

The 1993 movie "Shadowlands" portrays the joy and pain of the relationship between C. S. Lewis... and American writer - Joy Gresham. Their growing friendship... led to a marriage (only) - of **convenience**. ... The Oxford professor married this single mother... in a secret... civil ceremony... (simply) so that Joy could gain English citizenship. As the movie depicts... eventually it was discovered that Joy had terminal cancer... and Lewis realized his love for her.

Joy's cancer went into temporary remission... and for a season she and Lewis experienced the depth of committed Christian love. ... During this time... an Anglican priest talked with Lewis about prayer. ... In their conversation... a mature description - of how prayer works... was portrayed.

The Priest said: "*I know how hard you've been praying. And now God is answering your prayer.*" ... Lewis responded:

"That's not why I pray, Harry. I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time - waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God, it changes me."

... [P A U S E] ... Prayer changes us... doesn't it. (You probably already knew that this is a purpose for prayer. Didn't you?) ... OK... so then... let me ask you a question. ... Why do you think Jesus prayed when He was on earth? ... Was it necessary for Him to change? ... [P A U S E] ... As today's portion of Scripture opens... we find the Lord on His knees. ... In fact... He is praying all night alone to God the Father. ... Is He (REALLY-REALLY) desperate for some change in His life...?

No. Obviously there is more than ONE purpose for prayer. ... Something else has induced Jesus' prolonged and intense effort. (Put THAT on hold for a few minutes. We will come back to it.)

It is interesting to note that the Jews had places of prayer... called "oratories"... built outside of their cities or towns... where citizens could retire from the bustle of a city... and hold communion with God. ... They were built on the banks of rivers... in groves... or on hills. ... They were *crude* enclosures... made by building a rough wall of stone around a level piece of ground... and capable of accommodating a small number who might go there to pray.

(This makes me think of another movie... that came out in 2015... and was produced by the Kendrick Brothers. Tony Evan's daughter (Priscilla) stars in it. It was called "The War Room"... and it inspired many believers to designate a "*war room*" in their own homes... as a special place for them to pray. ... Have you ever designated a special place where you go for prayer... and do you use it regularly...?

Here in Luke 6... this is the only mention of all night prayer in the New Testament. ... Christ was persistent in His prayer life and His example is one that challenges us to do the same.

D.L. Moody said, "*I'd rather be able to pray than be a great preacher; Jesus Christ never taught his disciples how to preach, but only how to pray.*" We are urged repeatedly in the Scriptures to pray.

Matthew 26:41 (ESV)

⁴¹ *Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*"

1 Thessalonians 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ *pray without ceasing,*

1 Timothy 2:8 (ESV)

⁸ *I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;*

Back in June of 1987... I had just graduated from Western Seminary and had been called to pastor a church in Fresno California. Boy was I scared! I had been a nobody in a very large church... and an un-recognized student in an institution full of noble theologians – who really knew their way around the Bible. But I felt very safe there. ... And now it was time for me to “fly from the nest...” ... It was my very last Sunday at this large church that I attended while I was a seminary student. The pastor... (Bill Perkins)... preached on the very passage... that is our study for today.

God knew that there could not have been a better passage for me to hear... in the condition that I was facing. ... Pastor Bill gave a principle from the passage that I have tried to make central in my ministry. Many of you have heard me say it. ... The principle is this:

“Prayer is the work – ministry is only its overflow.”

Don't ever put the cart before the horse and consider prayer to be ‘a part of ministry’. How many times do we hear church leaders say: ‘*Now that we have planned our ministry... let's ask God to bless it...*’(?) WRONG! ... It must be the other way around. Prayer comes first. Ministry is not primary. Prayer is. ... Ministry must always be part of our praying – flowing out from it... Prayer is the work – ministry is its overflow.”

Have you ever prayed all night? It is extremely hard work. If you don't believe me... just try to pray for one hour. "*Prayer is the work – ministry is its overflow.*" ... We are NOT asking God to join us in our efforts! We seek to join Him in what He is already doing – and *that seeking* is often intense work. ... (**And**) that seeking *pleases* Him. ... It shows our dependence on Him. ... It recognizes that He is sovereign – not us.

So prayer changes us... and second – (in it)... we seek to join God where He is already at work and calling us to join Him. This is what Jesus was doing in our passage today. For me... this was such a great passage... just before I went to my first pastoral ministry. (And) what a great passage it is *for all of us in this room*. Today is our church's annual meeting. Today we evaluate and launch a new year of ministry. Prayer **REALLY HAS TO BE** the main part – out of which it flows.

Luke 6:12-13

Prayer was everything to Jesus. *Through dependent prayer* Jesus lived a life of flawless perfection... so that He could say:

John 8:28-29 (ESV)

²⁸ So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. ²⁹ And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

Even though Jesus is the eternal Son... He is God incarnate... even though Jesus created everything... even though He is the Alpha and Omega... and even though everything is moving toward... and will culminate in Him – Jesus could not live His human life... any other way... than through dependent prayer.

The spiritual logic is inescapable. ... If the eternal Son of God could not function as Jesus without dependent prayer... how much more is it essential for us (who are God's **adopted** sons and daughters) ? ... What folly if we frame our lives with prayer as window dressing ... but do not really pray. ... What arrogance to understand Jesus' necessity - but reject it for ourselves! ... Too often we engage not in *dependent* prayer but in *obligatory or routine* prayer. ... Jesus didn't say: "*Apart from me you can do **some things**.*" ... Rather... He said: "*Apart from me you can do **nothing***" (John 15:5). ... LISTEN! This is the logic of a living church — the logic of spiritual power and true spirituality. ("*Apart from me you can do **nothing***")

So – out of prayer... Jesus picks the men that will be His apostles. ... These would be the men that He would endeavor to teach and imprint His life and message - upon their hearts. ... They were going to be His walking Bibles of the truth. ... When the Lord's time would come to ascend to Heaven... these men would be **primary** to the sharing of His message to a lost world. They were "Deity's Dozen." – Jesus knew that the future of the church rested with them. And they DID go out and turn the world on it's ear! (The world has never been the same.)

Notice with me how verse 12 begins. "*In these days...*" ... Which days? ... The choosing of The Twelve probably occurred - shortly after the sabbath controversies - related in the previous 11 verses (here in chapter 6.) We saw last week that the enemies of Jesus were increasing in numbers and the intensity of their opposition. (In verse 11... Luke wrote how they were worked up into a senseless rage.) They were trying to figure out how to murder Jesus.

Now... Jesus knew that it was not yet His time for going back to Heaven. ... But He (also) must have known how much more *difficult* ministry was going to become. He needed 12 primary administrators... who could help Him *now*... **and** after He was gone. (What Luke mentions AFTER telling us about Jesus choosing these 12... suggests strongly to me that He presently needed officials to help with the crowd and the critics.

Please drop down and look at verses 17-19...

Luke 6:17-19

Jesus found a flat plain on the mountain and delivered His famous “Sermon on the Mount.” Now... he had administrators to help with all the people.

Before selecting these officials... Jesus had a lot of followers. They were all *disciples* (*mathētas*) which means: followers... learners... dedicated students... adherents who had a close personal fellowship with Jesus – and there may have been hundreds... or possibly thousands. But these were not *apostles*.

Jesus singled out (only) 12... to whom He gave the title of “*apostle*.” Disciples were followers... but *apostles* were those sent out as messengers with delegated **authority**. ... An apostle is a person who has been sent (or commissioned.) ... As such he represents his Sender... being clothed with his Sender’s authority (over life issues and doctrinal belief.)

It kind of makes sense (doesn’t it?) why Jesus wanted these officials NOW... and why Luke starts verse 12 off with: “*In those days...*”) The need for apostles was evident.

Luke 6:14-16

All of the disciples – except Judas Iscariot – were Galileans. This was a bunch of “country boy hicks-from-the-sticks.” ... Jesus didn’t search the temple in Jerusalem for the best and brightest scholars. He ignored the schools of meticulous Pharisees (who devoted their lives to strict obedience to the Law.) ... Instead... He hand-selected working-class... uneducated men... with obvious flaws.

Why would He? ... How could He? ... It is important to remember that **Jesus saw His men NOT as what they WERE... but as what they were to become.** ... And that is exactly as He sees you and I right now! (LISTEN!) When God calls ordinary men and women to serve Him... His call is always effectual... regardless of their apparent abilities or lack of them. Let me quote Chuck Swindoll on Jesus’ illogical (looking) selection.

Ironically, Judas, son of Simon Iscariot (John 6:71), was the only selection that would have made sense to the onlookers of his day—a fine, stronghearted patriot from Kerioth of Judea. How impressive—initially! The name Iscariot most likely derived from the Hebrew Ish-keriot, meaning “man of Kerioth”; and the people of Kerioth, a city in southern Judea, probably believed Judas would represent them well in the struggle for independence. He was born and raised in the rugged territory where mighty King David learned to become Israel’s greatest shepherd. His name, Judas, bristled with rugged heroism. As one commentator notes, “Judah, or Judas, was the name of one of the twelve sons of Jacob in the Old Testament, and the brilliant uprising for independence in 164 BC was led by a man named Judas. This Judas Maccabaeus was looked upon by all Jews as a sort of George Washington.”

We don’t see what God sees. Our logic often leads us the wrong way. Oh how important it is that we get this right: Ministry must always be part of our praying – flowing out from it... Prayer is the work – ministry is its overflow.

None of us is capable of doing ministry with our own logic and understanding. But one of the supreme glories of God's call is that our weakness is the opportunity for his power—*our ordinariness makes room for his extraordinariness*. This was gloriously true in the case of Moses (Exodus 2, 4), David (1 Samuel 16–17), and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1). Here is what Oswald Chambers wrote about this phenomenon:

God can achieve his purpose either through the absence of human power and resources, or the abandonment of reliance on them. All through history God has chosen and used nobodies, because their unusual dependence on him made possible the unique display of his power and grace. He chose and used somebodies only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources.

Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church powerfully substantiates that man's ordinariness (even his weakness) provide ready ground for God's extraordinary power. ... In discussing his own apostolic ministry... Paul made this unforgettable observation:

2 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

Paul summarized the secret of his ministry by referring to the ancient custom of hiding priceless treasure in common earthen... clay pots... buried under-ground.

The "treasure" was the gospel... and the "jars of clay" a penetrating metaphor for frail humanity. ... The glorious gospel is committed to common... frail... human beings... so that the immensity of the power... will be seen as God's... and not man's!

Clearly then... an awareness of our own weakness (our own ordinariness)... is a necessity in Christian ministry. Such a recognition keeps us dependent upon the power of God. (And) if this is not the case... (if we think too much of our extraordinary gifts)... we can be tempted to rely upon natural gifts to achieve supernatural ends.

Well... let's just take a moment (now) for a closer look at the clay pots that Jesus choose.

The first one to appear on all four lists of the apostles in Scripture is Peter. He was a son of Jonas or John. By trade he was a fisherman... who with his brother Andrew first lived in Bethsaida ... afterward in Capernaum. Both Mark and Luke report that it was Jesus who gave Simon the new name *Peter*. This new name... meaning *rock*... was a description not of what Simon was when called... but of what by grace he was to become. When Jesus assigned to Simon his new name... that was an act of love (a love that was willing to overlook the present and even the near future... and to look far ahead.)

God greatly used Peter (especially on the day of Pentecost.) ... He wrote two epistles which are vital for the Christian life and spiritual growth. ... Peter warned us of Satanic attack and the importance of the Word of God. His ministry was geared toward the Jewish people (while Paul focused on the Gentiles.)

Of the final days of the apostle Peter in Rome... writings exist that tell us Peter was cast into a horrible prison called the Mamertine... and for nine months... he lived in absolute darkness. He endured monstrous torture manacled to a post. ... In spite of all the suffering Peter was subjected to...

he converted some of his **jailers** (Processus... Martinianus... and forty-seven others.) ... Peter met his death at the hand of the Romans in Nero's circus, 67 AD. Others state that he was crucified. Jerome said that he was crucified... his head being down and his feet upward... himself so requiring... because he was (he said) unworthy to be crucified after the same form and manner as the Lord was.

When Jesus called Peter... He did not see him as he was THEN. He saw Peter for what he would become. ... And Jesus also knew what Peter's brother (Andrew) would become. Andrew was also a fisherman (like his brother Peter.) Andrew (in fact) brought Peter to Jesus.

Ancient writings indicate that Andrew took the Gospel of Christ to what is (today) Russia. Evidence shows that he went as far as the Caspian Sea. He also took the Gospel to Turkey... Macedonia... and Greece. It was in Greece that he was apparently martyred for his faith. (Andrew remained tied to the cross with thick tight ropes for three days and his last words were: *"Accept me, O Christ Jesus, whom I saw, whom I love, and in whom I am; accept my spirit in peace in your eternal realm."* It's believed that Andrew died on the last day of Nov., 69 A.D.)

When Jesus called Andrew... He did not see him as he was THEN. He saw Andrew for the incredible man of faith that he would become.

James was (yet) another Galilean fisherman. He and his brother John were called "the sons of thunder" by Jesus. They probably had fiery natures. ... James was the first of the 12 to die as a martyr for his faith. (He was the first apostle to be put to death.)

Clemens Alexandrinus states that as James was led to the place of martyrdom... his accuser was brought to repent of his conduct by the apostle's extraordinary courage... and fell down at his feet to request his pardon... professing himself a Christian... and resolving that James should not receive the crown of martyrdom alone. ... So... they were both beheaded at the same time. James cheerfully and resolutely received the cup... which he had told Jesus he was ready to drink. (These events took place in AD 44 by the order of Herod Agrippa I.)

When Jesus called James... He did not see him as he was THEN. He saw James for the incredible man of faith that he would become.

James' brother – John is next. The apostle John rose to a position of influence within world-wide Christianity and shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD... he moved to Ephesus. He became the pastor of the church in Ephesus and had a special relationship to other churches in the area... as we know from the letters to the Seven Churches in Asia... in the book of Revelation.

From Ephesus he was ordered to be sent to Rome... where it is affirmed he was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil. He escaped by miracle... without injury. Roman Emperor (Domitian) afterwards banished John to the Isle of Patmos... where he wrote the Book of Revelation.

Emperor Nerva (the successor of Domitian) recalled him from his bannishment. ... All of the apostles met a violent death (however) John died peacefully in Ephesus... at an advanced age... around the year 100 AD.

When Jesus called John... He did not see him as he was THEN. He saw John for the incredible man of faith that he would become.

Most of Phillip's ministry after Jesus returned to Heaven... took place in regions of what is now Turkey. He and Bartholomew were ministry partners and traveled together. As a result of their ministry... the wife of a Roman proconsul was healed by them and then gave her life to Christ as a follower. Her husband had them martyred for it.

Bartholomew is also known as Nathaniel. Before he linked up with Philip in Turkey... he had taken the gospel to Armenia... some regions of Russia... and India. (These guys traveled far and wide. The Apostle Paul was not the only one.)

Matthew was a tax collector... so he was considered a traitor and renegade by the Jewish people... until he quit and followed the Lord. ... He wrote his gospel in Hebrew... which was afterwards translated into Greek by James the Less. The scene of his labors was Northern Africa (Parthia and Ethiopia) where he suffered his martyrdom... being slain with an axe in the city of Nadabah, AD 60.

The apostle Thomas is said to have been a fearless evangelist and a great builder of churches. After the resurrection of the Lord Christ Jesus... Thomas went to Babylon. ... It is believed that he established the first Christian church there. ... He is also known to have gone to Persia and from there he went to India and preached the Gospel making many converts. ... It is also believed that the apostle Thomas evangelized as far as China... and while in India... he suffered martyrdom... being killed with

a lance (he was buried in Mylapore, India, which is now a suburb of Madras.)

James (the son of Alphaeus) is another apostle (besides James... the brother of John.) THIS James was designated different than the other James (sometimes) as “James the Lesser.”

Often when I communicate with Jim Young I will end my letter or email by referring to myself as “James the Lesser”... because we are both named James... and he is a little older than me.

But the apostle who went by the name “James the lesser” led the church at Jerusalem... and wrote the letter that we have in our Bibles that is called “the Book of James.” ... When he was 94 he was beat and stoned to death.

Judas (not Iscariot) was also known as Thaddaeus. ... I think if I were him... I would want to be known as “Thaddaeus” instead of Judas (not Iscariot.)

The last one that I will mention is Simon the zealot. Boy(!) what an odd pick he must have seemed... when he was chosen by Jesus. In all probability the designation “zealot” was because he had formerly belonged to the party of the Zealots. The Zealots were very cult-like... fanatical... and murderous. They were trained assassins who had sworn to slay every traitor and every Roman they could. ... But Simon the zealot had changed so much (being developed into a strong follower of Christ) that he preached the Gospel in Mauritania Africa... and then in Britain... where he was crucified, AD 74.

These were the men that followed the Lord. All but **one** were faithful to Christ. (Jesus' selection of Judas – knowing that Judas would betray Him... was part of God's perfect plan.)

The lives of the faithful apostles are a challenge to us today to be steadfast... unmovable... always abounding in the work of the Lord. They are also an encouragement to us that when God looks at you and I... He is seeing us – as what He is making us into being.

Look at all these men! Who would have ever thought?! ... God's ways are so much higher than our own. To us – **Judas Iscariot** would probably have been our top pick as an effective apostle. Wow! How our best understanding could lead us in the wrong way. ... [P A U S E] ...

Oh – that this might sober us into placing prayer in its right place. How can we ever do ministry without prayerful dependence?

(LISTEN!) We have three take-aways from today's passage: (1) ministry must always be part of our praying – flowing out from it... Prayer is the **work** – ministry is its overflow. ... (2) You and I are not yet what He is making us into. He sees you and I as what we are becoming. (3) Every follower of Christ is nothing more than a common clay pot that has His treasure inside. May our passage today encourage anyone who sees themselves as an ordinary NOBODY! ... Yes you are! ... And so am I! ... This way He can use us.

2 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)

⁷ *But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.*