

Stepping Out in Faith Sermon Series
The Disciples
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When I entered college, I was sure what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a doctor. Why? Was it because I was fascinated by the human body and modern medicine? Did I hold an altruistic ideal that I could cure people and make their lives better? Was it because I had the handwriting for it? Nope. I wanted to be a doctor to make lots of money. That's how 18-year-old Kory thought.

One of my first classes was Chemistry 101. It was taught by a guy who was about 100 years old and is probably still teaching today. It was a large class and my uncle was actually in there with me. That was great, because it meant we could study together. Unfortunately, studying together turned into five minutes of classwork and two hours of video games. I did not do well in Chemistry 101.

So I went to see my academic advisor and told her I wanted to change my major from pre-med. She said, "To what?" I said, "To anything that doesn't require math or science." She thought a minute and said, "Have you thought about communications?" I said no, but I like to talk. A lot. She said, "That will be perfect for you." So, without ever having taken a communications class or talking to a communications professor, I changed my major to communications.

That may not be the biggest leap of faith in my life, but it's one of the most memorable. We've all had moments when we've had to make a decision or take a stand on something that we weren't really sure about. We had no guarantee of an outcome and no promise that everything was going to work out all right. And yet, we went ahead and bought the house or changed jobs or make some other life-altering decision.

In this sermon series, which Trish introduced so well last week with Esther, we're looking at people in the Bible who made the decisions or took actions, not based on information or knowledge, but simply based on trust, or more specifically, trust in God. That can be the hardest step to take, and yet when we do, we are rewarded by seeing God in action in our lives.

Today, we're going to be looking at a group of people in the Bible who took a huge leap of faith based on very little information, and it changed the course of history. You heard the story in both our readings today about Jesus calling his disciples. I wish we had more information about these encounters because I have so many questions, but all we know is what the Bible tells us, and it's an amazing show of trust by both the disciples and by Jesus. Jesus called, they followed.

Realize at this point in the story, those men probably didn't have any idea who Jesus really was. He hadn't worked any miracles or delivered any sermons. And these men had other responsibilities to think about. They had families, they had jobs. They had 100 different reasons not to drop everything and follow this wandering prophet. And yet they went.

Talk about trust! I'm not sure about you, but I don't know that I would have responded the way they did. I might have been curious about what Jesus had to say, but I would probably want to ease into the situation a bit more slowly. Maybe I could put my name on a signup sheet for potential disciples or attend a potluck presentation on the

Kingdom of God. Maybe I could find an article on the internet called, “Twelve reasons to follow a wandering prophet – you won’t believe #7!” Maybe if I waited a bit longer Jesus would offer a less rigorous category of auxiliary membership with which I could get the same rewards with such a radical commitment.

But Jesus isn’t asking for our auxiliary membership. He’s asking for our lives, our faith, our complete trust...and that’s not an easy thing to give, at least for me. I enjoy the intellectual part of faith. I would teach a Bible Study every day if I could. Understanding the theology beyond your beliefs is an important part of having faith. But being a disciple is about more than talking theology or praying an eloquent prayer. Being a disciple means that when we are faced with a crucial moment in our lives, we respond we trust. When we are called to serve, or when we are called to take a stand, or when we are called to lean into an unseen God, we respond with trust.

That trust is built upon faith, not knowledge or training. If a certain level of competence were required to be a follower of Jesus, I’m not sure any of us would make the cut. There’s a lot to like about this Jesus guy, but he wouldn’t make a very good headhunter for a company. As one of the pastors of this church I’m blessed to work with an incredibly skilled and delightful group of folks. Every person on staff here is hard-working and a joy to be around. But they are also very, very talented at what they do. Imagine me randomly choosing one of you to play the prelude on the organ or provide childcare for our toddlers every week. Good luck! We have made it a point to hire people who are good at what they are hired to do.

Not Jesus. He needs to recruit 12 people to help him spread the word about God’s kingdom here on earth. I’m thinking he needs a few marketing folks, maybe a motivational speaker, a few talented salespeople. So who does he recruit? A bunch of fishermen and tax collectors and other blue-collar workers. Really, Jesus? Have you seen these guys’ resumes? Have you *smelled* their resumes?

But what Jesus knows is that God doesn’t call those who are equipped; God equips those who are called. When Jesus is calling the disciples, he’s not calling them for who they are. He’s calling them for who they have the potential to be. He’s not just looking at them; he’s looking into them. So the only prerequisite to being a follower of Christ is a genuine desire to follow. After all, how do you prepare yourself to be a disciple? How do you prepare yourself to trust, no matter what life throws at you? We can’t know what it’s like to have faith in the midst of a crisis until we are in that crisis. Our trust is not built upon knowledge or training; it is built upon a step-by-step journey of faith, a daily commitment to following Jesus. When we trust God in the little things, we are able to trust God in the big things.

Sean and Susan faced one of those big things, and it was the scariest thing I’ve ever seen. Sean and Susan were members of my last church and some of the most faithful people I know. Susan was an Elder and Sean went on several mission trips with us. One night, I got a call around midnight from Sean. Their young daughter, Grace, had been rushed to the hospital with what turned out to be a brain aneurysm. She was fine at dinner time and now just a few hours later she was fighting for her life.

As we sat in the hospital room in the early morning hours, waiting for news from the doctors, Sean and Susan and I talked about faith and God and why this had happened. And through her tears, I remember Susan saying that, no matter what happened to Grace, she trusted in God. It was the most radical statement of faith I had ever heard. I had seen

Susan trust in God in the little things every day for years. Now, faced with this unthinkable big thing, her faith and trust was holding her up. Thankfully, Grace recovered and is a beautiful and creative young woman. But, if Grace hadn't recovered, I know that Susan's faith would not have been shaken. She trusted God in the little things, so she was able to take this step of faith in the big thing.

I recognize that's easy to say but very hard to do, because not every situation works out the way we want. How do we keep trusting when a prayer isn't answered the way we want? I counted on God to change this situation, to make things better, to comfort and heal, to make life easier. And God didn't come through, so maybe God isn't as trustworthy as we think. Or...maybe we're not asking the right questions of God.

When we trust in God during difficult circumstances, we aren't trusting that everything is going to turn out OK. Not all cancer victims become cancer survivors. Not all car accident victims recover. Not all oppressed and abused people go on to live normal, healthy, happy lives. Trusting in God doesn't ensure that everything that we want to happen will happen. But what it *does* mean is that we believe God is with us through it all. Romans 8 says, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to this purpose." That doesn't say God will make everything work out like we want. But it does say in ALL things God is at work.

I believe that. I can't explain it, but I don't have to understand it to believe in it and trust in it, because I have seen it in action time after time in my life and in my ministry. The time will come for each one of us when we face the same decision. Trust or not trust? Follow or not follow? Ignore the call or answer it? I believe Jesus calls us each and every day to follow him. You know, it would be easier to stay put, to stick to what's familiar, to rest in what's comfortable. And we have that choice, don't we? But if we choose that, then we can't claim to be followers of Jesus. Spectators, maybe. Auxiliary members of the body of Christ. But not followers.

"Follow me," Jesus says. Will we follow him when it makes us uncomfortable? Will we follow him if it makes us unpopular? Will we follow him when it means reexamining our own tightly held beliefs and worldviews? Will we trust him when we don't know what our next step will be? Will we have faith in him when we don't know what's going to happen? Jesus doesn't provide empty platitudes or vague promises. He simply provides an invitation, each and every day. "Follow me." What will you do?