

Jesus Began With a Few

From chapter 1 (“‘Follow Me’—The Call of the Savior”) from J. Lee Grady’s new book, *Follow Me*

My wife and I had the opportunity to tour Israel with a small group of friends in 2018. I’ll never forget walking along the rocky shore of the Sea of Galilee, looking out at the small fishing boats and imagining what it would have been like to see Jesus and His small group of disciples in that place, just a few miles south of Capernaum.

When I got close to the water I rolled up my pants to my knees and waded in. I noticed some fishermen throwing their nets into the blue waters. I closed my eyes and tried to visualize a young Peter and his brother Andrew as they dragged their boat out from the shore and threw their nets on the waves. Fishing had been their daily routine for a long time. But one special day Jesus showed up and called to them from the water’s edge. “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17).

Peter and Andrew didn’t fully understand what Jesus meant when he issued that strange invitation. But they knew He was a rabbi, and they understood that he was inviting them to leave their mundane jobs on the water and begin a new spiritual adventure. They didn’t hesitate. Mark 1:18 says, “Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

That same day Jesus invited James and John, the sons of Zebedee, to join His small group. The four men went with Jesus to the local synagogue, where Jesus’ sermon was suddenly interrupted by the tortured cries of a demon-possessed man. The demon screamed at Jesus: “I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” (Mark 1:24). Then Jesus commanded the evil spirit to leave, and the man was thrown into convulsions before the demon screamed again and left the man’s body (vv. 25-26).

Can you imagine what Peter, Andrew, James, and John were thinking during this chaotic scene? “What are we doing here? Is every day going to be like this? How did Jesus do that?” But the four men stayed close to Jesus as they left the synagogue and walked to Peter’s house nearby.

Everyone in Capernaum was talking about Jesus that day—and the four young disciples were now part of the action. The townspeople were saying, “He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him!” (Mark 1:27). But Jesus didn’t do this amazing feat alone—He had his four friends with him. His new companions were a part of this bold mission.

That evening at Peter’s house, Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law from a fever (Mark 1:29–31). Jesus’ powerful ministry became very personal to Peter that day. As soon as word got out of that miracle, everyone from the city was at the door. Family and friends brought their sick loved ones to be healed, and others were delivered from demons (vv. 32–34).

Peter’s house suddenly become Ground Zero for something wonderful. The next morning, when Peter went to tell Jesus that more people were looking for Him, Jesus said these words: “Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for” (Mark 1:38).

Notice Jesus did not say, “I need to go to some other towns” or “People need Me over in Nazareth or in Samaria.” He said to Peter: “Let us go.” Jesus did not see the mission as His alone. He wanted his followers to join Him. They were his team. He had every intention of including them in His quest.

These beautiful scenes show us the essence of biblical discipleship. Jesus came to save the world, and He invites us to join Him in His work. Of course we don’t have the power to save people from sin. We are flawed vessels of clay. Yet He calls us to be His coworkers—to walk with Him, to feel what He feels, and to be a part of His audacious mission to change the

whole world.

He wants to do His work through us.

When Jesus issued His original invitation to Peter, He said: “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). Jesus’ mission is to “catch” as many “fish” as possible—but He does this by training men and women to be His workforce. If we choose to follow Him, we must go through a process of growth and training.

You don’t become a fisher of men overnight. Jesus said, “I will make you become...” (emphasis added). He invites us to enroll in a supernatural process of spiritual formation. When we submit to that process we become more like Him, and we begin to do His work in His way. We become true disciples who carry His heart, reflect His character, and complete His mission.

Peter’s Process of Becoming a Fisher of Men

Peter went through quite a process. From the moment Jesus moved into his house, this fisherman had a front-row seat as the gospel story unfolded. He watched the healing of paralytics, lepers, and bleeding women; he listened closely to Jesus’ teachings as the disciples walked along the dusty roads; he heard the Pharisees question Jesus and listened in amazement as Jesus rebuked them.

At one point Jesus even called Peter out of the boat to walk with Him on the water (Matt. 14:28–29). In another instance Jesus told Peter to go and find a coin in a fish’s mouth (17:27). And after Jesus fed a multitude with just a few scraps of food, He asked Peter: “But who do you say that I am?” and Peter gave the right answer: “You are the Christ” (Mark 8:29). Peter was well on His way to becoming a leader among Jesus’ followers. He was probably the first of Jesus’ followers to realize that Jesus was the Messiah.

The training got more rigorous after Jesus called the three men in His inner circle—Peter, James, and John—to see His heavenly glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter stared in awe as Moses and Elijah conversed with Jesus and a cloud of shining glory covered them. The three uneducated fishermen, with their jaws dropping, were given the chance to see things that angels have longed to see for ages. They beheld the Messiah in His heavenly glory and realized He is the focal point of all history (Matt. 17:1–8).

All this was part of a divine preparation process. But Jesus didn't allow these lofty revelations to puff Peter up with pride; before Jesus' crucifixion, Peter came face to face with his own soul-crushing weakness. In a moment of intense temptation, Peter almost crossed over to the dark side.

The night Jesus was arrested, Peter was stressed to the breaking point and fearful of the crowd. When the high priest's servant girl accused him of being a disciple of Jesus, he denied it (Mark 14:66–68). When the girl repeated her accusation to some bystanders, Peter denied knowing Jesus again (vv. 69–70). When others questioned him, Peter "began to invoke a curse on himself, and to swear, 'I do not know this Man of whom you speak'" (v. 71). The brave disciple who had promised Jesus he would follow Him anywhere turned into a pitiful wimp. He caved under the pressure. When the rooster crowed, Peter remembered Jesus' words: "'Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times'" (v. 72).

This could have been the end for Peter. He wept bitterly and disappeared (Mark 14:72). No words beyond his denial are recorded in Matthew's and Mark's gospels. In the Gospel of Luke, we read that Peter went to Jesus' tomb and found it empty. John's Gospel is the only one that describes how Peter found full restoration after his failure.

Sulking, lonely and dejected, Peter went back to what he knew—his boring fishing job. He had fished all night and

caught nothing (John 21:3). Perhaps he feared that God had rejected him forever. But then Jesus appeared on the shore and invited His friends to cast their nets on the right side of the boat—and they hauled in a full net of fish (v. 6).

This was a divine sign that their Master still had plans to use Peter in spite of his cowardly denials. Peter must have been curious when He saw the smoke from the charcoal fire Jesus had made on the beach. How could this be? Jesus wasn't frowning or scowling. Nor was He waiting to deliver a stern rebuke. He didn't scold Peter or even remind him of his cowardly denial. This amazing Savior simply invited Peter to sit with Him and eat a hot breakfast. Jesus wanted to eat grilled fish with His friend and chat with him by the warmth of that fire (John 21:9–13).

Before that breakfast conversation ended, Jesus repeated some important words that Peter had heard a few years earlier on that same rocky shoreline.

Jesus said again, "Follow Me" (John 21:19).

Jesus had not disqualified Peter! He was renewing His invitation. The broken, unstable man whom Jesus nicknamed a "rock" was not sent away (Matt. 16:18). He was back in the game. Jesus had taken His beloved friend through a rigorous training process that included an embarrassing failure. But on that day He reaffirmed that He would use Peter to "catch" many souls and to reproduce the life of God in people.

What is even more amazing is the way the shaky, impetuous, insecure Peter was transformed after he was baptized in the Holy Spirit a few weeks later in the upper room in Jerusalem. This weak man, who crumbled under pressure when His Master was arrested, then preached the gospel to a huge crowd—and three thousand people made decisions to follow the Messiah (Acts 2:14–41).

Jesus did exactly what He said He would: He made Peter a

fisher of men.

This is what God wants to do to you—and to every follower of Christ. Just as Peter had to be transformed, so you too must go through a process to become a disciple maker. Don't focus on your flaws or failures; grace will change you. When you read Peter's first epistle you see that he became an apostle and a strong spiritual father to his followers (1 Peter 1:1). Peter wrote this letter to "newborn babies," and he challenged them to "grow" (2:2). Jesus had miraculously changed Peter from a weak man into a powerful influencer who nurtured and mentored others.

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