

Twelve Ordinary Men

By John MacArthur

Small Group Study Guide

Lesson 1

Common Men, Uncommon Calling

1. “When Jesus chose the twelve to be His official representatives-preachers of the gospel who would carry both His message and authority,” He did not choose any religious leaders. Instead He chooses common men. Do you think Jesus still calls ordinary men to be part of His official representatives? Why?

2. “Many Christians become discouraged and disheartened when their spiritual life and witness suffer because of sin or failure.” Can you think of a time when you felt discouraged in your Christian walk? What happened?

3. Jesus spent the whole night in prayer before a major decision about His disciples. Can you recall a time when you really prayed for God’s guidance about a situation? What was the result?

4. John MacArthur points out 5 areas of difficulties that the apostles had in their training.

_____ *They lacked spiritual understanding*

_____ *They lacked humility*

_____ *They lacked faith*

_____ *They lacked commitment*

_____ *They lacked power*

Rate yourself in each of the areas above on a scale from 1-5, 5 being the hardest. Which area seems to be the hardest area for you? What can you do about it?

Reflection Question

If God can use fisherman and tax collectors to change the world, can he use you? What stands in His way?

Lesson 2

Peter

1. Jesus changes Simon's name to Peter or Rock. It appears that this may be a nickname, a name that Jesus wishes that Peter would be more like or should be more like. If Jesus had a nickname for you, what do you think it would be? (Ask your wife or friend for a hint) Why would He choose this name for you?

2. Leadership: Men are leaders! God made us leaders of our homes, our families and spiritual leaders of both family and church. The author points out three natural leadership characteristics in Peter. Rank yourself in strongest to weakest.

inquisitiveness

1. _____

initiative

2. _____

involvement

3. _____

What can you do to make your weakness your strength?

3. What difficult circumstances have helped shape your faith?

4. Jesus taught Peter submission, restraint and humility. Who do you submit to? How do you show restraint? What about your pride?

Reflection Question

Peter was transformed through submission, restraint, and humility. Which one will you let transform you today?

Lesson 3

Andrew

1. Andrew's first act after seeing the Messiah was to go find his brother. It seems his excitement helped persuade Peter to go also. Do you have family and friends that need Christ? How is your excitement level?

2. Andrew is said to be "interested in the individual." Does this style of evangelism suit you? Why or why not? Why does it seem to be effective?

3. Andrew saw the value of insignificant gifts. Can you remember a time when God used a small "insignificant gift" to bless you? (So little to accomplish so much)

4. The book states that Andrew had a servant's heart. Do you know somebody who labors inconspicuously in the background? What part of that service can we model?

Reflection Question

Jesus was training the disciples for leadership roles. In the end, they all held important roles in the early church. For what leadership role is Jesus training you?

Lesson 4

James

1. James is said to be the disciple of Passion or Zeal. This “son of thunder” nickname seems to fit his personality well. What areas of your life are you passionate about?
2. John MacArthur spends some time retelling the story of the Samaritan culture. Who in today’s world do you think is most like the Samaritans? Do you see them as outcasts?
3. Jesus asked James and John if they were ready to drink from the same cup as Him. To what “cup” was Jesus referring? Have you ever suffered for your faith?
4. James was first to die for his faith. Would you be willing to die for your faith? How do you know?

Reflection Question

“James is the prototype of the passionate, zealous, frontrunner who is dynamic strong and ambitious.” How can you be more passionate today?

Lesson 5

John

1. John MacArthur states that John “learned love” from Jesus and that love is a learned behavior. Who have you learned love from? Who is a good example of love in our society?
2. John is also the apostle of truth. Does it seem strange that truth and love can be embodied in the same apostle? Why?
3. John was imbalanced. He could not balance truth and his love for God. Do you ever find yourself in this situation? Know the truth and uphold it in love.
4. “Suffering is the price for glory.” “Suffering is the prelude to glory.” “Our suffering is the assurance of glory.” All these are statements from the book. John suffered as an older man not martyred like the other disciples. This was a different kind of suffering. Have you considered what type of suffering the Lord is asking you to go through?

Reflection Question

John 1:14 “Jesus was full of grace and truth.” As His disciples we also must be full of grace and truth “in balance.” How will you do that today?

Lesson 6

Philip

1. Philip was friends with the other disciples. Making spiritual friends was an important part of the disciples' development. They would later need each other to lean on and have each other as a resource. Have you developed spiritual friends? How have they helped you? How have you been a resource for them?

2. Philip knew that he could not feed the 5000 men on the hill. Jesus knew Philip could not do it either but he asked him anyway. Philip said that it could not be done, so Jesus asked someone else, Andrew. Has there been a time in your life that the Lord has asked you to do something and you knew it could not be done? What happened next?

3. "But people like Philip don't appreciate general rules of thumb; they want everything to be rigid and inviolable". Do you have areas, like Philip, where you just can't bend the rules?

4. Philip was a man of weak faith, black and white thinking, and limited ability. The Lord used him anyway. Do you know anyone like Philip that the Lord would want to use?

Reflection Question

Jesus said "my strength is made perfect in weakness." Jesus used Philip's weakness to His glory and to spread the Gospel. Will you let Him use your weakness to do the same?

Lesson 7

Nathanael

1. Nathanael was a student of the scriptures. He had been waiting and reading about the coming Messiah. This made him hungry to see the Lord. What has studying the Word made you hungry for?

2. Nathanael's studies had also added to his prejudices. He didn't believe that anything good could come out of Nazareth. What prejudices do you have that need to be realigned by the Holy Spirit?

3. Philip and Nathanael started their spiritual journey in different places but ended up in the same spot. Do you know someone that is on a different path than you? How is your love and patience with that person?

4. John MacArthur writes that Nathanael comes to full understanding and commitment in one day. This seems to be an unusual occurrence. Do you know someone in whom this has happened? When someone accepts Christ do we expect them to have full understanding and total commitment in one day? Explain.

Reflection Question

Full understanding and total commitment is the goal of each disciple of Christ. How are you doing?

Lesson 8

Matthew & Thomas

1. Matthew was a tax collector, and Jesus used him. Jesus also used lepers to teach us lessons about God. In today's world, who do you think equates to the tax collectors? How about lepers? Why?

2. As a tax collector Matthew dealt with the sins of greed and materialism. In our American society, these sins are sometimes seen as almost a virtue, "getting ahead," "getting something bigger and better." How do you combat these tendencies toward materialism in such a richly blessed society?

3. Thomas was a worry-wart. He tended to be anxious and angst-ridden. Do you know somebody who can always be looking on the dark side of life? How do you handle them and their negative attitudes?

4. Even though Thomas was the pessimist, Jesus took his question and turned it into one of our most beautiful and memorized scriptures. "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me." When has Jesus taken your questions and turned them into a blessing?

Reflection Question

How are you doing in accepting the people who are tax collectors and pessimist in today's society?

Lesson 9

The other three

1. Parts of Jesus teachings were very controversial. What parts of Jesus' teaching do you find controversial or hard to follow? Why?
2. History has given James, son of Alphaeus, the title "James, the less." While the title may seem to be less than complementary, what can we learn from such a title?
3. Do you find it interesting to have Matthew and Simon the Zealot in the same group of disciples? Why? Any modern day parallels?
4. Judas (not Iscariot) asked Jesus if he would magnify himself. Jesus replied that he would be made magnified to anyone who loved Him and followed His Word. What does that mean to you? How is that applied each day?

Reflection Question

Judas (not Iscariot) had three names, Judas, Thaddaeus and Lebbaeus. Each name suggests that he was tender-hearted and childlike. What qualities of being childlike can you add to your witness or ministry today?

Lesson 10

Judas

1. John MacArthur writes about Judas: “He followed Jesus out of a desire for selfish gain, worldly ambition, avarice, and greed. He sensed Jesus’ power, and he wanted power like that for himself.” Do you think this trap is still possible for people today? Explain.

2. From a human perspective, Judas had the same potential as the others (disciples). What do you think went wrong?

3. Jesus said that someone would betray Him. Each disciple asked if it was them. Even Judas asked “Rabbi, is it I?” This question of self examination is still one that we should ask today. How often should we ask the Lord if we have betrayed Him? Why?

4. Judas could have exchanged his oppressive burden of sin for an easy yoke. Why do you think he did not do that?

Reflection Question

How is what I learned from this study going to help me in my everyday walk with Christ?