

9

Followed

Jesus uses ordinary people with diverse backgrounds in His work.

LUKE 5:4-11,27-32

Social media makes it easier than ever 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.

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

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

LUKE 5:1-11,27-32

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).

Read Luke 5:4-11,27-32 in your Bible, looking for similar characteristics in those Jesus called to follow Him. What do these characteristics reveal about Jesus?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN (LUKE 5:4-11)

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” ⁵ Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

VERSES 4-7

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**. First-century fishermen fished with nets. They **let down** nets into the water to trap schools of fish swimming by.

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.

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 **large number of fish**. In fact, the haul was so large that their nets **began to break** 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.

VERSES 8-10

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.

Peter demonstrated worship in two ways. First, he **fell at Jesus’ 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 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. Everyone present was **astonished at the catch of fish**. This would have included the fishermen but also could have included members of the crowd who had stayed after Jesus was finished teaching.

The sheer number of fish would have been astonishing, but the timing—during the day instead of at night—made it even more incredible. Jesus responded to them with a common refrain: ***Don't be afraid.***

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 ***fish for 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.

VERSE 11

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.

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?

LEVI (LUKE 5:27-28)

²⁷ **After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, ²⁸ and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.**

VERSES 27-28

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. 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**.

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).

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.

Whatever his motivation, Levi **left everything**. 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.

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.

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

SINNERS (LUKE 5:29-32)

²⁹ Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” ³¹ Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

VERSE 29

Levi hosted **a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.** 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.

VERSES 30-32

As expected, Levi's guest list caught the attention of the **•Pharisees and the teachers of the law**—and not in a positive way. Instead of questioning Jesus directly, these religious leaders **complained to** His followers. This grumbling was common among the teachers who looked for ways to discredit Jesus. (See also Luke 15:2.)

As devout followers of the law, the Pharisees and scribes would have avoided this crowd at all costs. They wondered how a man who claimed to be a spiritual teacher could ***eat and drink*** with such unacceptable people. The religious elite's emphasis on outward actions revealed a spiritual chasm in their hearts.

Jesus responded to the Pharisees and scribes with a short proverb about mercy and compassion. He pointed out that **healthy** people do not need a **doctor**—an allusion that Luke would have appreciated as a medical expert. In contrast, only those who are **sick** seek out a physician. Likewise, Jesus did not come to restore those who were **righteous**. Instead, His mission involved giving hope to **sinners** who were willing to repent and believe.

Jesus' words were a condemnation of arrogance. The righteousness of the leaders was self-righteousness. Spiritually, they were sicker than the so-called sinners who found healing through Jesus. But their pride would never allow them to admit their need or drive them to the Great Physician.

Jesus' example reminds us that we aren't called to sit in our churches and wait for the lost to come to us.

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. God also wants us to share the good news of the gospel with everyone—including those on the outside looking in. To do that, we should go to them, meeting them where they are.

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 NEEDS
