Jesus has power to call disciples

Luke 6: 12-16

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Their **CALLING** . . .

He called them based on His **PERSPECTIVE**

Jesus chose them. He chose them sovereignly and appointed them, in the presence of the larger group. He selected them not for any extraordinary abilities or spiritual superiority. He seems to have deliberately chosen men who were notable only for their ordinariness.

What qualified these men to be apostles? They had no intrinsic ability or outstanding talent of their own. All twelve, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, were from Galilee. That whole region was predominantly rural, consisting of small towns and villages. Its people were not elite. They were not known for their education. They were the commonest of the common. They were fishermen and farmers. Galileans were deemed low-class, rural, uneducated people. They were commoners—nobodies.

God chooses the humble, the lowly, the meek, and the weak so that there’s never any question about the source of power when their lives change the world. It's not the man; it’s the truth of God and the power of God in the man.

That is how it has always been in God’s economy. He exalts the humble and lays low those who are proud.

All their shortcomings and human failings seemed to overshadow their potential. Time was short.

They had relinquished everything they knew, in order to be trained for something for which they had no natural aptitude.

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 that they were ordinary. They were chosen by Christ and trained for a time that is best measured in months, not years.
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He called them in **PHASES**.

He chose them before they chose Him (John 15:16). The process of choosing and calling them happened in distinct stages. Careless readers of Scripture sometimes imagine that John 1:35–51, Luke 5:3–11, and the formal calling of the Twelve in Luke 6:12–16 are contradictory accounts of how Christ called His apostles. But there is no contradiction. The passages are simply describing different stages of the apostles’ calling.

In John 1:35–51, for example, Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel encounter Jesus for the first time. This event occurs near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, in the wilderness near the Jordan River, where John the Baptist was ministering. Andrew, John, and the others were there because they were already disciples of John the Baptist. But when they heard their teacher single out Jesus and say, “Behold the Lamb of God!” they followed Jesus.

That was phase one of their calling. It was a calling to **conversion**. It illustrates how every disciple is called first to salvation. We must recognize Jesus as the true Lamb of God and Lord of all, and embrace Him by faith. That stage of the disciples’ call did not involve full-time discipleship. The Gospel narratives suggest that although they followed Jesus in the sense that they gladly heard His teaching and submitted to Him as their Teacher, they remained at their full-time jobs, earning a living through regular employment. That is why from this point until Jesus called them to full-time ministry, we often see them fishing and mending their nets.

Phase two of their calling was a call to **ministry**. Luke 5 describes the event in detail. This was the occasion when Jesus pushed out from shore to escape the press of the multitudes and taught from Peter’s boat. After He finished teaching, He instructed Peter to launch out to the deep water and put in his nets. Peter did so, even though the timing was wrong (fish were easier to catch at night when the water was cooler and the fish surfaced to feed), the place was wrong (fish normally fed in shallower waters and were easier to catch there), and Peter was exhausted (having fished all night without any success). He told Jesus, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net” (Luke 5:5). The resulting catch of fish overwhelmed their nets and nearly sank two of their fishing boats! (vv. 6–7).

It was on the heels of that miracle that Jesus said, “**Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men**” (Matthew 4:19). Scripture says it was at this point that “they forsook all and followed Him” (Luke 5:11). According to Matthew, Andrew and Peter “immediately left their nets and followed Him” (Matthew 4:20). And James and John “immediately ... left the boat and their father, and followed Him” (v. 22). From that point on, they were inseparable from the Lord.
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Matthew 10:1–4 and Luke 6:12–16 describe a third phase of their calling. This was their calling to apostleship. It was at this point that Christ selected and appointed twelve men in particular and made them His apostles. Here is Luke’s account of the incident:

He called them **PERSONALLY.**

The Twelve were personally selected and called by Christ individually. Jesus doesn’t call groups of people he calls individuals. He called Jacob only after separating him from all that enable him to withstand our Lord’s call (Genesis 32:24). He called Moses while he was tending to sheep on the west side of the wilderness (Exodus 3:1). So it is with us today. Our Lord calls personally and he calls us individually. It is this call that qualifies us and nothing else as we will discuss later.

He called them **PURPOSEFULLY.**

There was purpose in their number. Have you ever wonder why twelve? Why not eight or twenty-four? The number twelve was filled with symbolic importance. There were twelve tribes in Israel. However Israel was apostate. The Judaism of Jesus’ time represented a corruption of the Old Testament faith. Israel had abandoned divine grace in favor of works-religion. Their religion was legalistic. It was full of hypocrisy, self-righteous works, man-made regulations, and meaningless ceremonies. It was based on physical descent from Abraham rather than the faith of Abraham. In choosing twelve apostles, Christ was in effect appointing new leadership for the new covenant and the apostles represented the new leadership of the true Israel of God – consisting of people who believe the gospel and were following the faith of Abraham (Romans 4:6). In other words, the twelve apostles symbolized judgment against the twelve tribes of Old Testament Israel.
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Their CHARACTER . . .

1. **Simon Peter**: The man with a foot shaped mouth.

The nickname was significant, and the Lord had a specific reason for choosing it. Simon was by nature brash, vacillating, and undependable. He tended to make great promises he couldn’t follow through with. He was usually the first one in; and too often, he was the first one out. Jesus changed Simon’s name, it appears, because He wanted the nickname to be a perpetual reminder to him about who he should be. And whatever Jesus called him sent him a subtle message. If He called him Simon, He was signaling him that he was acting like his old self. If He called him Rock, He was commending him for acting the way he ought to be acting.

2. **Andrew**: The Apostle of Small Things

Peter’s brother, Andrew, is the least-known of the four disciples in the lead group. Andrew is left very much in the background. He was not included in several of the important events where we see Peter, James, and John together with Christ (Matthew 17:1; Mark 5:37; 14:33). At other key times, however, he was featured as part of the inner circle (cf. Mark 1:29; 13:3). There is no question that he had a particularly close relationship with Christ, because he was so often the means by which other people were personally introduced to the Master.

Andrew was the first of all the disciples to be called (John 1:35–40). He was responsible for introducing his more dominant brother, Peter, to Christ (vv. 41–42). His eagerness to follow Christ, combined with his zeal for introducing others to Him, fairly typifies Andrew’s character.

Of all the disciples in the inner circle, Andrew appears the least contentious and the most thoughtful.

Whenever he speaks—which is rare in Scripture—he always says the right thing, not the wrong thing. Whenever he acts apart from the other disciples, he does what is right. Scripture never attaches any dishonor to Andrew’s actions when it mentions him by name.

When it came to dealing with people, for example, Andrew fully appreciated the value of a single soul. He was known for bringing individuals, not crowds, to Jesus. Almost every time we see him in the Gospel accounts, he is bringing someone to Jesus.
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Remember his first act after discovering Christ was to go and get Peter. It was Andrew who brought the boy with the loaves and fishes to Christ. All the other disciples were at a loss to know how to obtain food for the multitude. It was Andrew who took the young boy to Jesus and said, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish” (John 6:9).

3. James: Son of Zebedee, and sons of thunder
   James is the least familiar to us of the three that were in Jesus inner circle. The biblical account is practically devoid of any explicit details about his life and character. He never appears as a stand-alone character in the Gospel accounts, but he is always paired with his younger and better-known brother, John. The only time he is mentioned by himself is in the book of Acts, where his martyrdom is recorded.

   James is referred to as “the sons of Zebedee” (Matthew 20:20; 26:37; 27:56; Mark 10:35; Luke 5:10; John 21:2)—signifying that Zebedee was a man of some importance. He was apparently quite well-to-do. His fishing business was large enough to employ multiple hired servants (Mark 1:20). Furthermore, Zebedee’s entire family had enough status that the apostle John “was known to the high priest,” and that is how John was able to get Peter admitted to the high priest’s courtyard on the night of Jesus’ arrest (John 18:15–16).

   He was the first to be martyred. So there is good reason to assume he was a strong leader—and probably second in influence after Peter.

   If there’s a key word that applies to the life of the apostle James, that word is passion; he was a man of intense fervor and intensity. He was zealous, thunderous, passionate, and fervent.

4. John: The Apostle of Love
   The apostle John is familiar to us because he wrote so much of the New Testament. He was the human author of a Gospel and three epistles that bear his name, as well as the book of Revelation. Aside from Luke and the apostle Paul, John wrote more of the New Testament than any other human author.

   John has often been nicknamed “the apostle of love.” Indeed, he wrote more than any other New Testament author about the importance of love—laying particular stress on the Christian’s love for Christ, Christ’s love for His church, and the love for one another that is supposed to be the hallmark of true believers. The theme of love flows through his writings.
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But love was a quality he learned from Christ, not something that came naturally to him. In his younger years, he was as much a Son of Thunder as James. He was not as he is often portrayed in medieval art—a meek, mild, pale-skinned, effeminate person, lying around on Jesus’ shoulder looking up at Him with a dove-eyed stare—forget that caricature. He was rugged and hard-edged, just like the rest of the fishermen-disciples. He was every bit as intolerant, ambitious, zealous, and explosive as his elder brother.

5. Philip: The Earnest Inquirer or The Bean Counter
Philip is the fifth name on every list. This apparently signifies that Philip was the leader of the second group of four.

He is not be confused with Philip the deacon, found in Acts 6.

What do we know about Philip? Matthew, Mark, and Luke give no details at all about him. All the vignettes of Philip appear in the Gospel of John. We discover that Philip was a completely different kind of person from either Peter, Andrew, James, or John. In John’s narrative, Philip is often paired with Nathanael, so we can assume the two of them were close comrades. He is unique among all the disciples.

Piecing together all that the apostle John records about him, it seems Philip was a classic “process person.” He was a facts-and-figures guy—a by-the-book, practical-minded, non-forward-thinking type of individual. He was the kind who tends to be a corporate killjoy, pessimistic, narrowly focused, sometimes missing the big picture, often obsessed with identifying reasons things can’t be done rather than finding ways to do them. He was predisposed to be a pragmatist and a cynic—and sometimes a defeatist than a visionary.

John 6:5 says, “Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?’” Why did He single Philip out and ask him? John says, “This He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do” (v. 6).

Philip was apparently the apostolic administrator—the bean counter. It was a task that certainly suited Philip’s personality. He was the type of person who in every meeting says, “I don’t think we can do that”—the master of the impossible.

6. Bartholomew or Nathanael: The guileless Israelite
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One striking fact about Nathanael is obvious from how Philip announced to him that he had found the Messiah. John 1:46 then gives us a further insight into Nathanael’s character; he was a student of Scripture.

Although he was as a student of Scripture and a searcher for the true knowledge of God; although he had strong spiritual interests and had been faithful, diligent, and honest in his devotion to the Word of God; he was human. He had certain prejudices. Here is his response: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

The most important aspect of Nathanael’s character is expressed from the lips of Jesus. Jesus knew Nathanael already. So His first words upon seeing Nathanael were a powerful commendation of Nathanael’s character. Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!” (John 1:47).

He was pure-hearted from the beginning. Certainly, he was human. He had sinful faults. His mind was tainted by a degree of prejudice. But His heart was not poisoned by deceit. He was no hypocrite. His love for God and His desire to see the Messiah were genuine. His heart was sincere and without guile.

7. Thomas: The melancholy or Pessimist
He is usually nicknamed “Doubting Thomas,” but that may not be the most fitting label for him. He was a better man than the popular lore would indicate.

Thomas was a somewhat negative person. He was a worrywart. He was a brooder. He tended to be anxious and angst-ridden. He was like Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh. He anticipated the worst all the time. Pessimism, rather than doubt, seems to have been his besetting sin.

Like Nathanael, Thomas is mentioned only once each in the three synoptic Gospels. In each case, he is simply named with the other eleven apostles in a list. We learn everything we know about his character from John’s Gospel.
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It becomes obvious from John’s record that Thomas had a tendency to look only into the darkest corners of life. He seemed always to anticipate the worst of everything. Yet despite his pessimism, some wonderfully redeeming elements of his character come through in John’s account of him.

“Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him’” (John 11:16). Now that is pessimistic, and that’s typical for Thomas. But it is a heroic pessimism. He could see nothing but disaster ahead. He was convinced Jesus was heading straight for a stoning. But if that is what the Lord was determined to do, Thomas was grimly determined to go and die with Him. You have to admire his courage.

Matthew was a tax collector—a publican—when Jesus called him. That is the last credential we might expect to see from a man who would become an apostle of Christ, a top leader in the church, and a preacher of the gospel. After all, tax collectors were the most despised people in Israel. Publicans were men who had bought tax franchises from the Roman emperor and then extorted money from the people of Israel to feed the Roman coffers and to pad their own pockets. They often strong-armed money out of people with the use of thugs. Most were despicable, vile, unprincipled scoundrels.

9. James the son of Alphæus: James the Less
It may well be that all these things were true of James, so that he was a small, young, quiet person who stayed mostly in the background. That would all be consistent with the low profile he had among the Twelve. We might say his distinguishing mark was his obscurity.

He sought no recognition. He displayed no great leadership. He asked no critical questions. He demonstrated no unusual insight. Only his name remains, while his life and his labors are immersed in obscurity.

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The last name on the list of faithful disciples is “Judas, the son of James.” The name Judas in and of itself is a fine name. It means “Jehovah leads.” But because of the treachery of Judas Iscariot, the name Judas will forever bear a negative connotation. When the apostle John mentions him, he calls him “Judas (not Iscariot)” (John 14:22).

In Matthew 10:3, he is called “Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus.” Judas was probably the name given him at birth. Lebbaeus and Thaddaeus were essentially nicknames. Thaddaeus means “mamma’s boy.” His other name, Lebbaeus, is similar. It is from a Hebrew root that refers to the heart—literally, “heart child.”

Both names suggest he had a tender, childlike heart. It is interesting to think of such a gentle soul hanging around in the same group of four apostles as Simon the Zealot. But the Lord can use both kinds. Zealots make great preachers. But so do tender-hearted, compassionate, gentle, sweet-spirited souls like Lebbaeus Thaddaeus.

Like the other three faithful members of the third apostolic group, they are shrouded in obscurity. But that obscurity should not cloud our respect for them. They all became mighty preachers.

11. Simon…. The Zealot.
Simon was apparently at one time a member of the political party known as the Zealots. The fact that he bore the title all his life may also suggest that he had a fiery, zealous temperament. But that term in Jesus’ day signified a well-known and widely feared outlaw political sect, and Simon had apparently been a member of that sect.

Their CONDITIONING . . .

Their apostleship began with a kind of internship. Christ sends them out. Mark 6:7 says they were sent out two by two. At this stage they were not quite ready to go out alone, so Christ teamed them in pairs, so that they would offer one another mutual support.

Throughout this phase of their training, the Lord Himself stuck closely with them. He was like a mother eagle, watching the eaglets as they began to fly. They were always checking back with Him, reporting on how things were going (cf. Luke 9:10; 10:17). And after a
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couple of seasons of evangelistic labor, they returned to the Lord and remained with Him for an extended time of teaching, ministry, fellowship, and rest (Mark 6:30–34).

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.

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 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.

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.

Now the next eighteen months of their lives would be filled with even more intensive training—the best seminary education ever. It would not be an easy process. Why was the learning process so difficult for the apostles?
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First of all, they lacked **SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING**.

They were slow to hear and slow to understand. They were at various times thick, dull, stupid, and blind. All those terms or their equivalents are used to describe them in the New Testament. So how did Jesus remedy their lack of spiritual understanding? He just kept teaching. Even after His resurrection, He stayed forty days on earth. Acts 1:3 says that during that time He was "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." He was still persistently teaching them until the moment He ascended into heaven.

A second problem that made the learning process difficult for the disciples is that they lacked **HUMILITY**.

They were self-absorbed, self-centered, self-promoting, and proud. They spent an enormous amount of time arguing about who would be the greatest among them (Matthew 20:20–28; Mark 9:33–37; Luke 9:46). How did Jesus overcome their lack of humility? By being an example of humility to them. He washed their feet. He modeled servanthood. He humbled Himself, even unto the death of the cross.

Third, not only did they lack understanding and humility, but they also lacked **FAITH**.

Four times in the Gospel of Matthew alone Jesus says to them, "O you of little faith" (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). In Mark 4:40, He asked them, "How is it that you have no faith?" At the end of Mark's Gospel, after they had spent months in intensive training with Jesus—even after He had risen from the dead—Mark writes, "He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart" (Mark 16:14). What remedy did Jesus have for their lack of faith? He kept doing miracles and wonderful works. The miracles were not primarily for the benefit of unbelievers; most of His miracles were deliberately done "in the presence of His disciples" so that their faith could be strengthened (John 20:30).

Fourth, they lacked **COMMITMENT**.

While the crowds were cheering and the miracles were being multiplied, they were thrilled. But as soon as the soldiers came into the garden to arrest Jesus, they all forsook Him and fled (Mark 14:50). Their leader ended up denying Jesus and swearing he didn’t even know the man. How did Jesus remedy their proneness to defection? By interceding for them in prayer. John 17 records how Jesus prayed that they would remain ultimately faithful and that the Father would bring them to heaven (vv. 11–26).

Fifth, they lacked **POWER**.
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On their own, they were weak and helpless, especially when confronted with the enemy. There were times when they tried but could not cast out demons. Their faithlessness left them unable to harness the power that was available to them. What did Jesus do to remedy their weakness? On the day of Pentecost He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower them. This was His promise to them: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). That promise was mightily fulfilled.

We’re inclined to look at this group with all their weaknesses and wonder why Jesus did not simply pick a different group of men. Why would He single out men with no understanding, no humility, no faith, no commitment, and no power? Simply this: His strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Again we see how He chooses the weak things of this world to confound the mighty. No one could ever examine this group of men and conclude that they did what they did because of their own innate abilities. There is no human explanation for the influence of the apostles. The glory goes to God alone.

Acts 4:13 says this about how the people of Jerusalem perceived the apostles: “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” The Greek text says people perceived that they were “aggramatoi ... idiotai”—literally, “illiterate ignoramuses.” And that was true from a worldly viewpoint. But it was obvious that they had been with Jesus. The same thing should be said of every true disciple. Luke 6:40 says, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.”

Their COMMISSIONING . . .

Mark 3:14 records this same event: “Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach.” Notice the two-step process. Before they could be sent out to preach, they had to be pulled in. It was absolutely critical that they be with Jesus before they be sent out. In fact, it isn’t until Luke 9:1 that Jesus calls the Twelve together and gives them authority over the demons and power to heal diseases. At that point, He literally delegates to them His miracle power. So in Luke 6, He identifies and appoints them and brings them under His direct and personal tutelage (“that they might be with Him”). In Luke 9, several months later, He gives them power to work miracles and cast out demons. Not until then did He “send them out to preach.”
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Their **CONSUMATION** . . .

Despite the obstacles they faced, they triumphed. In the midst of great persecution and even martyrdom, they fulfilled their task. Against all odds, they entered victorious into glory. And the continuing witness of the gospel—spanning two thousand years’ time and reaching into virtually every corner of the world—is a testimony to the wisdom of the divine strategy. No wonder we are fascinated by these men.

**Matthew:** suffered martyrdom by being slain with a sword at a distant city of Ethiopia.

**John:** was put in a caldron of boiling oil, but escaped death in a miraculous manner, and was afterward banished to Patmos.

**Peter:** was crucified at Rome with his head downward.

**James, the Greater:** was beheaded at Jerusalem.

**James, the Less:** was thrown from a lofty pinnacle of the temple, and then beaten to death with a fuller’s club.

**Bartholomew:** was flayed alive.

**Andrew:** was bound to a cross, whence he preached to his persecutors until he died.

**Thomas:** was run through the body with a lance at Coromandel in the East Indies.

**Thaddeus:** was crucified at Edessa, A.D. 72

**Philip:** preached in Upper Asia where he was scourged, thrown into prison, and afterwards was crucified, A.D. 54.

**Simon the Zealot:** preached in Africa and Britain where he was crucified in A.D. 74.

Longfellow could take a worthless sheet of paper, write a poem on it, and make it worth $6,000—*that’s genius.*

Rockefeller could sign his name to a piece of paper and make it worth a million dollars—*that’s capital.*

Uncle Sam can take gold, stamp an eagle on it, and make it worth $20.00—*that’s money.*
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An artist can take a fifty-cent piece of canvas, paint a picture on it, and make it worth $1,000—*that's art.*

God can take a worthless, sinful life, wash it in the blood of Christ, put His Spirit in it, and make it a blessing to humanity—*that's salvation.*