Jesus Chooses 12 Apostles

Scripture Reference: Matthew 4:18-22; Matthew 9:9; John 1:35-50; Matthew 10:1-4

Suggested Theme: Jesus invites everyone to follow Him. Follow Him with your whole heart and life.

Memory Verse: Name the 12 Original Apostles: Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Thomas, Matthew, Bartholomew, James (the less), Simon, Thaddeus, Judas

Story Overview:

Many people followed Jesus. These followers were called disciples. There were many disciples, but Jesus chose twelve men to be His special followers. These men were granted special abilities and were called Apostles.

Background Study:

After spending forty days in the wilderness after his baptism, Jesus returned to the area around the Jordan River. John the Baptist was still preaching in the area, and many people had become disciples or pupils of John. Disciples liked spending lots of time with their teachers because they wanted to be like them.

John the Baptist immediately encourages his disciples to follow Jesus. Andrew and Simon Peter were disciples of John and were the first disciples called by Jesus. Andrew heard about Jesus first and then went to get his brother, Simon (John 1:40-41). They were fishermen. Simon was already known by the name “Peter,” a Greek name. Jesus tells him that he will be known as “Cephas,” which is the Aramaic translation of Peter and means “rock” John 1:42. This will have more meaning later when Jesus uses Peter’s name to teach a lesson about the Kingdom (Matthew 16:18). Peter is mentioned in the Gospels and Acts more than any other apostle. He preached the first Gospel Sermon (Acts 2) and wrote two New Testament books.

The disciples must have had very tender hearts to follow Jesus so quickly. They immediately left their careers (fishermen, tax collectors, etc.) to travel with Jesus. Most of them did this based on His simple invitation to “Follow Me.” It was not their education or talent that made them special – it was their commitment to Jesus.

All followers of Jesus who try to be like Him are His disciples in the general sense (including you and me). In the early church, disciples were eventually called “Christians” (Acts 11:26). In the ministry of Jesus, there were many disciples, but twelve of them had a particular role. These were sometimes referred to as “the 12 Apostles,” “the Apostles,” or even “the Twelve.” In addition to the 12 apostles, the word “apostle” can also have a more general meaning of one sent on a mission.

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Just before the crucifixion, there were 12 apostles, including Judas Iscariot. After Judas betrayed Jesus and then hung himself, only 11 apostles remained. Matthias replaced him in Acts 1:12-26. So Matthias then became one of the twelve.

Later, Jesus came to Paul and named him a special apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9 – especially verse 15).

The names of the apostles can be confusing. Some have the same name, and others are known by multiple names.

There were two Simons, Simon Peter (Cephas) and Simon the Zealot. A Zealot was a member of a Jewish revolutionary group that was trying to overthrow the Roman government and free the Jews.

There was James, the son of Alpheus (sometimes called "James the Less" because he was younger than the other James), and then James, the son of Zebedee.

James, the son of Zebedee, had a brother, John (not to be confused with John the Baptist), and these both numbered among the 12. The brothers, James and John, worked together in their father's fishing business before following Jesus. They were known as the "sons of thunder" because of their tempers.

This John was one of Jesus' closest friends. Later, when Jesus was dying on the cross, Jesus asked John to take care of Mary. This John is traditionally the author of the Gospel of John, 1-3 John and the book of Revelation.

Matthew was also known as Levi (Matthew 9:9 and Luke 5:27-28). He was a tax collector for the Romans when Jesus called him to be an apostle.

Bartholomew's other name was "Nathanael," and he seemed almost always to be mentioned with Philip. Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; John 1:45-49, 21:2; and Acts 1:13.

Thaddeus is called "Judas" in Luke 6:16, and he is sometimes referred to as "Judas not Iscariot." Judas Iscariot was the one who later betrayed Jesus.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Before the group gathers, write the names of the 12 Apostles on the chalkboard, whiteboard or on a piece of paper.

Play a "follow the leader" game and lead the children around the room or a space outside. Talk about what it means to lead and what it means to follow. "Who should be the leader in our lives?" (Jesus) "What does it mean to follow Jesus?" (Love Jesus and obey God. Do what Jesus did. Act the way He did. Do what He wants because He is the leader.)

Today's story will teach us about some men who followed Jesus. Some of them used to be fishermen but they decided to leave their fishing and follow Jesus. Jesus told them that they would not be fishing for fish anymore. They would be fishing for men. Jesus would make them fishers of men. Here are the names of the men who became fishers of men (show the children the names of the apostles).

How many of you can make "fish lips?" Today, as I tell the story, I want you to make fish lips every time I say the name of one of the men on this list."

The Story:

Have you ever played the game "follow the leader?" One person is the leader, and everyone else follows. Whatever the leader does, every follower copies it and does exactly the same. The followers want to be like the leader.

In the New Testament times, a follower was called a disciple.

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When Jesus began His ministry, He asked people to follow Him and become His disciples. One day, when Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Andrew and Simon Peter casting nets to catch fish. Jesus called out to them, saying, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of people.”

What do you think Jesus meant by fishers of men? Fishermen usually cast out nets and bring fish in. Fishers of men go fishing for men. They teach people and then bring them to God. Peter and Andrew wanted to become fishers of people. They left their fishing immediately and followed Jesus.

Then they saw two other brothers, James and John, mending nets with their father, Zebedee. Jesus called them and said, “Follow me.”

James and John left their boat and their father and began to follow Jesus.

Jesus’ group of followers was growing. Now, Jesus had four disciples – Peter, Andrew, James and John. On His way to Galilee, Jesus found Philip and invited him to come along, too. Philip was from Bethesda, the town where Andrew and Peter lived.

Philip went to find his friend Nathanael. “Nathanael, we’ve found the one that Moses wrote about in the Scripture! He is Jesus from Nazareth.”

When Nathanael met Jesus, he was very surprised. He had never met Jesus before, but Jesus knew all about him. Because of this, Nathanael knew that Jesus was someone very special sent from God. He started following Jesus, too. You might know Nathanael by his other name. His other name was Bartholomew.

Jesus called others to follow him. Matthew was a tax collector in the town of Capernaum. Some people thought that Matthew could never be like Jesus. Tax collectors were often cheaters. But Jesus knew that Matthew could have a good heart. When Jesus said, “Matthew, come follow me,” Matthew got up from the table and began following Jesus.

Jesus invited others to follow Him. Soon, James (called “James the Less” because he was younger than the other James) and Thomas followed Jesus. After this, another Simon, Thaddeus and Judas Iscariot.

More and more people became disciples (followers) of Jesus. Even though many followed Jesus, twelve men were with Him almost all of the time. This group of twelve men became known as the “Twelve Apostles.” Jesus gave these men special responsibilities and even special powers to do miracles.

Peter, Andrew, James and John. Philip, Thomas, Matthew and Bartholomew (Nathanael). James (the less), Simon, Thaddaeus and Judas.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- What did Jesus say to the fishermen named Andrew, Peter, James and John? ("Come, follow me")
- What kind of fishermen did Jesus tell the apostles that they would be? (Fishers of men)
- What is a disciple of Jesus? (someone who follows Jesus and lives like Him)
- What is an apostle of Jesus? (Jesus chose 12 disciples to follow Him and be His special students and close friends. They would be given power from God to do certain miracles and were with Jesus during His ministry)
- What were some of the jobs of the apostles before following Jesus? (fishermen, tax collectors, zealots)
- How many original apostles were there? (12)
- Name the twelve apostles. (Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Thomas, Matthew, Bartholomew, James the Less, Simon, Thaddeus, Judas)
- Why do you think the disciples who were fishermen quit their jobs and left everything to follow Jesus?
- Did Jesus' disciples and apostles have to be intelligent, rich, or powerful? (No, anyone can follow Jesus)
- What did you learn about God or Jesus from this story?
- What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Reflection:

- What do you think Jesus' 12 disciples looked or acted like?
- How well do you think the 12 apostles got along? Do you think they became friends?
- What part of the story did you find most interesting?
- The fishermen immediately dropped their nets and followed Jesus when He said, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Would you stop everything and follow Jesus if He said this to you?
- How do you think the 12 apostles felt when Jesus called them to follow Him?
- Of Jesus' 12 apostles, Andrew and Peter were brothers, and so were James and John. Do you think it would have been a great or difficult experience to follow Jesus with a sibling?
- What do you think it means to follow Jesus?
- Do you follow Jesus?
- What is your favourite part of following Jesus?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer

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methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- Apostle Song
- Fished All Night and Caught No Fishes Song
- Fishers of Men Song
- Goodbye World Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- Apostle Song with slideshow (outside source on YouTube)
- The Books of the New Testament.
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Sing: The Apostle Song (Jesus Called Them One by One) You could take the song a step further to add a visual element. Write the lyrics on a whiteboard or piece of paper that is big enough for everyone to see. As you go through the song, have the children identify the names of the apostles and circle them.
- Play “Apostle Bingo.” Make a bingo grid and put the names of the apostles (instead of numbers) in the squares. Play like normal bingo, but use names instead of numbers.
- Play “Apostle Concentration.” Make up 12 matching pairs of cards (2 with Andrew written on them, 2 Peters, 2 Johns, etc.). Mix up the 24 cards and lay them face down on the table. Children take turns turning two cards over. If the two cards they turn over match, then they get a point for the matching pair – and also win an extra turn. Keep playing until all cards have been matched. The child who has won the most pairs wins. Printable pictures of the apostles from Bible Fun for Kids and More
- Write the apostles’ names on 12 separate cards. Hide the cards before the group gathers. At the appropriate time, let the children find them.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

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Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring pages and worksheets about Jesus calling His first disciples (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page with text (Ministry Spark)
- Craft: Wreath about following Jesus (Sunday school crafts)
- Craft: Printable pattern form simple apostle finger puppets (toddler-activities-at-home)
- Craft: Cute fish mobile made from toilet paper or paper towel tubes (catholic icing)
- Craft: “Teach a man to fish” craft from a handprint (Busy bee kids crafts)
- Printable pictures of the apostles (Bible Fun for Kids)
- Chart: “Interesting Facts about the Apostles” (Bible charts)
- Lesson plan and activities: Great visuals and fun egg carton activity that children could easily make on their own or in groups (Kids Bible Deb Jackson)

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