

# Are You Qualified?

## The Life of Jesus Vol.1 (Tests and Builds) Part 15

Luke 6:12-16 10-16-11

Summary: Jesus chose men for the most important role ever who were impetuous, quiet, aggressive, unloving, pragmatic, dull, prejudiced, irreligious, ignorant, hostile, and obscure, but used them in great ways - either by changing them or channeling them. (Weaknesses are usually perversions of your strengths.) The key to greatness is not personality type; it is responding to a great calling. Go in the strength that you have!

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Peter</b> .....	<b>2</b>
Strengths and weaknesses .....	2
<b>Andrew</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>James and John</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Pride .....	4
<b>Philip</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Nathaniel</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Matthew</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Simon</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Thomas</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>James the son of Alphaeus</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Thaddeus</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Made great by their calling</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Conclusion: Go in the strength that you have</b> .....	<b>9</b>

**Luke 6:12-16** One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. **13** When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: **14** Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, **15** Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, **16** Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

## Introduction

If you ever want some interesting reading, find a large church that is looking to hire a pastor, and send away for the job description and the list of required qualifications. It is unbelievable. You practically have to be able to walk on water. They want a stand-out resume, a proven track record, Masters degrees, Doctorate degrees, published author, well-known, young and healthy and good-looking, but with decades of experience and distinguished and mature and wise. We are determined to only use the highly qualified. If you have ever run a business, you know how important it is to have qualified people. Otherwise your business goes in the tank, because you do not have enough time or energy or ability to do everything yourself.

Can you imagine if you were in charge of hiring a team of men who would be the leaders, not of a local church, but of the Church worldwide? And part of their job description would be to write the Bible? Can you imagine what kind of list of qualifications we would come up with for that?

When Jesus stood on a hillside one day, looked over all his many followers, and proceeded to pick out twelve to be Apostles, that was what He was doing. He was selecting twelve men to fill the twelve most important job positions that have ever existed in the history of the human race. So it is no surprise that before Jesus picked out these men, He spent the entire night in prayer (Lk. 6:12).

We have been studying the works of Jesus, and the next main event is when Jesus sends out the twelve on their first, short-term mission project. And what I would like to do this morning is not just focus on this particular calling, but to back up and look at their calling in general. These twelve men

are the greatest success story ever. At the beginning of Acts there are a few Christians huddled together in a room. Now two thousand years later, there are millions of Christians all around the world devoting our lives to following every word these men wrote. Skip ahead to Revelation and you see a vast multitude that no one could count from every tribe and tongue standing before the throne of God worshipping Him - all through the ministry of these twelve men. Jesus did a great job picking these guys. Spending the entire night in prayer really paid off in this case.

So what kind of men were they? What type of person does God tend to use when He wants to accomplish really great things? Let's just take a quick tour through the gospel accounts and see what we can glean about the kinds of skills and abilities these men had.

## Peter

### **Matthew 10:2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter)**

The word first means "chief," or "foremost." He was the leader. He was not called first, but he is always listed first. Peter spoke for the group, he represented the group, he asked questions for the group - he was even rebuked for the group. He was the leader.

What kind of a person was he? One word: *impetuous*. Act first, think later. He was the Apostle with the foot-shaped mouth. Ever met someone who as soon as a thought crosses his mind it comes out his mouth? That was Peter. Whenever Jesus asks a question, Peter blurts out an answer - even when he did not know the right answer. He had an answer for everything - even rhetorical questions. "Who touched Me?"

"Lots of people. That guy, they did, that guy..."

He always pipes up with an answer. All the followers leave Jesus - "Will you leave, too?" Peter: "Where would we go - You're the one with the words of eternal life."

"Who do you say I am?"

"Christ, Son of the living God"

He has always got an answer.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses***

Act first, think later is a personality trait that can really hurt people..., and it is a trait that can do great things for the glory of God. If you are the type who speaks without racking your brain to figure out what everyone will think, that gives you a great advantage in the battle against fear of man. Some people can never speak up when they should because they are paralyzed by fear of what people will think. Not you. You might be concerned about people looking down on you for your words, but only after you have already spoken the words. People like Peter are free to act on their faith, because by the time it occurs to them to have doubts, they have already acted. In the middle of a raging storm, Peter walked on water. "But he doubted and sank." Yes, but there were eleven other guys who never got out of the boat. Why? Because they all thought it through first. People like Peter are half-way across the Sea of Galilee on foot before it occurs to them to think, "Wait a second, what if this doesn't work?"

Isn't it true that most of the time your strengths and weaknesses come from the same personality traits. What was Peter's greatest strength? Fearless initiative. What was his greatest weakness? Fearless initiative. God gives you all kinds of strengths, and Satan uses those to push you into sin. So if you want to know your weaknesses, look real close to your strengths. And if you want to know your strengths, look right next to your weaknesses.

Sometimes Peter's impulsiveness was a beautiful thing. In John 21, after the crucifixion, the Disciples go back to fishing, and they are working an area about one hundred yards off the shore, and suddenly there is a guy on the beach calling to them. They cannot really make out who it is from that distance, but John ends up recognizing His voice and says, "It's the Lord." SPLASH! Peter? Peter?

Peter is swimming. He loved Jesus so much, he just had to be near Him – NOW. What about the fish? What about the boat? The crew? I am sure Peter thought about all that – later. But as soon as he sees an opportunity to be near Christ, he acts. No one desired nearness to Jesus more than Peter. You read the gospels and you get the feeling that every time Jesus stopped, Peter bumped into the back of Him. Peter was also a man of questions. He did not just answer them – he also asked them – lots of them. Peter asks more questions in the gospel accounts than all the rest of the Apostles combined. He does not care about looking dumb. If there is a question in his mind, it is coming out of his mouth.

“How many times do we have to forgive - up to seven times?”

“We left everything for You, what will our reward be?”

“Hey, why is that fig tree You cursed dead?”

“Explain the parable to us.”

“When are all these end times events going to happen?”

“Who do these parables apply to?”

**John 13:33 “I will be with you only a little longer...”**

**36 “Lord, where are you going?”**

**...“Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow’ later.”**

**37 Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now?”**

And after Peter was told he would die as a martyr, he said, “Well, what about John?”

This group of men was the most important group of men in the world with the most difficult task in the world, and what was their leader like? Ambivalent, inconsistent, impetuous, questioning – he argues with the Lord, he rebukes the Lord. Peter was a man with a long list of mostly bad personality characteristics, yet these are the very things Jesus used to make him great. Except for Jesus, no name appears more often in the Gospels than Peter’s.

## **Andrew**

The second name in the list is Andrew – Simon Peter’s brother. These guys were quite a pair. Andrew found Jesus first, Andrew was called first, but Peter gets all the attention. The first three called were Andrew, James and John. Who were the inner three? Peter, James, and John. Andrew got pushed out.

Andrew was no Peter, that is for sure. But he really was a great man – in a different way. He was not out there walking on the water, but he brings a little boy to Jesus with some loaves and fishes. In fact, that seems to be the mark of Andrew’s life. Every time we see him he is bringing someone to Jesus. The boy with his lunch at the feeding of the five thousand. The Greeks in John 12. (Philip’s way of bringing people to Jesus was to bring them to Andrew, and Andrew would bring them to Jesus.) Andrew as the one who first brought Peter to Jesus. Sometimes it takes an Andrew to reach a Peter.

And when he does, he is right back in Peter’s shadow. Of the thirteen times Andrew is mentioned in Scripture, with only one exception his name always appears with Peter’s – even when Peter is not part of the story. He is always, “Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.” It is like that is his last name. All his life - “Andrew? Who’s Andrew?”

“Peter’s brother.”

“Oh – OK. - Yeah, Peter, he’s really something isn’t he?”

When Andrew was the first to find the Messiah, you might expect he would say, “I’m not telling Peter!” No, the very first thing he does is run and tell his brother, knowing full well that as soon as Peter enters the group, Peter will run the group, and Andrew would be right back in the shadows. But

that is Andrew. He is content to serve quietly. He does not want to be on stage, he does not want to be out in front, he does not want any attention. You never hear about these people. They are just quietly working behind the scenes.

## James and John

The next two are also brothers – James and John. The most direct statement about these brothers' temperament is Mark. 3:17 where Jesus nicknamed them, "Sons of Thunder." They were hot-headed fireballs. Jesus passed through a Samaritan village that did not welcome Him.

**Luke 9:54 When the disciples James and John saw' this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"**

Great missionary heart. They don't accept you? Fry 'em.

I think their favorite moment in Jesus' life was when He made a whip to clear the Temple.

"Get 'em! Let them have it Lord!"

When Herod wanted to stop the Church's progress, he chopped off James' head. He put Peter in jail. Apparently James was perceived as a bigger problem than Peter. James was aggressive. He was the first of the Apostles to be martyred. Fourteen years into the book of Acts and he is dead. The world could not deal with James.

And his brother John – we picture this mild, pale, skinny little guy laying his head on Jesus' shoulder talking about love all day. But John was just as thunderous as James. The one time John appears by himself, he gets rebuked by Jesus for not accepting an outsider (Mk. 9:38-41). John was an explosive, short-tempered, aggressive, insensitive, thunderous man whose evangelistic motto was "Turn or burn...on second thought, just burn." No love at all.

And it is fascinating to see how the Lord used these two brothers. The Lord changed John. John became the Apostle of love. The word "love" appears twenty-four times just in the tiny book of 1 John. John became consumed with the importance of love.

And he loved Jesus. John was closer to Jesus than anyone else. He is called the Apostle whom Jesus loved. And when it came time to pass on the duties when Jesus was dying, to Peter He said, "Feed My sheep," but to John He said, "Take care of My mother." No one was closer to Jesus than John – they were best friends.

The fascinating thing about James and John is the different ways the Lord used them. God used John by *changing* his characteristics, and he used James by *channeling* them. Fourteen years and James is dead. John lived about sixty-five years after the crucifixion, which means he was probably a teenager when Jesus chose him. Interesting that He is in His thirties and picked a teenager for a best friend (and a wild teenager at that). John was probably the youngest in the group, and very likely lived to be the oldest. When he was an old man, God still was not done with him. At the end of his life, when he was very elderly and close to death, he jotted down a little booklet you may have heard of – the book of Revelation. John – he ended up writing more of the New Testament than any of the twelve.

### *Pride*

Jesus had to do a lot of work on these two brothers. At the beginning they had massive egos. There was one time when James and John came to Jesus with their mother, and asked to be on His right and left in the kingdom. All they want is to be the top two men in the Universe.

**Matthew 20:22 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered.**

We can handle anything You can handle. Such pride. Jesus was trying to explain to them that in the kingdom the way to glory is the way of the cross. It is the way of humility, servanthood, and suffering. So when they ask for the greatest seats in the kingdom, they are asking for the greatest suffering. So He says, "Can you drink from My cup?" and they say, "Sure. Piece of cake."

### **23 Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup"**

Both these men did drink the cup of Jesus' suffering. James was the first of the Apostles to die, John was the last. James got his head chopped off right away; John was exiled and served the Lord under persecution for decade after decade.

The Romans had a coin that pictured an ox standing before an altar and a plow, and the inscription said, "Ready for either." That is how it is for the Christian. For James, it was the altar (immediate, dramatic sacrifice of his life in dying for the Lord). For John, it was the long, difficult furrow of the plow (decade after decade of hard service). There is more than one way to give your life for God.

What kind of people does God tend to use? He uses quiet people like Andrew, and He uses loud ones like James and John. And some of them He uses by changing their characteristics; others He uses by channeling them. The Lord uses those who with tenacity advance the front lines of the Kingdom, who see only a job and will die getting it done. And He uses men like John, who are sensitive and loving, and who show men the love of God and attract men to Christ. He uses people when they are crazy, energetic teenagers – full of zeal and tireless – but lacking in life experience, and he uses people when they are old, tired, secluded on an island - forgotten by most people, but still important in the kingdom of God.

## **Philip**

And then He uses people like Philip. You get a great picture of Philip's personality in John 6, at the feeding of the five thousand, where Jesus singles Philip out. Just before Andrew shows up with that little boy, Jesus wants to teach Philip a lesson.

**John 6:5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"**

Philip already had it all calculated. They had these barley biscuits that were about the size of your hand and an inch thick. You could get thirty-six of those biscuits for one denarius. Eight months' wages is two hundred denarii. So Philip sees this crowd, and he whips out a pen and paper: "Let's see, we could get thirty-six of those times two hundred, that's 7200 biscuits. Five thousand men plus wives and children, 15,000-20,000 people. If each person took a bite around the edge..."

"Listen, I got it all figured out - it can't be done."

Jesus had been performing miracles of healing all day long and it does not even occur to Philip to rely on that.

Philip is analytical and pragmatic – a man of common sense and calculation. He cannot see past the natural. He is limited by measurements and calculation.

Men like this cannot deal with anything out of the ordinary. When those Greeks came to see Jesus, he did not know what to do! They were Greeks. This has not happened before – it is different.

"You guys wait here, I don't know if this can happen. I'm going to have to get this authorized. I'm going to have to check with Andrew."

He was afraid of anything out of the ordinary.

Every church board has people like this. There is an opportunity for people to come to Christ, and they are sitting there in the board meeting saying, “It can’t be done.” The power of the Holy Spirit does not even register in their calculations.

### **John 12:22 Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.**

This is the second time Andrew bails him out. It is great to have an Andrew around when you are dealing with a Philip. You get Philip together with Peter or James and all you get is a big argument.

“I’m not taking the Greeks to those guys – those maniacs will bring *anyone* to Jesus without even thinking about the ramifications. I’d better ask Andrew.”

But a quiet, humble Andrew can come along and give Philip’s faith a little, quiet boost without being too threatening.

“That feels a little funny bringing Gentiles in, doesn’t it, Philip? It’s OK though, because the Lord came to save everyone...” (and he holds Philip’s hand in bringing these men to the Lord).

One last glimpse of Philip. The night before Jesus died, and Philip is still confused about Jesus’ deity.

### **John 14:8 Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?**

This is after three years of intensive training by Jesus Himself! It is like someone completing seminary and as he goes up and the guy hands him his diploma, he leans over and says, “Remind me one more time - who is Jesus again? Is He God or what?” Philip was not the sharpest knife in the drawer. Oh, and by the way – God made Philip one of the twelve most important men who ever lived.

## **Nathaniel**

Philip had a friend named Bartholomew. That was his last name – his first name was Nathaniel. Nathaniel was the opposite of Philip. He believed and understood everything right from day one. When he first met Jesus, Jesus said, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” He knew what kind of tree Nathaniel had been sitting under. One little act of power, and Nate says, “You are the Messiah,” and from that moment on it is settled. After that, Nathaniel never has another question. He believes, he understands, he trusts – it is all settled for him.

Nathaniel was not perfect. He had a terrible attitude toward Nazareth. He is the one who said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” So he had some prejudice. But as soon as he met Jesus and Jesus revealed Himself, he believed.

What kind of people does God use? God uses slow, dull, weak-faithed skeptics like Philip, and clear thinking, trusting great-faithed souls like Nathaniel.

## **Matthew**

Next comes Matthew, the tax collector. He is the only one in the list where it mentions his former job. Tax collectors were the most hated individuals in the whole culture. They were the worst kind of traitor, because they were Jews who collected taxes for Rome from fellow Jews - and ripped them off in the process. They are always mentioned in Scripture with sinners and prostitutes; because that is the crowd they hung around. And that is the kind of people they were. Before Jesus called him, Matthew would have been in the worst kind of bars in the worst part of town. Probably a very non-religious person. Certainly no Bible expert. Tax collectors were banned from the synagogues, so Matthew probably knew next to nothing about the Bible.

Matthew was one of those people who had just ruined his life. Once you have been a tax collector, no one would ever hire you, so there is no way out of that job. He is just one of those hopeless cases of human debris that is no value to anyone. But Jesus calls him, and he follows. And all

the way through the gospels he never says a word. He never asks a question, never appears in an event. He is not a character in any of the miracles accounts. After his calling he is never mentioned again as doing or saying anything.

Although he did make one little contribution. You are holding it in your hand. Matthew was used by God to pen the greatest work on the majesty of the kingliness of Christ ever written – the Gospel of Matthew. And it is interesting – Matthew quotes Old Testament more than all the other three gospel writers combined. He started out with zero knowledge and ended up becoming an expert on the Old Testament.

Who does God use? He uses people like Nathaniel - people who before coming to know Him were pious, sincere, God-fearing men who are seeking God, seeking his will, searching the Scriptures. Honest men in whom there is no guile - nothing false, no deceit. And he uses guys like Matthew - irreligious low-life traitorous crooks who could not care less about people or God, who are steeped in overt sin, and who have made a mess of their lives.

## Simon

One of the fascinating things about the fact that Jesus called Matthew was the fact that Jesus also called Simon the Zealot. Here is why that is significant: The word zeal, in Scripture, refers to the quality of a person who gets angry at those who dishonor God, and they do something about it. The great illustration of a zealot in the Old Testament is Zimri, who found a man and a woman committing sin together, and put his spear through both of them. Pinned them to the ground. And Zimri is the prototype of the zealots - people who absolutely cannot stand people dishonoring God. In the New Testament, the word “zeal” took on a revolutionary flavor. Although - I always thought zealots spent all their time trying to fight against Rome, but the zealots did not really attack Romans. They attacked Jews who wanted to compromise in some way with Rome. If you were a Jew and you compromised with Rome in any way, the zealots would come after you. And they were ruthless. The zealots would publicly torture and murder Jews who compromised with Rome.

So Jesus chooses a Zealot. We do not know if Simon was more of an Old Testament type, or more of a political type, but one thing is for sure – he would have had to have taken some pretty extreme action against people in order to get that nickname – Simon the Zealot.

Do you think Simon the Zealot had just little anxieties about Matthew being in the group? If Simon would have gotten this close to Matthew before this, he would have probably stuck a knife in him. But Jesus called then both.

## Thomas

OK, back to the list. Next up is Thomas. Now, when I say “Thomas,” what characteristic do you think of? Doubt. Doubting Thomas – that is all anyone ever says about Thomas. I think Sarah Palin gets more favorable press than Thomas. He is famous for his doubting, but that is not the only thing Thomas did. If you want to get a clear picture of what kind of person Thomas was, you can see it in John 10. In John 10, Jesus and the Disciples are in hiding. The Jews had made an attempt on Jesus’ life, they escape, and in John 10:40, they retreat across the Jordan. Now they are safe in hiding. But then Jesus gets word that His good friend Lazarus was very sick. Lazarus lived in Bethany, which was right next to Jerusalem where the authorities had tried to kill Jesus. So Jesus tells His Disciples, “Grab your stuff – we’re going to Bethany.”

**John 11:8 "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"**

“Are you kidding? We just escaped with our lives! What’s the point of fleeing if we’re going to go right back there?”

Now, what do you suppose Thomas is saying in this whole conversation? It might surprise you. In verse 16 he takes some leadership and says something to the rest of the Disciples:

**16 Let us also go that we may die with him.**

The issue with Thomas was not so much doubt as much as pessimism. It does not even occur to him that Jesus might survive this. But that does not stop him.

“We’ll die, so let’s go.”

That is pessimism, but it is also courage. The greatest courage is not the courage of the optimist, because the optimist thinks everything is going to work out just fine. The greatest courage is that of a pessimist, because he knows everything is going to be a disaster, and he is still willing to go.

If you see Thomas asking for proof of the resurrection and you interpret that as a lack of faith, that is a mistake. I do not know how you can be eager to lay down your life for Christ if you do not believe. Thomas was a man of faith and courage... and love for the Lord. Thomas loved Jesus so much, that existence without Jesus was worse than death. For Thomas, it was, “Death? Sure. Disloyalty? Never.”

So Thomas had some wonderful traits. But he definitely did struggle with pessimism. In John 14, Jesus makes one of the most precious promises in the whole Bible. What Christian has not taken delight and comfort in these words?

**John 14:1 Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.**

For 99.9% of Christians, that is one of the most comforting, wonderful statements imaginable. Not even the average pessimist could find a problem with that promise. But Thomas is not just an average pessimist.

**5 We don't know where you are going - how can we know the way?**

Jesus makes that amazing promise and all Thomas can say is, “We’re never going to be able to find the place, we’ll get lost, it’s not going to work...” He is like Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh.

Well, the next day they crucified Jesus. Then they put Him in the tomb. And you know what Thomas said?

“I knew it! Jesus is gone, and we are alone, and we can’t go to Him — everything I was afraid of happened. Just as I feared - everything turned out terrible.”

If you think he was a pessimist when Jesus was alive doing miracles and speaking words of comfort – imagine what he is like now! Thomas is depressed - because he loved so deeply. He would have died with Jesus, but Jesus died without him. He wanted to go with Jesus, but Jesus went without him. And now Thomas is so dejected that when all the Apostles were gathered... – and the resurrected Jesus appears to them – Thomas just... wasn’t there. He is off alone somewhere.

**John 20:25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”**

But the only thing more difficult than trying to encourage a pessimist is trying to encourage a depressed pessimist.

**25 ...But he said to them. “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”**



Is that doubt? It is not any worse doubt than any of the other disciples had. None of them but John believed until they actually saw Jesus. Thomas is just saying he needs proof. There is nothing wrong with requiring evidence before you believe something. Jesus gave him proof, and Thomas believed immediately.

What kind of people does Jesus use? He uses optimists who believe immediately like John and Nathaniel, and pessimists who doubt everything and assume the worst like Thomas.

## **James the son of Alphaeus**

Next is James the son of Alphaeus. What do you know about James the son of Alphaeus? I'll tell you what you know – nothing. You do not know anything about James the son of Alphaeus, because the Bible does not say anything specific about him. I love it that the Lord includes one guy in here who is just utterly obscure. He is never mentioned anywhere in the Bible except in the lists of the twelve. He never did or said anything that anyone thought was worth writing down – not even the Gospel writers. He is a nobody. Yet he will judge the twelve tribes of Israel. In heaven someday, James the son of Alphaeus will be giving orders to Abraham and Moses, David, Elijah, Enoch, Job, Noah – from a throne that is next to Christ's. I am glad God is not dependent upon celebrities, aren't you?

## **Thaddeus**

Finally, Thaddeus (also known as Judas, son of James). We do not know a whole lot about Thaddeus. He is mentioned in John 14:22, where he asks a really insightful question about why Jesus was revealing Himself to the twelve and not to the whole world. If that question is any indication, I am guessing Thaddeus was a bit of a thinker.

## **Made great by their calling**

This is some group, isn't it? Can you imagine traveling around with that bunch? Can you believe *those* twelve men turned the world upside down? Jesus took this scattered, diverse, inexperienced, rag tag conglomeration of mismatched personalities, and He made them the most successful team affecting the greatest work ever accomplished in the history of mankind. History has placed these men on stained glass windows with halos. But they were very common, ordinary men. The one thing they had in common was that none of them were clergy – all laymen.

They did become great, however. How? What made them great? It was not because they fit into some certain personality type. It was not because of their money. It was not because of their rhetoric. It was not political influence. It was not their skills. It was not even their spiritual maturity. It was their calling.

Greatness is not really very complicated. If you want to be great and to do great things, it is very simple: Just have a great God call you to do something, and do it.

And every Christian has a calling – and contrary to popular belief, God does not make your calling impossible for you to discover. It is easy. Look at your gifts and abilities and desires and passions; then look at the ministry opportunities that are available around you right now..., and pick the one that is the best match. That is your calling, and it is every bit as high a calling as the Apostles received because it comes from just as a great a God.

## **Conclusion: Go in the strength that you have**

And if you think you have too many weaknesses and not enough strengths to be of any use to God, read Judges 6. God called Gideon to save Israel from the hordes of Midian.

**Judges 6:15 “But Lord,” Gideon asked, “how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family .“**

What do you do if you are like Gideon, and you just don't have much to offer? The answer is in verse 14.

**14 The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have ... Am I not sending you?”**

Isn't that what the Lord Jesus is saying to you right now? Stop using inability and weakness as an excuse - am I not sending you? Go in the strength you have. God uses weak vessels, but He requires of those vessels all the strength they have.

What resources do you have? Are you like Peter? Your mouth gets you into trouble, sometimes you talk a little better game than you play? You have trouble with self-control? Work on shoring up your weaknesses, but in the meantime, go in the strength you have.

Are you like Andrew? Quiet, shy, soft-spoken, always in someone's shadow? Are you like the sons of thunder - bull in a china shop? Maybe you are a teenager - young and inexperienced like Jesus' best friend, John. Or maybe you are old and feel like you cannot do much anymore like John did later. Go in the strength that you have.

Are you like Philip? Is it hard for you to trust - hard to see past circumstances? Limited understanding? Are you like Nathaniel? You struggle with prejudice. Maybe you are like Matthew. Way behind in your knowledge of Scripture - made a mess out of your life. Some of you are like Thomas - pessimistic. You are sitting there fretting because your lunch plans today probably are not going to work out. You have trouble trusting in the goodness of God. Could be that you are a zealot like Simon. You have fiery passion about the Lord, and you cannot stand it when people dishonor him. Maybe you are like Thaddeus - you ask the hard questions. Maybe you are like James the son of Alphaeus - nobody ever heard of you and nobody ever will.

Whatever you are, whatever God made you, however He designed you and put you together, whatever strength you have been given; seek out what God has called you to do and go in the strength you have.

**BENEDICTION: Hebrews 13:20-21 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**