

PICK YOUR FRIENDS WELL

Twelfth in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *Lessons for Life* from Luke 6:12-19
“When day came, He called His disciples to Him; and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles.” Luke 6:13

Pepper Rogers was head football coach at Georgia Tech in the 1970s. But before Georgia Tech, from 1971-1973, he was head coach at UCLA. He was suffering through a period where UCLA lost some tough games, and he was receiving a lot of criticism from the fans and the media. He complained to his wife, but felt she wasn't sympathetic enough. So he said to her, “My dog is my only friend. A man ought to have at least two friends.” She replied to him, “So get yourself another dog!”

Today we come to the final lesson for life in this series, that we draw from the teaching and practice of Jesus. Today's lesson is, *Pick your friends well*. Turn with me to Luke 6:12-19 which is the account of how Jesus chose his twelve disciples. In this passage I want you to note three things: **1. The process Jesus followed** as he picked his disciples, **2. The people** he chose, where we'll learn something about who these men were; and **3. The priorities** he looked for in the men he selected. Then we'll draw some applications for our own lives and our relationships.

1. The process Jesus followed as he picked his disciples. We have a major transition between verses 11 and 12. Prior to verse 12 Jesus was making short—what we would call mission trips—to the cities and towns of Galilee. The men he had called previously to follow him accompanied him on these preaching forays, and then they returned home and took care of the responsibilities of family and business. We may assume that some went with him on one occasion and others accompanied him on other occasions as time and schedule permitted. But now in verses 12-13 Luke tells us, “*It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him; and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles.*” The call was now going to be for full time ministry, and this was a call the twelve would fulfill for the rest of their lives.

I want us to observe the process Jesus followed as he chose the twelve, for he does not take this step lightly or casually. Luke says first of all he went off to the mountain to pray. Don't picture Jesus climbing some lofty and inaccessible peak in the Rockies or the Alps. Rather it was a hill, the hill where he preached the “Sermon on the Mount.” He chose an isolated, park-like setting where he would not be disturbed. It was around sunset when he withdrew there, for Luke says he spent the entire night in prayer. While everyone else was asleep, Jesus prayed.

We may assume that he prayed about each of the scores or perhaps hundreds of men who had participated in his preaching junkets, the men who had helped with the crowds, who had made the arrangements for him in various towns. They had heard him teach. They had seen his miracles of healing. And Jesus had had the opportunity to observe them and get to know them on a personal level. So now he was carefully reviewing each man, judging each heart, thinking over each one's talents and abilities.

And he prayed about each of them in turn. In Romans 8:27 the apostle Paul discusses the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and he says, “*He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is.*” In other words, as Jesus prayed he entered into intimate contact with the Holy Spirit who dwells in each Christian’s heart. And the Holy Spirit revealed what he inside each person. Who is this person, really? How much does he love God? How much does he truly desire to be holy and righteous? All of this Jesus was searching out as he prayed his way through the list of candidates.

George Washington said, “*Associate yourself with men of good quality if you esteem your own reputation: for it is better to be alone than in bad company.*” That’s what Jesus was doing, and we would be wise to follow his careful pattern in choosing those who are our friends. Many people today pick their friends in a most casual manner. I don’t know how many of you have profiles registered on the internet through *Facebook* or *MySpace.com*. For those of you who are uninitiated, those sites enable you to name someone as your “friend,” giving him special access to your information. But many people are discovering that your so-called friends can lift your pictures or stated indiscretions and plaster them all over the internet. There are now several companies that specialize in cleaning up your image on the web. They promise that if someone—a prospective employer, for example--googles your name, they’ll never find the embarrassing information that may be floating around out there about you. Beware, then, of whom you make your friends!

2. The people Jesus chose to be his disciples. Verse 13 says that in the morning Jesus called all his disciples together—the whole crowd of people—and announced the twelve he’d picked to be with him from that time on. He would give these twelve extensive training and private teaching which would equip them to be his apostles. Luke names them for us in verses 14-16. First on the list is “**Simon**, whom He also named *Peter*.” Peter’s given name in Hebrew was Symeon. Like many in that day, he had adopted the Greek-sounding variant, Simon. Jesus named him Peter which means *Rock* in Greek. This name might have been a nickname, but more probably it was a means of protecting his identity and ensuring the safety of his family against the growing opposition to Jesus. Peter was originally from Bethsaida which was a fishing town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. But Peter had moved to Capernaum on the north shore and he had a house there which Jesus used as his Galilean headquarters.

Second on the list is **Andrew**, Simon Peter’s brother. The name *Andrew* is another of these nicknames, and it means *manly*. Combine that name with Peter and we get a clue to the type of men they were. Andrew had joined Peter as a partner in the Capernaum fishing business. Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist and was the one who had introduced Peter to Jesus. Third, is **James** whose younger brother, **John**, is the fourth on the list. Their father, Zebedee, had made his sons partners in the family fishing business they ran out of Capernaum. They were a well-to-do family. Their mother was Salome who was the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, so James and John were Jesus’ cousins. He named them *the sons of Thunder*, which tells us something about their personalities. They were strong, loud, energetic men.

Fifth is **Philip**. About all we know of him is that he, like Peter and Andrew, was from Bethsaida. They may have been boyhood pals. Philip's friend, **Bartholomew**, sometimes called Nathaniel, is given sixth. He was a godly man of whom Jesus said he had no guile or duplicity in his heart. (John 1:47) How rare is that? Philip, who was initially also a disciple of John the Baptist, was the one who first introduced Bartholomew, or Nathaniel, to Jesus. Bartholomew was from Cana. Do you remember what happened in Cana? Jesus attended a wedding there and performed his first miracle, turning water into wine. Could it have been Bartholomew's wedding Jesus attended? Did Bartholomew invite Jesus to the wedding after first meeting him through Philip? It's fun to speculate about how closely these men may have been connected to each other!

So far each of the disciples chosen had long and deep spiritual experience. Now we meet one who didn't. The seventh named is **Matthew**, sometimes called Levi. You recall that he was the tax collector in Capernaum. Matthew was a crook who hung out with the Capernaum underworld, but he was to become the author or compiler of the gospel that bears his name. The name of the eighth disciple is **Thomas**. Thomas is another of these nicknames. It means *Twin*. So, probably Thomas had a twin brother. Some have speculated that his twin brother was Matthew, but we don't know. Ninth is **James the Less**. He was called *the Less*, perhaps to distinguish him from James, the brother of John, or because he was younger than the other James, or because he was a short little fellow. His father's name was Alpheus, which was the same name as the father of Matthew. It's possible he was Matthew's brother, which would make Matthew even more the family's black sheep. But here's another possibility. There is some evidence to suggest that James might have been the son of Cleopas, another possible pronunciation of the same Hebrew word from which we get Alpheus, so that could make him another cousin of Jesus. There is no way to know for sure.

The tenth disciple named is **Simon the Zealot**. This could be a reference to his zeal and passion for God, or, more likely, he had some connection with the political party of terrorist revolutionaries that agitated for Jewish independence. That would make Simon and Matthew as different in their political beliefs as far left Democrats and conservative Republicans are today. Do you see how Jesus can bring people together? Eleventh is **Judas**, the son of James, sometimes called Thaddeus, of whom we know nothing. The final disciple is **Judas Iscariot**, who is always listed last, and who is always identified by the words, "*who became a traitor*" or something equivalent. The name Iscariot literally means *a man from Kerioth*, which tells us that he came originally from Moab in the mountainous region on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea in what is today Jordan, or from the semi-desert section of southern Israel, below Hebron. The point is that where all the others appear to have come from Galilee in the north, Judas Iscariot was from another part of the country altogether and spoke with a different accent—say, Brooklyn versus deep South. No one knew Judas from before. These then were the twelve men Jesus chose to be his inner circle of disciples.

3. The priorities that Jesus looked for in the men he chose. The question we want to ask here, is, what made Jesus select these particular men? First of all, notice again that in verse 13 he named them as apostles. In other words, he chose these men

with the intention that they would be the ones he would charge with building his church. Verse 17 says, “*He descended [from the mountain] with them, and stood on a level place; and there was a great multitude of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon.*” The region of Tyre and Sidon was the seat of the old Phoenician sea-going empire. The north African city of Carthage which was a rival of Rome for many, many years was a Phoenician colony. They were entrenched pagans by heritage, and the territory around Tyre and Sidon was outside Israel proper. So, in Tyre and Sidon we have the entire world represented symbolically, standing alongside with the Old Testament church. Something new was going to happen, and these twelve men were the ones who would lead the way to bring the whole world to Christ. They were the ones who would penetrate the distant parts of the earth with the gospel. Jesus chose them because he believed they were the ones who possessed the necessary gifts to carry out that task.

What kind of qualifications did they possess? Well, there was zeal. We may think of Peter in this regard. Boisterous Peter, who sometimes talked and acted before he thought, but who boasted to Jesus that he would die before he denied Christ or the cause. (Matthew 26:35) He still had to learn to rely on Christ’s power, but no one could deny his passion. Then there was loyalty. Think of Thomas. When Jesus told his disciples that he was heading to Jerusalem, they all thought he was being foolish, but Thomas said, “Come on, fellows. Let’s go and die with him!” (John 11:16) Then there was the willingness to learn and to be lead. James and John came to Jesus and requested that they might be appointed to the most important places in his coming kingdom. (Mark 10:35-45) That doesn’t sound like humble followers! But when Jesus rebuked them and redirected their vision, they yielded. John in his old age became the greatest servant to the church, continually urging believers to love one another rather than seeking their own benefit. As he was carried into the churches, he would say to the younger believers, “Little children, love one another. Love one another.” Finally, there was the willingness to stand together so that they might never be divided. In the book of Acts (2:14) we find this clearly demonstrated. It’s Pentecost. The apostles storm the temple courtyard, and there, surrounded by thousands of people, they brave the fierce opposition. They set Peter forward as their collective mouthpiece, and they fearlessly proclaim the gospel to the masses—believe in him and you will be saved!

All of these are rare qualities in men. Perhaps you’ve heard the story about two friends, John and Dave, who were hiking in the woods when they came upon an obviously hungry mountain lion who was blocking the path. Dave immediately sat down and pulled from his backpack a pair of running shoes and shorts. He removed his hiking boots and put on his tennis shoes. John said, “You don’t think you can outrun that mountain lion, do you?” “I don’t have to,” said Dave. “I only have to outrun you.” Jesus wanted better friends than that.

What can we learn from this account of Jesus choosing the twelve disciples? First, we should realize that you and I can have no better friend than Jesus, and we should desire above all to have him as our friend. In the upper room on his last night with these men, Jesus said (John 15:13-14), “*Greater love has no one than this, that a man lay down*

his life for his friends. You are My friends.” What a wonderful thing to hear the Savior say that to us! On the cross he laid down his life to pay for the sins of sinners like you and me. There is no possible way you or I can make ourselves acceptable to God by doing good or being religious. You can be forgiven only if you turn from your sins and place your faith in Jesus, trusting that he has done everything necessary to secure our salvation. You will find no better friend than he.

But, second, how do we know that we have become a friend of Jesus? Jesus told his disciples in John 15:14. *“You are My friends if you do what I command you.”* If we have been saved by his sacrifice for us, it should produce in us a gratitude so great that we will do anything for him, that we will render him our full obedience and service. Judas Iscariot was present that night. He heard those words. In a sense they were meant for him as a last appeal to turn from his sin. But all along he had disobeyed Christ. He was the group’s treasurer, but he was an embezzler. He feigned concern for the poor, but he criticized Mary of Bethany when she poured her expensive perfume on Jesus as an expression of her great love. Judas’ heart was full of greed. He was committed only to his own welfare. He had never been Jesus’ friend. What a terrible warning this is to any man or woman who is not completely serious about following Christ. The Bible says Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him, and yet he chose him to be a disciple. That tells us sin is not forced upon us. It is always something we choose to do. Look into your own soul this morning and make sure that from the heart you are a friend of Jesus, and that he is your friend.

Finally, third, we ought to make friends of those who share our love for Christ, and are, like ourselves, committed to his kingdom and to the standards of righteousness. Jesus prayed in the upper room for his disciples and for those who would come to him through their testimony. *“That they may all be one,”* he prayed. (John 17:21) Anything that divides Christian from Christian, or places an impediment to true and loving fellowship among believers is condemned by Jesus in the strongest possible manner. When any Christian is left without friends in the church, that too, is a failure by believers to follow Jesus. The first commandment he gave us is to love God and to love each other. If we would be friends of Jesus, we must be very careful of the others he regards as his friends. We must love each other. There must be no fracture in the body.

Scott and Crystie Peeler have a little burro named Butterbean, that runs around in the pen in their yard. Crystie is a vet, so that perhaps explains their somewhat exotic pet. Butterball is a cute little thing. He stands probably three feet high. But burros are strange creatures. They can’t live without a friend. So Scott and Crystie bought a little goat they’ve named Billy G, who has big horns and is about two-thirds as big as the burro. These two are inseparable. They stand together, run around together, eat together, sleep together. A burro and a goat. Friends. But there is a parable here for Christians. Love one another!

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