

BE WITH HIM. FOLLOW HIM.

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When I was studying at the theological seminary in the late 1980s, we had to deliver a sermon in front of the class as part of our homiletics course. I wanted to convey a "real" message, not just put on a show. I'm not the type who thrives on exams, and I don't like competitions either. But that's just how it was: There was no getting around it—I had to go through with it. Afterward, every sermon was dissected, analyzed, and critically evaluated according to all the rules of the trade. Every word was weighed on a gold scale and scrutinized closely.

I no longer have any idea how I did (maybe I've just successfully blocked it out), nor do I remember exactly what I preached back then, but one thing is certain: A situation like that doesn't exactly provide the ideal conditions for an authentic and powerful message straight from the heart of God that changes lives; yet the Bible verses I chose back then still stay with me to this day. I'd like to share them with you today.

ARE YOU DRIVEN BY NECESSITY OR DRIVEN BY GOD'S CALLING?

First of all, I'd like to briefly describe the context of the events. Jesus is at the beginning of His ministry. People are flocking to Him, and you can literally feel their longing for hope and deliverance—their distress is great. Yet at that moment, he does not yield to the pressure of their distress, nor does he rush into action; quite the opposite: he first withdraws to pray.

This is already the first important insight: being driven by necessity and being called by God are two completely different "drivers." If we want to help others in the name of Jesus, we should not be driven by their distress, but rather know that we are called and sent by God. Let us now read the text:

Daniel 6:11 (HOF) Afterward, Jesus went up the mountain. He called the disciples He wanted with Him, and they came to Him. Then He chose twelve of them, whom He named apostles. They were to remain with Him constantly and learn from Him. He intended to send them out with the mission to proclaim the message of salvation and, by his authority, to free people from the power of demonic forces. These twelve men were: Simon, whom Jesus named Peter; then James and his brother John, the sons of Zebedee—Jesus called them Boanerges, which means "Sons of Thunder"—; as well as Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon the former freedom fighter, and Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed Jesus.

ORDINARY PEOPLE HANDPICKED BY JESUS

Let's first take a closer look at verse 13: "Jesus went up on a mountain. He called the disciples he wanted with him, and they came to him." Jesus didn't look for perfect résumés—he chose neither the religious elite nor the "best of the best." No, he preferred to rely on ordinary people like you and me—though: ordinary?—well, yes: His choice fell on rough-and-tumble fishermen with coarse language, tax collectors with questionable pasts, hot-headed activists, and political radicals. But there were also low-profile figures with no notable fame.

But these were exactly the kinds of people he (!) wanted around him. They were all handpicked, and Jesus called them by name.

Everything is connected to your name: your personality, your character, your background and history, your strengths and abilities, but also your scars, weaknesses, and dark sides.

Perhaps you sometimes think: "Only when I have my life truly under control, when I pray more, when I know the Bible perfectly—only then can God use me." But that is a mistake! We see this here in the disciples.

He knew Peter's weaknesses, the hot-headedness of the sons of Thunder, and the pasts of Matthew and Simon. Yet He chose them and called them to follow Him. God knows your limitations and your "But..." all too well. Despite all that, Jesus says to you today: "I want you—you, specifically! All inclusive, warts and all!"

God can't use you only once you're "finished and ready"—sometime in the future, on Day X, in the distant future. Jesus has chosen you—not because you're already "utterly perfect," but simply because he wants you by his side. You are his choice! And as for necessary changes: He shapes, molds, and trains you along the way, on the journey we share.

Your identity and your worth do not depend on how much you accomplish, how rich you are, what family you come from, how popular you are at work, or how much affirmation you receive from others.

SEEING WITH GOD'S EYES FROM THE MOUNTAIN

What I find fascinating: Our passage begins in verse 13 with the words: Jesus went up the mountain. This was a desolate place, far from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. There he sought God and listened to his voice. There he had spent the entire night in prayer. And there God opened his eyes and showed him exactly who should be part of his team.

Down in the valley, you see only sons of thunder, Zealots, tax collectors—their inglorious past or the immaturity of adolescents. But "up on the mountain," you see with God's eyes—or as it says in the Old Testament:

1 Samuel 16:7 (HOF) *"Do not be impressed by his height and stately appearance. He is not the Chosen One. I judge differently than people do. A person sees what meets the eye; but I look into the heart."*

If Jesus has called you to follow Him, then He sees something in you—something you yourself may not even be able to recognize yet. Therefore, you may say—without false pride, but with your head held high: I am God's idea! He has called me. I belong to Him. I am allowed to be with Him. He wanted me!

But why is it so important that this be the foundation of your deepest, innermost identity and your sense of self? Quite simply: In your life and ministry, you will repeatedly reach your limits and find yourself at your wits' end. Days that wear you down, that can discourage you—and make giving up seem like a reasonable option. In such moments, when the ground is literally pulled out from under your feet—in these dark nights of the soul—you can keep one thing in mind again and again: "I didn't choose myself—HE called me. It wasn't my idea. HE wanted me."

THE HEART OF DISCIPLESHIP: BEING WITH JESUS

Let's return once more to our original passage in Mark 3. Right in verse 14, it becomes clear what Jesus considers the heart of discipleship:

Mark 3:14 (HOF) *"Then he chose twelve of them, whom he named apostles. They were to remain with him constantly and learn from him."*

Here, Jesus makes it very clear what his highest priority is: "They were to be with him—and learn from him." Imagine how those twelve men sat together with Jesus back then and experienced him day after day. They listened to him and observed how he interacted with people, how he prayed, how he treated the lepers with compassion, welcomed children, and loved sinners.

In the process, it became clear to them: Jesus isn't just conveying a message—he is the message. They didn't just learn words—they felt his heart. They didn't just learn what to say, but what a life fully centered on God looks like.

In our hectic world today, everything revolves around performance and efficiency. That shapes us. Even in our spiritual lives, we can therefore easily fall into a trap: We're so busy doing things for God that we hardly have any time left to live with him. We organize, help, accomplish, do, act—and at some point we realize that our inner well is slowly running dry, that we're tired, worn out, and drained.

But here we learn something. Jesus doesn't say first and foremost, "Do more!" He says, "Be with me. Become my friend." Elsewhere, Jesus once expressed this heartfelt message as follows:

John 15:15–16 (NLB) *"I no longer call you servants, because a master does not confide in his servants. You are now my friends, for I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me; I chose you."*

A Christian who is too busy to pray is busier than God ever intended. Therefore, consciously set aside times of silence. Don't let the hustle and bustle of everyday life or a packed schedule rob you of prayer and Bible reading. But don't put pressure on yourself—start small (but make it a regular habit): five quiet minutes in the morning, a simple prayer in the car, or a brief pause at noon. Stay with Him! Be His friend, not just God's co-worker!

THE FRAGRANCE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

In Old Testament times, kings, priests, and prophets were anointed with oil as a sign of their calling by God and of their God-given authority and power. But what is anointing? It is not a technique that can be learned, but rather the fragrance of the room where you have been with Jesus.

When you spend time in the presence of the Holy Spirit, feast on His Word, worship before His throne, and allow it to penetrate your heart, then you do not ultimately descend from the mountain of God into the valley and among the people by your own strength. Instead, you bring the atmosphere of heaven into your family, your neighborhood, and your workplace.

If, along this path, you sense, "Lord, patience, mercy, or humility still need to grow here," this does not hinder or obstruct your calling, nor does it fundamentally call it into question—rather, it is part of the process. For God desires not only to work through you but also within you, so that you yourself may become like Christ.

Anyone who walks steadily with Jesus changes, matures, and eventually takes on the "shepherd's scent." And that is precisely what the following passage is about:

Mark 3:14–15 (HOF) *"He wanted to send them out with the mission to proclaim the message of salvation and, by his authority, to free people from the power of demonic forces."*

WORD AND POWER: THE TWIN DIMENSIONS OF MINISTRY

Jesus never sends His followers out empty-handed. He equips us with all the heavenly resources we need to fulfill His mission. Mark mentions two dimensions of ministry that are as inseparable as twins: Word & Power!

We are a Pentecostal-charismatic free church. We are not ashamed of the supernatural! We believe that the Kingdom of God consists not in words, but in power. We rely on the work of the Holy Spirit. We pray for healing, expect spiritual gifts, prophecy, and God's signs and wonders. We love the presence of God.

But it is not a place where we hide from the world. We are not called to live in an ivory tower. For this reason, the Holy Spirit fills us with His power so that we may go out and be witnesses for Jesus. We receive in order to pass it on; we are comforted in order to comfort others; we experience forgiveness in order to grant it; and we receive fire in order to shine.

We live in a world full of overwhelming darkness that longs for genuine hope and God's help. You will meet people who are broken, full of doubt, or bound by sin, addiction, and darkness. You don't have to be a trained speaker to bring the hope of the Gospel into the darkness.

Simply share God's goodness, encourage, reconcile, and speak words of life. Clever, rhetorically polished words alone cannot break these chains—but the Gospel is able to do exactly what is impossible for humans! Trust in this power! Jesus grants you His authority—the right to act, speak, and move in the name of the King of kings.

So: If someone around you is sick or in despair, boldly offer to pray for them! And if fears or darkness threaten your thoughts or your family, stand up and speak the name of Jesus over that situation! Do not be afraid; do not fear. You do not go in your own strength, but in the name of the One to whom all authority has been given. And never forget:

1 John 4:4 (LUT) *"Children, you are from God, and [...] the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world!"*

A DIVERSE TEAM CHANGED BY UNITY

Finally, Mark 3:16–19 lists the names of the Twelve. That's quite a motley crew! Take, for example, the impulsive Peter. He often spoke out of turn and sometimes spoke before thinking. Matthew, the former tax collector, worked for the Roman occupiers and had cheated his own countrymen. James and John would have loved to call down fire from heaven whenever something didn't go their way. That's why Jesus called them the "Sons of Thunder"—passionate, fiery, and occasionally too impetuous. Simon the Zealot had previously been a radical freedom fighter who deeply hated the Romans and their collaborators! They couldn't have been more different, yet in fellowship with Jesus, their hearts were transformed, and they became brothers pulling in the same direction.

We here today (take a look around) are all very different people, each with our own gifts, temperaments, life stories, perspectives, and experiences. And that's a good thing. After all, we don't have to be the same. The only thing that matters is that we have the same Lord.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter how well-known we were, how many likes or subscribers we had, how many meetings we planned, what successes we celebrated, or how much money we accumulated. In the end, only one thing matters: He loved Jesus. He stayed with Jesus. He followed Jesus' call. Now that's a great obituary, isn't it? In summary, this means:

- I. **The King has called us.** We are wanted. He wants us by His side!
- II. **God's presence is our home.** When we stay with Him, we feel His heartbeat!
- III. **We can count on the work of the Holy Spirit;** therefore, we should openly proclaim the Word and unleash its power by praying boldly with and for people. The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in us!
- IV. **Let's stick together,** cherish our differences, preserve our unity in Christ, and enjoy our fellowship. We need one another—no matter how different we may be.

One day we'll all stand before Jesus. How wonderful it will be when He looks at us lovingly and says: "I know you. We walked this path together! I'm so proud of you! I'm glad you're here now, at the finish line—with Me!" And now imagine hearing these incredible words of praise from His lips—spoken with deep gratitude:

Matthew 25:21 *"Very good! Well done! You are a capable and trustworthy steward. You have been faithful in small matters, so I will entrust you with greater things. Come in to my feast and rejoice with me!"*