

TWELVE ORDINARY MEN

α

OTHER BOOKS BY JOHN MACARTHUR

Twelve Extraordinary Women

Hard to Believe

The Book on Leadership

The Battle for the Beginning

God in the Manger

The God Who Loves

The Gospel According to the Apostles

How to Survive in a World of Unbelievers

Introduction to Biblical Counseling

The Murder of Jesus

Rediscovering Expository Preaching

Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry

Terrorism, Jihad, and the Bible

The Vanishing Conscience

Whose Money Is It, Anyway?

Why Government Can't Save You

Why One Way?

BIBLE PRODUCTS BY JOHN MACARTHUR

Biblical Parenting for Life Study

MacArthur Bible Studies

MacArthur's Quick Reference Guide to the Bible

The MacArthur Student Bible

The MacArthur Study Bible (New King James Version)

TWELVE ORDINARY MEN



HOW *the* MASTER
SHAPED HIS DISCIPLES *for*
GREATNESS,
and WHAT HE WANTS TO DO *with*
YOU

JOHN MACARTHUR



NELSON BOOKS
A Division of Thomas Nelson Publishers
Since 1798

www.thomasnelson.com

TWELVE ORDINARY MEN

Copyright © 2002 by John MacArthur

Nelson Books,
a division of Thomas Nelson, Inc.,
P. O. Box 141000
Nashville, TN 37214

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the copyright owner, except for brief excerpts quoted in critical reviews.

All Scripture quotations in this book, except those noted otherwise, are from the New King James Version, © 1979, 1980, 1982, 1984 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Quotations marked NASB are from the New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1988, and 1995 by The Lockman Foundation, and are used by permission.

Quotations marked NIV are from
The Holy Bible: New International Version.
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society.
All rights reserved.
Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

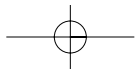
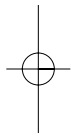
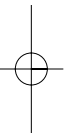
ISBN 0-8499-1773-5 (hc)
ISBN 0-7852-8824-4 (tp)
ISBN 0-7852-2677-x

Printed in the United States of America
06 07 08 09 10 QW 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

DEDICATION



To Irv Busenitz, for his loyal friendship and devoted service over three decades. Irv is a true teacher and selfless servant who has faithfully invested his own life in the lives of other men who come to study at The Master's Seminary. Irv is the ideal model of both disciple and disciple-maker, having dedicated himself to fulfilling 2 Timothy 2:2: "The things you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

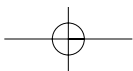
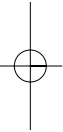
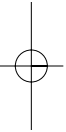


THIS BOOK IS IN NO SMALL MEASURE thanks to the faithful support and encouragement of David Moberg, Mark Sweeney, and the rest of the staff of the W Publishing Group. We have enjoyed a close and fruitful partnership over the years, and I am grateful to the Lord for the ministry these dear friends have had in so many of my published works.

I am particularly grateful to Mary Hollingsworth and Kathryn Murray of the W Group, who worked hard under very short deadlines to keep this book on schedule throughout the editorial and typesetting process. Their kindness, patience, and diligence have been exemplary, even under difficult circumstances.

Thanks also to Garry Knussman, who proofread this material at several different stages and offered many helpful editorial suggestions.

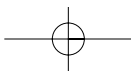
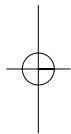
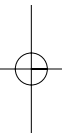
My special thanks goes to Phil Johnson, who has worked alongside me as my main editor for more than twenty years. He applied his skills in the process of translating this material from transcripts of my sermons on Matthew 10 and Luke 6, collating both series into one seamless whole and making sure the text was clear and readable.



CONTENTS



<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
<i>Introduction</i>	xi
1. Common Men, Uncommon Calling	1
2. Peter—The Apostle with the Foot-Shaped Mouth	34
3. Andrew—The Apostle of Small Things	72
4. James—The Apostle of Passion	90
5. John—The Apostle of Love	111
6. Philip—The Bean Counter	138
7. Nathanael—The Guileless One	157
8. Matthew—The Tax Collector; and Thomas—The Twin	173
9. James—The Less; Simon—The Zealot; and Judas (Not Iscariot)—The Apostle with Three Names	193
10. Judas—The Traitor	210
<i>Notes</i>	223



INTRODUCTION



MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS AGO, while preaching through the Gospel of Matthew, I gave a series of character studies on the twelve apostles. The messages were extremely well received, and we produced a tape album and study guide from that series, titled *The Master's Men*. Over the years we have broadcast the entire series several times on the *Grace to You* radio broadcast. Each time it airs, it generates a greater outpouring of affirmative response from listeners. After twenty years, that album continues to be one of the most popular series we have ever produced.

A few years ago, I started teaching a verse-by-verse exposition of Luke's Gospel in our church. When I reached Luke 6:13–16 (where Luke records Jesus' calling of the Twelve) I preached a new series of messages on the apostles. Once again, the response was overwhelming and enthusiastic. While preaching the series I realized that an entire generation had been born and reached adulthood in the years since we had last studied the lives of the disciples. They identified with these men in the same way their parents had done more than two decades before.

Even people who had practically memorized the tapes from the earlier series said they still found the lives of the disciples as fresh and relevant and practical as ever. The new

series quickly became another favorite, and people began urging me to combine all the material on the apostles in a book. I didn't need much prodding for such a project. The book you are holding in your hands is the result.

I have always been fascinated with the lives of the twelve apostles. Who isn't? The personality types of these men are familiar to us. They are just like us, and they are like other people we know. They are approachable. They are real and living characters we can identify with. Their faults and foibles, as well as their triumphs and endearing features, are chronicled in some of the most fascinating accounts of the Bible. These are men we *want* to know.

That's because they were perfectly ordinary men in every way. Not one of them was renowned for scholarship or great erudition. They had no track record as orators or theologians. In fact, they were outsiders as far as the religious establishment of Jesus' day was concerned. They were not outstanding because of any natural talents or intellectual abilities. On the contrary, they were all too prone to mistakes, misstatements, wrong attitudes, lapses of faith, and bitter failure—no one more so than the leader of the group, Peter. Even Jesus remarked that they were slow learners and somewhat spiritually dense (Luke 24:25).

They spanned the political spectrum. One was a former Zealot—a radical, determined to overthrow Roman rule. But another had been a tax collector—virtually a traitor to the Jewish nation and in collusion with Rome. At least four, and possibly seven, were fishermen and close friends from Capernaum, probably having known one another from childhood. The others must have been tradesmen or craftsmen, but we are not told what they did before becoming followers of Christ. Most of them were from Galilee, an agricultural region at the inter-

INTRODUCTION

XIII

section of trade routes. And Galilee remained their home base for most of Jesus' ministry—not (as some might think) Jerusalem in Judea, which was the political and religious capital of Israel.

Yet with all their faults and character flaws—as remarkably ordinary as they were—these men carried on a ministry after Jesus' ascension that left an indelible impact on the world. Their ministry continues to influence us even today. God graciously empowered and used these men to inaugurate the spread of the gospel message and to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Ordinary men—people like you and me—became the instruments by which Christ's message was carried to the ends of the earth. No wonder they are such fascinating characters.

The Twelve were personally selected and called by Christ. He knew them as only their Creator could know them (cf. John 1:47). In other words, He knew all their faults long before He chose them. He even knew Judas would betray Him (John 6:70; 13:21–27), and yet He chose the traitor anyway and gave him all the same privileges and blessings He gave to the others.

Think about the ramifications of this: From our human perspective, the propagation of the gospel and the founding of the church hinged entirely on twelve men whose most outstanding characteristic was their ordinariness. They were chosen by Christ and trained for a time that is best measured in months, not years. He taught them the Scriptures and theology. He disciplined them in the ways of godly living (teaching them and showing them how to pray, how to forgive, and how to serve one another with humility). He gave them moral instruction. He spoke to them of things to come. And He employed them as His instruments to heal the sick, cast out demons, and do other

miraculous works. Three of them—Peter, James, and John—even got a brief glimpse of Him in His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–9).

It was a brief but intensive schedule of discipleship. And when it was over, on the night of Jesus' betrayal, "all the disciples forsook Him and fled" (Matthew 26:56). From an earthly point of view, the training program looked like a monumental failure. It seemed the disciples had forgotten or ignored everything Christ had ever taught them about taking up the cross and following Him. In fact, their own sense of failure was so profound that they went back to their old vocations for a time. And even at that, it appeared they would fail (John 21:3–4).

But encouraged by the risen Lord, they returned to their apostolic calling. Empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they valiantly undertook the task to which Jesus had called them. The work they subsequently began continues today, two thousand years later. They are living proof that God's strength is made perfect in weakness. In and of themselves they were clearly not sufficient for the task (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:16). But God led them in triumph in Christ, and through them He diffused "the fragrance of His knowledge in every place" (v. 14).

To get an appreciation for the brevity of their earthly time with Christ, consider the fact that Jesus' entire ministry from baptism to resurrection lasted only about three years. And the intensive training time with the disciples was only about half that long. In A. B. Bruce's classic work, *The Training of the Twelve*, he points out that by the time Jesus identified and called the Twelve from the larger group of His followers (Matthew 10:1–4; Luke 6:12–16), half of his earthly ministry was already over:

The selection by Jesus of the twelve . . . is an important landmark in the Gospel history. It divides the ministry of our Lord into two portions, nearly equal, probably, as to duration, but unequal as to the extent and importance of the work done in each respectively. In the earlier period Jesus labored single-handed; His miraculous deeds were confined for the most part to a limited area, and His teaching was in the main of an elementary character. But by the time when the twelve were chosen, the work of the kingdom had assumed such dimensions as to require organization and division of labor; and the teaching of Jesus was beginning to be of a deeper and more elaborate nature, and His gracious activities were taking on ever-widening range.

It is probable that the selection of a limited number to be His close and constant companions had become a necessity to Christ, in consequence of His very success in gaining disciples. His followers, we imagine, had grown so numerous as to be an incumbrance and an impediment to his movements, especially in the long journeys which mark the later part of His ministry. It was impossible that all who believed could continue henceforth to follow Him, in the literal sense, whithersoever He might go: the greater number could now only be occasional followers. But it was His wish that certain selected men should be with Him at all times and in all places,—His traveling companions in all His wanderings, witnessing all His work, and ministering to His daily needs. And so, in the quaint words of Mark, “Jesus calleth unto Him whom He would, and they came unto Him, and He [ordained] twelve, that they should be with Him.” (Mark 3:13–14)¹

That means these few men, whose backgrounds were in mundane trades and earthly occupations, had little more than eighteen months' training for the monumental task to which they were called. There was no second string, no backup players, no plan B if the Twelve should fail.

The strategy sounds risky in the extreme. In earthly terms, the founding of the church and the spread of the gospel message depended entirely on those twelve ordinary men with their many obvious weaknesses—and one of them so devilish as to betray the Lord of the universe. And the entirety of their training for the task took less than half as long as it typically takes to get a degree from a seminary today.

But Christ knew what He was doing. From His divine perspective, the ultimate success of the strategy actually depended on the Holy Spirit working in those men to accomplish His sovereign will. It was a mission that could not be thwarted. That's why it was a work for which God alone deserves praise and glory. Those men were merely instruments in His hands—just as you and I can be God's instruments today. God delights to use such ordinary means—"the foolish things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:27–29). The two-thousand-year triumph of the apostolic endeavor is a testimony to the wisdom and power of the divine strategy.

Sometimes in Scripture the Twelve are called "disciples"—*mathetes* in the Greek text (Matthew 10:1; 11:1; 20:17; Luke 9:1). The word means "learners, students." That is what they were during those months they spent under the direct and personal tutelage of the Lord. He had multi-

tudes of disciples, but these twelve were specifically called and chosen to a unique apostolic office. Therefore they are also designated “apostles”—*apostoloi* in the Greek. The word simply means “messengers, sent ones.” They were given a unique ambassadorial office of authority and spokespersonship for Christ. Luke especially uses this term in his gospel and throughout the Book of Acts, and he reserves the term almost exclusively for the Twelve. Matthew speaks of “apostles” only once (Matthew 10:2); elsewhere, he refers to “twelve disciples” (11:1; 20:17) or “the twelve” (26:14, 20, 47). Likewise, Mark uses the term “apostles” only once (Mark 6:30). Other than that, he always refers to the apostles as “the twelve” (3:14; 4:10; 6:7; 9:35; 10:32; 11:11; 14:10, 17, 20, 43). John, too, uses the word *apostolos* just once, in a nontechnical sense (John 13:16—where most English versions render the expression, “he who is sent”). Like Mark, John always refers to the apostolic band as “the twelve” (John 6:67, 70–71; 20:24).

Luke 10 describes an incident where seventy of Jesus’ followers were chosen and sent out two by two. They were obviously “sent ones” and some commentators therefore refer to them as “apostles,” but Luke does not employ that term to describe them.

The Twelve were called to a specific office. And in the Gospels and Acts, the term *apostoloi* almost always refers to that office and the twelve men who were specifically called and ordained to the office. Acts 14:14 and the Pauline epistles make it clear that the apostle Paul was likewise called to fill a special apostolic office—that of “apostle to the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13; 1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11). Paul’s apostleship was a unique calling. He obviously had the same authority and privileges as that of the Twelve (2 Corinthians 11:5). But Paul’s apostleship is not subject

matter for this book, because our focus here is on the twelve men who shared Jesus' public ministry with Him as His closest friends and companions. Paul wasn't converted until after Christ's ascension (Acts 9). He was an apostle "born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:8). He spoke with the same authority and manifested the same miraculous ability as the Twelve—and the Twelve embraced him and recognized his authority (cf. 2 Peter 3:15–16)—but he was not one of them.

The number twelve was significant, because Luke describes how, after Jesus' ascension, the apostles chose Matthias to fill the office vacated by Judas (Acts 1:23–26).

The role of an apostle (including the special office to which the apostle Paul was called) involved a position of leadership and exclusive teaching authority in the early church. The New Testament Scriptures were all written by the apostles or their close associates. And before the New Testament was written, the apostles' teaching was the rule in the early church. Beginning with the very first converts at Pentecost, all true believers looked to the apostles' leadership (Acts 2:37). And as the church grew, its faithfulness to the truth was described in these terms: "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42).

The apostles were given a supernatural power to work signs and wonders (Matthew 10:1; Mark 6:7, 13; Luke 9:1–2; Acts 2:3–4; 5:12). Those signs bore witness to the truth of the gospel, which the apostles had received from Christ, and which they introduced on His behalf to the world (2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3–4).

In other words, their role was a pivotal, foundational role. They *are* in a true sense, the very foundation of the Christian church, "Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20).

INTRODUCTION

XIX

These studies in the lives of the apostles have been a particular delight for me—and one of the most fruitful endeavors of my life. My greatest joy is preaching Christ. Eleven of these men shared that passion, devoted their lives to it, and triumphed in it against overwhelming opposition. They are fitting heroes and role models for us, despite their shortcomings. To study their lives is to get to know the men who were closest to Christ during His earthly life. To realize that they were ordinary people just like us is a great blessing. May the Spirit of Christ who taught them transform us the way He transformed them, into precious vessels fit for the Master's use. And may we learn from their example what it means to be disciples indeed.