

The Twelve – Introduction

As we begin tonight, I want to ask each of you to look around the room and privately pick four other people to be on your team. Don't worry about overlaps and things like that. Just pick four other people whom you think need to be on your team.

How do you think Jesus went about choosing The Twelve from among so many followers? After all, He chose a few who admittedly were not the brightest. None of them had advanced degrees and vast amounts of knowledge in the Torah. Most of them worked with their hands in what we call blue-collar jobs. One was a government bureaucrat that no one cared for and the other was bright enough to oversee the finances, but it turned out he was secretly working to put an end to the entire movement. Somehow, Jesus chose twelve out of hundreds of followers to be His closest companions and then spent most of His earthly ministry molding them into faithful and fearless men who would become foundational pillars of a movement that would forever change the world. Jesus knew when He chose these men that being with Him, observing Him, and following Him, would completely change them. And guess what? That's exactly what happened. All of them, including Judas, the betrayer, would be transformed by Jesus' divine power.

Go through this study over the next few months will hopefully remind each of us that Jesus' transforming power is still at work. If you will allow the things we discover during this time to permeate into your heart, Jesus will transform you too. If He can take this small group of common men and turn them into extraordinary men of God, then He can certainly take us, remove our fears and our faithlessness, and empower us to become bold and fearless followers who are confident in the work of His grace and forgiveness. If you have never really answered the call to follow Jesus, my prayer is that this study will help you make that decision. Are you ready and willing to go on a journey you will never forget?

We are starting this study on a fact-finding mission.

1. How many disciples did Jesus have during His earthly ministry? At the height of His popularity, the Gospels inform us that large crowds followed Him everywhere He went. The ones who stuck around and didn't come for the show or for a personal miracle, were considered disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. In the ancient world, every teacher, religious or not, had a company of disciples. John the Baptist had disciples. The Pharisees had disciples. So did Jesus.
2. Were all of them men? Y or N Within the larger group of followers, which is what the word "disciple" means – a follower or student of another, Jesus had smaller group of men and women who were more deeply committed to Him.
3. Who were the women named in the Bible? Let's look at an example of one of these groups. Read Mark 15:40-41 and Luke 8:1-3.
4. What role did these women play?

Mary Magdalene

Jesus exorcises seven demons from Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:1-3), and she follows Him after He heals her. Seven, whether symbolic or literal, meant a great many in ancient texts. This proved Jesus' power over the forces of darkness and His ability to save us from even the direst of circumstances.

Some readers mistake Mary for the prostitute who washed Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-50), but no biblical support equates the two.

Mary witnessed Jesus' death and was the first of the women to see the resurrected Jesus (John 20:11-18). When all the disciples except for John had fled during Jesus' trial and execution, she stood by to comfort him.

Lessons learned from Mary: No one is ever too far gone from salvation. If Jesus could free Mary from seven demons, and she, in turn, could become one of His most loyal followers, then He can without a doubt transform us.

Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome

The first, Mary, was the mother of one of Jesus' disciples: James (Matthew 27:55-61). She provided for Jesus' ministry via financial means, and two of her sons seemed to follow from Galilee to Jerusalem alongside her. She witnessed Jesus' death and, likely, His resurrection (Mark 16:8).

Salome, the mother of the other James and John, asked if her sons could receive "places of honor" in God's kingdom (Matthew 20:20-21). She also witnessed Jesus' death and resurrection, as one of the women at the tomb.

Lessons learned from these women: Even when God gives our children places in ministry, which does not mean we have no place in ministry as well. These mothers gave up everything to follow Jesus and provide for His ministry. When their sons fled the cross, they stayed behind and had a chance to be the first witnesses to His miraculous work three days later.

Joanna the wife of Chuza, and Susanna

A group of women listed in Luke 8:1-3 (including Mary Magdalene) provided for Jesus' ministry and needs "out of their private means."

Although not an anomaly for women to have a job in ancient times, it was rarer. These women, healed by Jesus' ministry, decided to give up financial means to follow him.

Joanna, the wife of an important court official, would've had many resources to give and she does so heartily. She also may have had to give up social standing as well, given women were not supposed to "socialize" with men outside of their family, according to this article.

Susanna does not have a noted family member listed by her name, such as Joanna. She gave nevertheless, whether she had great means or little to speak of. Grateful that Jesus

has healed her physically and spiritually, she accompanies Him and His disciples in their ministry.

Lessons learned from these two: Whether the Lord has blessed us with great means or extraordinarily little, we ought to give back to reflect the gratitude in our hearts that He has healed us.

What Does This Mean for Us?

We have no excuse not to give our all to Jesus. Women during His time had little say, and at times, little means. But they still surrendered everything to Him, especially to express gratitude for His miraculous work in their lives.

And then, of course this brings us to the most well-known of Jesus' followers; **The Twelve.**

Can you name them? The Bible gives us 4 lists – Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:12-16; and Acts 1:13.

It is these men, these twelve chosen Apostles that the rest of our study will focus on. They were not saints. They were not educated. They were not religious experts. But the things Jesus accomplished through the lives of these Twelve common, ordinary men is simply amazing and it should encourage us to know that if we allow it, if we are willing to follow, He will do amazing things through us too.