

# Followed

Jesus uses ordinary people with diverse backgrounds in His work.

LUKE 5:4-11,27-32



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the lake of Gen-nes'-a-ret  
two ships standing by th  
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ship.

4 ¶ Now when he had left speaking

us world), and (4) those ruled (individuals who believ  
pel]. The kingdom of God is already present in at le  
senses (Matt. 12:28) but also still future (Matt. 6:1  
vv. 33-  
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the King (ruler), [2] the  
realm being ruled (this  
5:1-3 Gennesaret was an alternate name for the se  
lee, which is also called the sea of Tiberias (John  
The boat Jesus chose belonged to Simon Peter  
mother-in-law He had recently healed (Luke  
Jesus **sat down** in the boat; this was the normal p  
a teacher (see note at 4:19-21).  
5:4-7 In spite of the fact that his night labors had t  
less, at Jesus' command Peter responded in faith

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**How has time changed some of the people you knew in your childhood?  
What surprises you most about these changes?**

Social media makes it easier to reconnect with former classmates and childhood friends, but that may not lessen the surprise we experience. The person we thought to be the least likely to do a particular thing may now be doing the very thing we thought he or she would never do. We never know what life holds for a person or what God can do in time. Jesus called some unlikely people to be His followers, reminding us that God sees people differently than we do.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In Jesus' hometown of Nazareth, He met anger and rejection (Luke 4:16-30). In contrast, the people of Capernaum were more open to His message (4:31-44). Jesus healed people and exorcised demons but always kept His focus on His saving mission. His primary purpose was to preach the good news of the kingdom.

In light of His mission, Jesus began to call individuals to walk with Him. These followers, His disciples, would be with Him over the course of three years. They would learn at the feet of the Master. While they did not realize it at the time, they were being mentored to replicate His works after He returned to heaven. To encourage these first disciples, Jesus performed a miracle that demonstrated both His provision and His authority (5:4-7).

None of these men were perfect, yet they were willing to leave their comfort zones and surrender to the Savior. They were open to leaving their jobs as fishermen to become fishers of men (5:10). They were going to

be God's instruments to bring many to eternal life.

Between His call to the fishermen and His call to Levi the tax collector, Jesus healed a leper and dealt with questions about His authority and deity. Rather than avoiding the leper, Jesus reached out and healed him with a touch (5:12-16). His demonstration of love and compassion ran counter to the rigidity of the legalists. Later, He proved His divinity by forgiving another man's sins. When the leaders questioned His ability to do so, Jesus responded with a physical healing that validated His claims (5:17-26).

Jesus' call of Levi led to His interaction with the tax collector's allegedly "unclean" friends, creating another dispute with religious leaders. Jesus reminded them that God's love casts a wide net. His teaching, however, did not stop His enemies from attempting to discredit Him (5:33-39).

# LUKE 5:4-11,27-32

**4** When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into **deep water**<sup>A</sup> and let down your nets for a catch.” **5** “Master,” Simon replied, “we’ve worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I’ll let down the nets.” **6** When they did this, they caught a great number of fish, and their nets began to tear. **7** So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them; they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. **8** When **Simon Peter**<sup>B</sup> saw this, he fell at Jesus’s knees and said, “Go away from me, because I’m a sinful man, Lord!” **9** For he and all those with him were amazed at the catch of fish they had taken, **10** and so were James and John, Zebedee’s sons, who were Simon’s partners. “Don’t be afraid,” Jesus told Simon. “From now on you will be catching people.” **11** Then they brought the boats to land, left everything, and followed him. [...]

**27** After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, “Follow me.” **28** So, **leaving everything behind**<sup>C</sup>, he got up and began to follow him. **29** Then Levi hosted a grand **banquet**<sup>D</sup> for him at his house. Now there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others who were guests with them. **30** But the Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, “Why do you **eat and drink**<sup>E</sup> with **tax collectors and sinners**<sup>F</sup>?” **31** Jesus replied to them, “It is not those who are healthy who need a doctor, but those who are sick. **32** I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

## Passage Outline

Peter, James, and John  
(Luke 5:4-11)

Levi  
(Luke 5:27-28)

Sinners  
(Luke 5:29-32)

## Key Words

- A. At night fishermen fished the shallows, but the fish stayed in deeper, cooler water during the day.
- B. The introduction of the name “Peter” highlights the significance of this experience.
- C. Levi’s occupation was different, but his response was the same (v. 11). The implication was that this action was irreversible.
- D. Eating a meal with someone established a covenant relationship.
- E. The Pharisees were rigorous about separating clean from unclean. Eating and drinking with such outcasts implied a repulsive level of acceptance to them.
- F. Tax collectors are almost always paired with “sinners” in the Gospels—an indication of how much others looked down on them.

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

When the crowds around Jesus began to grow, He turned a lake into an outdoor amphitheater (Luke 5:1-4). After teaching the crowd from Peter's boat, Jesus directed the fisherman to take Him out into the *deep water*. It is interesting to note the confidence with which Jesus directed Peter and his associates. The Lord didn't just suggest the possibility of a windfall; He guaranteed a *catch*. If they would trust Him, they would see a result. The experienced fisherman understood this was not a fluke or stroke of luck. Peter had heard Jesus' teachings and had seen Him heal a member of his own family. But it was this display of divine intervention that moved Him to worship.

**Why is it important for a person to realize his or her sinfulness?**

**How does doing so open the door for God to work?**

Peter was not alone in His amazement. These fishermen could have had previous encounters with Jesus (John 1:29-42). But Luke emphasized the impact this particular fishing experience had on these future apostles.

**BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible dictionary.** Read articles about tax collectors in a Bible dictionary. Review Bible passages identified in the article, paying attention to the context of the passage. How would you describe the attitude of most people toward tax collectors in Jesus' day? How would you describe Jesus' attitude toward them?

If Jesus' selection of fishermen gave people a head tilt, one can only imagine how they responded to His calling of a *tax collector*. While fishermen didn't occupy the highest rung of the social ladder, they were miles ahead of tax collectors. Whatever his motivation, Levi left *everything behind*. His tax office was the equivalent of the boats and nets discarded by Peter, James, John, and Andrew. Plus, his tax business was likely a lucrative endeavor that earned a comfortable living. But holding to his old life was not an option when given this new opportunity.

**What are some things that might hold a person back from following Jesus? How does Jesus' invitation to follow Him remove those potential barriers?**

Jesus' words to the leaders were a condemnation of arrogance. Spiritually, the leaders were sicker than the so-called sinners who found healing through Jesus. But their pride would never drive them to the Great Physician.

**Who is more difficult to deal with, "sinners" (represented by the tax-collector) or the self-righteous (represented by the Pharisees)? Explain. How can self-righteousness get in the way of sharing the gospel with others?**

**KEY DOCTRINE: Evangelism and Missions** It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ (2 Tim. 4:5).

# APPLY THE TEXT

- A believer's past sinfulness does not disqualify him or her from being used by God.
- Jesus calls people to follow Him.
- Believers are to follow Jesus' example by going to those in need of His salvation.

**Discuss actions the Bible study group can take to be more open to all people.  
What needs to be implemented to make the group more accessible to lost people?**

**Who can you encourage in the faith this week with truths from this study?  
How can you help that person follow Jesus more closely?**

**Seek to memorize Luke 5:32 this week. Quote it every morning and then ask God to help you see people in need of Him through your day. How did God open doors for you to share Him with others this week?**

## Prayer Requests

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# DAILY EXPLORATION

## Day 1: Jesus always keeps His promises.

*Read Luke 5:4-7, considering Simon Peter's response.*

Fishermen worked at night when there was less activity on the water. Plus, fish were generally more active and came closer to the surface for food after the sun went down. The work of throwing out and pulling in nets was physically taxing. Peter and his co-workers had just finished a long and unproductive night of doing just that before allowing Jesus to use their boat. Now, Jesus was asking them to go back out in what may have been the least logical time of the day to fish. Even though they had *worked hard all night* and *caught nothing*, Peter agreed to follow Jesus' instructions. As promised, Peter and the other fishermen experienced the unbelievable—and unexplainable. The nets that had come up empty the night before now captured a *great number of fish*. In fact, the haul was so large that their nets *began to tear* under the strain of the weight. Realizing that they had more than they could handle alone, the people in Peter's boat called out to their partners for help. Even with the extra hands and hulls, they almost didn't make it back to land. The fish *filled both boats* to the point that the vessels *began to sink*. Jesus always keeps His promises. More times than not, He comes through with more than we could think or imagine. If Peter and his friends had been skeptical about Jesus' request before, that skepticism was removed beyond doubt.

**Would you view the dropping of the nets as an act of faith or testing?**

## Day 2: We must acknowledge our sinfulness.

*Read Luke 5:8, highlighting Simon Peter's response to Jesus fulfilling His promise.*

Peter demonstrated worship in two ways. First, he *fell at Jesus's knees*. This was a sign of humility and a display of honor for who Jesus is and what He had done. Some scholars also see a distinction in Peter's shift from "Master" in verse 5 to *Lord* in verse 8. By itself, bowing down was not necessarily an act of worship. However, Peter's confession left no doubt that he saw Jesus as more than just a teacher. The phrase *sinful man* indicates that Peter understood he was in the presence of someone worthy of worship.

**Why is it important for you to realize your sinfulness? How does doing so open the door for God to work in you?**

### Day 3: Jesus expects us to leave everything behind to follow Him.

*Read Luke 5:9-11, identifying the men's response to Jesus found in verse 11.*

Luke's focus was more on the call of Peter and the other fishermen than the great catch of fish. By acknowledging his limits, Peter found hope and purpose. Jesus' words involved more than encouragement; they came with a command. From that point forward, Peter and his associates would be pursuing a new call from God. Instead of catching fish, they would be focused on *catching people*. The great haul of fish was nothing compared to the number of people whose lives would be changed through the future ministries of these men. Once they landed their boats on the shore, they *left everything and followed him*. This kind of sacrifice and surrender is the expectation for anyone who chooses to be Jesus' disciple. (See Luke 9:23.) This would have represented an incredible move for these men. Mark pointed out that James and John's family had servants (Mark 1:20). This was an indication of wealth. While we do not know about the financial status of Andrew or Peter, we might assume their partnership was profitable—and more secure than following a traveling preacher. Still, they were convinced that sacrificing everything was a price worth paying. Therefore, they walked away from their fishing business and started a new adventure with Jesus.

**What has God asked you to lay aside to follow Him? Have you followed through on that? If not, what steps can you take today to make that a priority?**

### Day 4: Jesus' invitation to follow Him is extended to all.

*Read Luke 5:27-28, noticing again the command to leave everything behind.*

Tax collectors worked for the Roman government, which caused most Jews to despise them. Even worse, they often cheated people by charging more than the Romans required and pocketing the rest. Still, Jesus' encounter with a tax collector named *Levi* ended with an invitation to *follow me*. Capernaum was a customs station for the Romans, and Levi would have collected money from both local Jewish merchants and foreign caravans heading north toward Damascus. Since Jesus had drawn crowds in Capernaum, it's possible that Levi might have seen Him or heard Him teach. Jesus' words and actions may have even piqued Levi's interest. While Jesus' choice might have shocked some, history reminds us that Levi remained faithful to Christ. He ended up writing one of the Gospels, and tradition says he died as a martyr for the Savior.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Levi is the same person as Matthew, the writer of the first Gospel (Matt. 9:9; 10:3) and one of the twelve apostles. Mark 2:14 identifies him as the son of Alphaeus, although it is unlikely this was the same Alphaeus who was the father of another apostle, James the Lesser (Mark 3:18).

**What are some things that hold you back from following Jesus fully? How does Jesus' invitation to follow Him remove those potential barriers?**

## Day 5: Jesus calls us to share the gospel.

*Read Luke 5:29-32, noting Jesus' reply to the Pharisees.*

Levi hosted a banquet for Jesus and invited a large crowd. The addition of *others* suggests even more despised members of society were present at the banquet. In Levi's own Gospel account of this party, he referred to "sinners" attending the dinner (Matt. 9:10-11). This was a term used by the religious leaders to call out those who violated elements of the law—more out of hypocritical pride than a concern for their restoration. Luke's quotation of religious leaders in verse 30 affirmed their disdain for people who didn't fit their ideas of spirituality. As expected, Levi's guest list caught the attention of the Pharisees—and not in a positive way. Instead of questioning Jesus directly, these religious leaders started complaining to His followers. Jesus responded to the Pharisees with a short proverb about mercy and compassion. Jesus' example reminds us that we aren't called to sit in our churches and wait for the lost to come to us. He spent time with the outcasts of society. As a result of His love, they turned to Him.

**How can self-righteousness get in the way of sharing the gospel with others?**

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## TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Luke 5, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

**What's the significance to Simon's responses in verse 5 to Jesus' command?**

**What does Jesus ask us to leave when we follow Him?**

**What evidence shows that Jesus transformed Levi, later called Matthew?**



For additional context, read "A First-Century Tax Collector," available digitally in the Winter 2020-21 issue of *Biblical Illustrator* for Explore the Bible at LifeWay. [com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://com/BiblicalIllustrator).