accomplish His purposes.

Undoubtedly there are people in your life who wish you harm. Don't be discouraged. They are as much a part of God's plan for you as those who treat you kindly. You must reach out to them just as Jesus reached out to Judas. God knows what He's doing. Trust Him, and rejoice as you see His purposes accomplished even through your enemies.

Suggestions for Prayer: Praise God for His sovereign control over every circumstance and for the promise that His purposes will never be thwarted.

For Further Study: Read Matthew 26:14-50 and 27:1-10. How did Jesus reveal that it was Judas who would betray Him? What reaction did Judas have when he heard that Jesus had been condemned?

Day 29

The Characteristics of Hypocrisy (Judas Iscariot)

The twelve apostles included "Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him" (Matt 10:4).



Hypocrisy is a spiritual cancer that can devastate lives and destroy ministries.

On a recent trip to New Zealand I learned that shearers there use specially trained, castrated male sheep to lead other sheep from holding areas into the slaughtering room. Those male sheep are appropriately called "Judas sheep." That illustrates the commonness with which we associate Judas with deception and death. Pretending to be a friend of Jesus, Judas betrayed him with a kiss and became for all time and eternity the epitome of hypocrisy.

Several characteristics of spiritual hypocrisy are clearly evident in Judas' life. First, hypocritical people often seem genuinely interested in a noble cause. Judas probably didn't want the Romans to rule over Israel, and he saw in Christ an opportunity to do something about it. He probably had the common misconception that Jesus was immediately going to establish His earthly Kingdom and put down Roman oppression.

Second, hypocritical people demonstrate an outward allegiance to Christ. Many of those who followed Jesus in the early stages of His ministry deserted Him along the way (John 6:66). Not Judas. He stayed to the end.

Third, hypocritical people can appear to be holy. When Jesus told the disciples that one of them would betray Him, none of them suspected Judas. Even after Jesus identified Judas as His betrayer, the other disciples still didn't understand (John 13:27-29). Judas must have put on a very convincing act!

Fourth, hypocritical people are self-centered. Judas didn't love Christ; he loved himself and joined the disciples to gain personal prosperity.

Finally, hypocritical people are deceivers. Judas was a pawn of Satan, whom Jesus described as "a liar, and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Is it any wonder that his whole life was one deception after another?

Judas was an unbeliever, but hypocrisy can also thrive in believers if its telltale signs are ignored. Guard your motives carefully, walk in the Spirit each day, and immediately confess even the slightest hint of hypocrisy.

Suggestions for Prayer: Ask God to purify your love for Him and to protect you from the subtle inroads of hypocrisy.

For Further Study: Read John 12:1-8. How did Mary demonstrate her love for Christ? What objection did Judas raise? 4 What was his motive?

Day 30

Learning From Judas (Judas Iscariot)

The twelve apostles included "Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him"(Matt10:4).



God can use even an apostate like Judas to teach us some important lessons.

Judas is history's greatest human tragedy. He had opportunities and privileges known only to the other disciples, but he turned from them to pursue a course of destruction. Yet even from his foolishness we can learn some important lessons.

Judas, for example, is the world's greatest example of lost opportunity. He ministered for three years with Jesus Himself but was content merely to associate with Him, never submitting to Him in saving faith. Millions of others have followed his example by hearing the gospel and associating with Christians, yet rejecting Christ. Tragically, like Judas, once death comes, they too are damned for all eternity.

Judas is also the world's greatest example of wasted privileges. He could have had the riches of an eternal inheritance but instead chose thirty pieces of silver. In that respect he is also the greatest illustration of the destructiveness and damnation greed can bring. He did an unthinkable thing, and yet he has many contemporary counterparts in those who place wealth and pleasure above godliness.

On the positive side, Judas is the world's greatest illustration of the forbearing, patient love of God. Knowing what Judas would do, Jesus tolerated him for three years. Beyond that, He constantly reached out to him and even called him "friend" after his kiss of betrayal (Matt 26:50).

If you've ever been betrayed by a friend, you know the pain it can bring. But the Lord's pain was compounded many times over because He knew ahead of time that He would be betrayed and because the consequences were so serious. Yet He endured the pain, because He loved Judas and knew that His own betrayal was a necessary part of the redemptive plan.

The sins that destroyed Judas are common sins that you must avoid at all costs! Use every opportunity and privilege God gives you, and never take advantage of His patience.

Suggestions for Prayer: Thank Jesus for the pain He endured at the hands of Judas. Pray that you will never cause Him such pain.

For Further Study: Read 1 Timothy 6:6-19. What perils await those who desire wealth? Rather than pursuing wealth, what should you pursue? What attitude should wealthy people have toward their money?

Day 31

Making Worthless Things Valuable

"The names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-gatherer; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him" (Matt. 10:2-4).



In Gods hands you can be a precious and effective instrument.

The story is told of a great concert violinist who wanted to prove a point, so he rented a music hall and announced that he would play a concert on a \$20,000 violin. On concert night the music hall was filled to capacity with music lovers anxious to hear such an expensive instrument played. The violinist stepped onto the stage, gave an exquisite performance, and received a thunderous standing ovation. When the applause subsided, he suddenly threw the violin to the ground, stomped it to pieces, and walked off the stage. The audience gasped then sat in stunned silence.

Within seconds the stage manager approached the microphone and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, to put you at ease, the violin that was just destroyed was a \$20 violin. The master will now return to play the remainder of his concert on the \$20,000 instrument." At the conclusion of his concert he received another standing ovation. Few people could tell the difference between the two violins. His point was obvious: it isn't the violin that makes the music is the violinist.

The disciples were like \$20 violins that Jesus transformed into priceless instruments for His glory. I trust that you have been encouraged to see how God used them despite their weakness, and I pray that you have been challenged by their strengths. You may not be dynamic like Peter or zealous like James and Simon, but you can be faithful like Andrew and courageous like Thaddaeus. Remember, God will take the raw material of your life and will expose you to the experiences and teachings that will shape you into the servant He wants you to be.

Trust Him to complete what He has begun in you, and commit each day to the goal of becoming a more qualified and effective disciple.

Suggestions for Prayer: Make a list of the character traits you most admire in the disciples. Ask the Lord to increase those traits in your own life.

For Further Study: Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17, noting Paul's perspective on his own calling.