

The Uncommon Use of Common People

Luke 6:12-16, Acts 4:13

Ray Anderson ---- August 4, 2024

Well, I'm excited to be able to share with you some thoughts from Scripture today. In December of 1955, a forty-two-year-old lady boarded a bus to go home after a long day at work as a seamstress at a department store. On that bus trip she was arrested for refusing to give up her seat, a seat that was actually in the colored section. Rosa Parks' simple act became a pivotal moment in the civil rights movement.

The last words of an account manager named Todd Beamer were "Let's roll!" He and the other passengers on United Flight 93 courageously then moved forward to retake control of the plane from the terrorists on 9/11. They all died in a field in Pennsylvania.

After her 13-year-old daughter was killed by a drunk driver, Candy Lightner founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). MADD transformed our views about driving under the influence and led to stricter laws across the country.



If you wanted to spark the civil rights movement, would you have chosen a seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama?



If you had needed to stop a group of terrorists, would you have chosen an account manager?



If you wanted to change the laws about repeat drunk driving offenders, would you have chosen a mom from California?



If you had wanted to stop a column of Chinese tanks leaving Tiananmen Square, would you have sent this guy out?

See, they were all common people, doing life, working their jobs, taking care of their families. But they got used in an extraordinary way.

If you wanted to establish an organization, a worldwide organization, that would still be around two thousand years after you were gone, how would you select your core leaders to accomplish that task? I think I would certainly think about the top thinkers of the day, highly educated people, well-respected, proven leaders, gifted speakers, great organizers, and go look for those kinds of people.

Today we're going to look at a passage in Luke 6 that explains how Jesus chose the people that He was going to entrust with the health, the well-being, and the expansion of His Church after He left.

But before we get to Luke 6, it's really helpful to have a little bit of a survey of what's happened between chapter 3 and chapter 6, to understand what's already happened in Jesus' ministry.

See, for the sake of storytelling, most of the time in movies or TV shows about Jesus, they kind of start with Jesus gathering the twelve. And so, you think that He started there and that it grew from those people surrounding him. But that's not how Luke represents what was happening before He ever chose the twelve. See, His ministry already had a multiple of people gathering around Him. He was doing miracles, He was teaching. And then, from that multitude of people, a larger group of disciples was forming. These were consistent followers who were attaching themselves to Jesus. It is from that group of disciples that Jesus is going to pick the twelve.

Jesus' Growing Group of Followers

But before we get to the call, let's look at this context. We'll pick it up in Luke 3 where Jesus is being baptized by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. A cloud opens up and the voice of God speaks and says, "[Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased.](#)" Jesus is going public.

He goes from that setting to the wilderness. He wanders around the wilderness for forty days, where He's tempted by Satan.

The next place He shows up is in the town of Nazareth, His hometown. It's a small village on the side of a hill. There He's asked as kind of rabbi to speak and to share. And so, He reads the scripture that day, the message from the Torah and the second reading. And it's there He says, "[I'm fulfilling this in front of you today.](#)" It's interesting that Jesus stops short of the complete passage when He says that.

People begin to wonder, "Who is this guy?" And people know His friends and family; they saw Him growing up and running around the village. And they say, "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

But by [Luke 4, verse 36](#), we see this: "[And amazement came upon them all, and they began discussing with one another saying, 'What is this message? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.'](#) And the report about Him was getting out into every locality in the surrounding district."

Jesus in [Luke 4:42](#) is teaching the multitudes. It says in verse 42, "[And when day came, He departed and went to a lonely place; and the multitudes were searching for him, and came to him, and tried to keep Him from going away from them.](#)"

So, there's this group of people called the multitude—it's a large number of people, probably in the hundreds. There are probably 500 to 600 people in the room right now. We would be called a multitude. We're not counting the heads. We know later on there are times when it's in the thousands and actually five thousand or eight thousand around Jesus. But this multitude begins to gather around Him and is following Him around to see His miracles and to hear His teaching. It's the multitude of the curious. This is the best show in town, and they want to see what's happening.

Now Jesus has been doing miracles during these chapters. He's healed a demonic man of his possession; He's healed Peter's mother-in-law; Peter has his fantastic catch of fish; He healed the paralytic man and the man with the withered hand.

While all this is going on, another group is forming within that group of multitudes. It's a large group of disciples. It's people who are becoming consistent in their following of Jesus, and they're following Him regularly. We know how people like Peter left his fishing net. Well, he didn't just walk up on him one day and say, "Come follow me"—or on Matthew the tax collector who left his booth. They had had multiple contacts with Jesus. They had been hearing His teaching, they had been seeing these miracles happen. One of the qualifications they use later in Acts 2 when they're replacing Judas is the replacement must have witnessed this from the time of the baptism until the Resurrection.

So, they had had multiple contacts and they had chosen to become part of this group called the committed, these disciples around Him. In that group were also a number of women, like Mary Magdalene. They were coming out of that large circle into a circle of the committed.

So, when you think about the disciples of Jesus, even early on, you need to think beyond the twelve. It was a large group. If there are six hundred here, let's say there are a hundred in that discipleship group now. They're attaching themselves to Jesus. And the twelve are going to be selected out of that group of a hundred. We know that at one point He sends out at least seventy people to go into the villages to preach.

An Oppositional Group Forms

Now so that no good deed goes unpunished, there's a resistance that's also forming against Jesus. The scribes and the Pharisees begin to see Him and watch Him and watch the multitudes follow Him and not them. They're threatened by that, and they're looking for a way

to accuse Him and bring some kind of charges against Him. They're getting angrier and they want to figure out what they might use against Jesus.

The Call

So now, again, the leaders that Jesus is going to choose—the twelve—are going to come out of this multitude of the curious, the larger group of disciples that have chosen to follow Him. It is in that context that Luke 6 happens. All of this gone on before this time, and now in [Luke 6: 12](#) it says, “[And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.](#)” Jesus spends the whole night in prayer. This is the only time in Scripture that it is mentioned that Jesus spent that much in prayer. We know there's a place where it talks about how Jesus withdraws to pray; He prayed in the evening in the Garden of Gethsemane. But this is the only time that it mentions that He went off and prayed all night.

And then in verse 13, it says, “[And when day came, He called His disciples](#)”-- (this larger group of, let's say, one hundred)—“[and He chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew; and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.](#)”

This is how He selected them from the larger group.

Now He called these folks for a unique purpose. He gives them a unique name—apostles. “Apostle” simply means “sent ones.” It doesn't mean to put them on a church, statues, all that stuff. They're just sent ones.

He's going to draw these unique group of people, these twelve, into a unique view of Jesus and His ministry from this point on. That's going to shape them to be His witnesses, His sent messengers. It's going to be hard to refute facts about His ministry, His miracles, His teaching, if you have at least twelve testaments of eyewitnesses to that. You only needed two to establish fact.

So, He gives them a unique designation and He gives them a unique role. And it's a unique role in establishing His Church. He chooses common men for an uncommon purpose. He's going to train these folks to be the transitional leaders of his early Church. They're going to be instrumental in establishing the Church, in writing the gospels and the epistles, in expanding

the scope of the Church beyond Israel. But that all comes later. That's not now. He's choosing common people for a very uncommon purpose.

I have personally enjoyed watching the show *The Chosen* in all its seasons. What I appreciate about it is its portrayal of this interaction of these disciples as they wrestle with following Jesus and getting close—the emotions that they're feeling, the interaction that they have. They're just common guys.

Now we tend to think of the twelve apostles—because we see them again in statues afterward, after we know what they accomplished—as these holy, righteous, and courageous dudes. That is not who they are. We think they were totally sold out to God from the beginning. That wasn't true.

Because we tend to think of them that way, we can project on ourselves that we have to become something more than who we are in order for God to use us. That's not where these guys started when they followed Jesus.

Let's look at Acts chapter 4 at the end of a situation where the high priest and the elders of Israel have taken Peter and John and examined them because they had the audacity to heal a lame man in the temple.

So, they examine them, and here's what it says in [verse 13](#): “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that they had been with Jesus.”

Let's look for a minute at just how ordinary their backgrounds were. Let's look at professions: multiple of them were fishermen, there was a tax collector, there was a national zealot. There were Galileans, which meant something, and there were Judeans. There were some who worked for Rome as a tax collector, and some who wanted to kill Romans as a zealot. They were not a homogenous group of people. They were not holy and righteous, certainly. But God is going to use them. They bring all of their prejudice with them when they come to this—prejudice about one another in this group, and prejudice about other people. That's how ordinary these guys were.

Let's look at how unschooled they were. They had little formal education. They got on-the-job training for their professions as fishermen and tax gatherers and as a zealot. But there's no indication that any of them were selected for advanced education beyond the age of thirteen. They learned to read and write but had no formal education beyond that.

They were primarily exposed the teaching of their local synagogue when they went to the synagogue. Now that teaching would include this. During that period of time, there was a liturgy about the synagogue teaching, just as if you go to a formal church today there's an Old Testament reading and a New Testament reading. They had a similar kind of liturgy that dated back to the days of Babylon.

What they would do, typically, in this region, is read through the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, every year—a section each day, going through the whole Torah. The last day they would read the last passage of the Torah, and then they would start over, and they would have a party for that. So, every year they're hearing those five books, the stories of their history, their nation.

Along with that, there's a corresponding passage. There's a unique way they did this. They would attach to that a passage from the other prophets in Old Testament scripture. And those passages primarily had to do with the Messiah. Again, this liturgy started in Babylon when there were in exile. So, they had been looking for hundreds of years toward the coming of the Messiah. So, that's what they heard in their synagogue each week, this promise of the Messiah.

See, at best, these guys knew the Jewish law well enough to know that they could not meet the standards of the scribes and Pharisees. They just didn't measure up.

I appreciate understanding that, because when I was in college, I was incredibly Bible illiterate. I'd come to know Christ when I was sixteen. In college I decided at one point that either I had to figure out how to walk with God consistently, or I needed to figure out how I could get Him out of my life so that I could live the way I wanted to live. I chose over a Spring Break that I would walk with God.

So, when I went back after that Spring Break, some fraternity brothers who were believers in the house were dividing up the fraternity brothers to lead Bible studies. There were some guys they kind of didn't want in their group anymore because they had been disruptive and had questions. Most of those guys on that "we'll come back to" list were the guys I was close with. They were my drinking friends. So, I said, "Okay, I'll lead a Bible study with them." Well, it probably isn't fair to call it a Bible study, because it was really a book club. They suggested that since I didn't know very much of the Bible, that I should just get Paul Little's book *Know Why You Believe*. And I could read a chapter, write some discussion questions, and just lead a discussion and see where it went.

So, I gathered this group of guys. We'd read one chapter. I didn't even read the rest of the book—I didn't know how it ended. I'd read one chapter, I'd lead a discussion. During that discussion, one of the guys said, "Doesn't it say somewhere in the Bible that God loves everyone?" And I would say, "I don't know. It sounds biblical. I'll find out." And so, it did sound biblical, but I didn't know where it said that. So, I'd go ask my mentors, "Does it say somewhere that God loves everybody?" And they'd say, "Yeah, right here. Let's look at John 3:16." And so, I'd look at it and come back and say, "Guys, the Bible does say that, and here it is. Let's look at John 3:16."

That's where I started as a group leader. So, as I got into ministry and was trying to encourage people that I was discipling to become a group leader, they'd say, "Ray, I just don't know enough of the Bible to lead a discussion group or to lead a Bible study." I'd say, "Oh, really? You want to match biblical ignorance with me and where I started?" It just doesn't fly. That's how uneducated I was, and God could use me.

These guys were not only uneducated; they believed the wrong things—things that just weren't true about God or how He dealt with things. They bought into the fallacy that rich people and religious people would get into heaven and common people wouldn't. They believed that people who were blind or sick or lame were that way because of sin in their life or maybe their parents' lives. They believed the purpose of the Messiah's coming was to overthrow the Roman rule and to establish Israel as a great nation again. These are the guys He's choosing.

These guys were rough-around-the-edges kind of guys—guys who would sit around a campfire, swap fishing stories, and belch on cheap wine.

They faced the corruption of the Jewish religious system that kept the common people as outsiders. Religious piety was what God was looking for. People like fishermen, tax gatherers, prostitutes, carpenters, laborers, sinners need not apply. God had no use for people like them.

Why did Jesus not wait and pick a better group of guys? Why not someone educated like Nicodemus or Jairus, who was a synagogues ruler, or Joseph of Arimathea? Why not go ahead and convert someone dramatically, like the Apostle Paul?

No, these were common men of their day. They would still be judged as common men today.

Why does God do that? Why does He choose common people for the task of building and expanding His Church? Because if it works, it must be an act of God. God would have to do that, because there's nothing talented in these guys.

There's an old saying: if you see a turtle on a fencepost, you know he didn't get there on his own. If you see these guys establish a worldwide church, they didn't get there on their own. God was doing something.

The Church exists today as a testimony of God's work to His glory, not necessarily to the wisdom of these founding leaders or the leaders since.

This church, Grace Covenant Church, exists today as a testimony to God's work to His glory, not to the wisdom of our founders, not past or current church leaders. In my twenty-nine years on staff here at Grace, there have been multiple times and multiple good reasons for this church to split. There were staff transitions that were hard, there were elder transitions that were hard, there was a battle over worship styles—contemporary and traditional. There were real questions about whether or not we should build this building or not, and some people left because of it. And then we had COVID: masks or no masks? There's no win in that choice. I was there. It's to the glory of God that we are here and we are thriving.

The Bible gives us now criteria for selection of the elders and church leaders. They're listed in Titus and in 1 Timothy. We have a whole process built around the qualifications of those passages. We actually work with someone to disciple and mentor them for a year before they even go through the process of interviews and questionnaires and interviews with their spouse and prayer and discussions and all that sort of thing before they ever get to you as a candidate for voting on as an elder.

But that's not the selection process used here for these twelve. What if Jesus could see something in them that He could also see in us?

Criteria for Jesus' Selection

Let's go back to [Acts 4:13](#): “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled and ordinary, they were astonished and they took note that they had been with Jesus.”

What does that look like? How do you see that in someone, that it looks like they were with Jesus? I think there are a few criteria and aspects we can see in these guys--again, before

they were apostles, when they were just followers of Christ, that we might be able to see in us also.

The first I would point out is that they were seekers of God. They desired something more spiritually than just fulfilling religious acts. They wanted a relationship with God. They wanted something deeper in that relationship.

Jesus was changing the rules. Connection with God was no longer to be based on religious piety. It was going to be based on faith in the heart. On one side, it's faith in you doing things for God that makes you acceptable. On the other, it's a faith that He makes you acceptable to God. And our choice is this transfer of trust.

These early disciples showed themselves to be seekers of God. Does that sound like you, a seeker of God?

A second aspect that we can see in them is this commitment. They were committed. They moved from the circle of the curious multitude to the circle of the committed. They became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, that no one else had words of life. They were willing to stop keeping Jesus at a distance and move closer, and to take that risk of moving closer. See, the closer you get to a light and a mirror, the more imperfections you see in yourself, and many people are too afraid of that to get closer.

These early disciples were wrestling with whether or not they had enough faith to take that risk in Jesus. They had their doubts—even after the resurrection—whether or not the Messiah could come back in this way. They had to deal with their prejudice and their wrong beliefs about God. Does that sound like you?

See, this move to the circle of the committed meant that they had to entrust themselves to other people who were in that circle. They needed to connect to community and not stay as an outsider, just looking at Jesus from a distance.

They were seekers of God. They were committed to following Him. And the third thing I think would distinguish them in that group is they were available. They believed that God could use someone like them. See, even before they're chosen as apostles, these sent messengers were willing to tell others about what they saw, what they heard, and the impact it had on them, and what they had come to believe: that Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior.

In John 1, John records that, starting with the baptism of Jesus (that's where I started in Luke 3—that event was important). Starting there, one of John's disciples was a guy named

Andrew, Peter's brother. And when he heard John say, "There's the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," he follows Jesus, and he goes and finds his brother, Simon. And he says, "We have found the Messiah." And he brings Peter to Jesus.

The next day they're off in Galilee and Jesus finds a guy named Philip. And He says, "Follow me." And Philip had a friend named Nathanael. So, he goes and tells Nathanael, "We have found Him of whom Moses and the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Nathanael's response is, "Could anything good come from Nazareth?" You've got to see the place to understand that.

Philip said, "Why don't you come and see?" And he does.

See, all these things were happening before they were chosen as the apostles.

Application

God is still using common people for an uncommon purpose. The growth of the Church through the centuries has not been because of celebrity pastors or great orators or great evangelists. They serve their purpose in time. The message of Jesus, being the Savior, goes out by means of ordinary people telling others what they have seen God do, what they have heard in the teachings of the Bible, and the impact it has had on them personally.

See, we choose to be seekers of a closer relationship with God. And God sees that in us. Little by little, we start reading our Bible, and then we start praying a little bit more as part of that seeking. We move from the circle of the curious multitude to the circle of the committed. We choose to show up. We choose to be learners. We choose to get connected in community with others who share a similar commitment to follow Jesus. We're seekers, we're committed, and we're also available. We begin to believe that God could use someone like me, someone like you, to build His Church and to be a messenger to others.

Sometimes it's fun when you go on a mission trip and you see someone who goes reluctantly, maybe, but willingly. They're available. And they go and they begin to play with the children, and they teach a Bible story, and they begin to see that God can use them to do something incredible, to touch another life.

In the next several weeks the ministries of Grace will gear back up. I want you to consider what your next steps in seeking to grow in your relationship with Christ will be, in being a committed follower of Him, and being available to be used by Him to bring Him glory.

Let me tell you a story. My wife's grandmother was Thelma Frensley. When she died, a long-time family friend, Mark Hall, called and asked if he could speak at the memorial. We didn't know what he wanted to share, but still we were glad to give him the platform. Because the Frensley and the Crouch/Hall families had been friends for three generations. Diana's grandmother and Mark's grandmother were friends. Her name was Ellen Crouch. They were childhood friends. Diana's dad and Betty Hall, Mark's mom, had been friends who had grown up together. Diana and her sister and the children of the Hall family had grown up together, connecting and doing things together in the summer.

We were surprised when Mark shared that Nana had had an impact on four generations of his family, down through his own children. Ellen, Mark's grandmother, was eleven years old when she moved to Port Arthur, Texas, from New York state. She was a lonely girl and went outside to play and met another neighborhood girl, Thelma, who was her age also. The two of them became fast friends and wound up being lifelong friends. Ellen's family didn't go to church. They weren't attenders. But Thelma invited Ellen to go to church with her. There Ellen heard Bible stories. She learned to sing songs about God's love. She was taught that Jesus was the Savior.

As a little girl, Ellen placed her trust in Jesus as her personal Savior. As an adult, Ellen led her daughter Betty to the Lord as her Savior. Betty led her children to the Lord, which included Mark. And Mark had taught his children that God loved them and that Jesus was the Savior, and they embraced Jesus as the Savior.

Four generations of one family became believers because a little girl invited a new friend to come to church with her--an ordinary girl being used by God to change four generations of a family.

If you wanted to see generations of a family come to know Jesus, would you pick an eleven-year-girl to be your messenger?

What if God wanted to build a church in Austin? What if He wanted to reach the people in your neighborhood? What if he wanted to minister to people in your office—your coworkers?

Who would He choose? He would choose you. He'd choose you, and He'd choose you. Because God still uses common people for an uncommon purpose.

Our job as pastors and teachers and elders and leaders of this church is to equip you to do works of service, to build God's Church, to expand the influence of Jesus to other people. We can't equip you if you don't believe that God could use you. I need you to start believing.

God has you in your place at this time because He uses ordinary, common people for an uncommon purpose. And if He would build a church with ordinary people, then He'll receive the glory for that, because He did it through us.

See, God takes the common and sanctifies it. He sets it apart for an uncommon purpose, His uncommon use of common people.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You that You are God Most High. You love us and You came to us, and Jesus, You are our Savior. There is no one who has words of life like You. Father, before You are the people of Grace Covenant Church. They come as seekers, they come as people committed to Jesus as their Savior, and they make themselves available to You. Would You use us for extraordinary purposes as just common people? In Jesus' name. Amen.