

ministry to preteens



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LESSON OVERVIEW

Lesson 1:
Peter, the Unexpected

Luke 5:4-11, Acts 4:13

Bottom Line: Jesus calls imperfect, ordinary people to follow Him, be shaped by Him, and show others God's greatness!

SUPPLIES

Opening Game:

- Whiteboards - 1 per team
- Dry erase markers - 1 per team
- Alternately, pen and paper can be used

Small Group Activity:

- Small strip of paper for each preteen
- Pen or pencil for each preteen
- Basket, bucket, or hat for each small group to hold the strips of paper

NOTES

All Scripture references are taken from the NLT unless otherwise indicated.

INTRODUCTION

SAY: What a great day to see you all!

I can't wait to grow with you today as we begin a series about some very important people in the Bible.

I'll give you a hint, we are talking about a group of 12 people ...

I'm talking about the disciples!

Jesus chose 12 men to follow Him, learn from Him, and train to be more like Him.

That's what it means to be a disciple.

Disciples are followers who are dedicated to learning from and becoming like the one they follow.

There is so much that we can learn from Jesus and His disciples IRL.

You know, IRL ...

TBH, I think I may have to BRB, IDK.

LOL, do you guys know what those abbreviations mean?

Pause for responses. See if your preteens can tell you what each abbreviation means. (TBH = To be honest, BRB = Be right back, IDK = I don't know, LOL = Laugh out loud, IRL = in real life)

SAY: Today we're going to talk about **The Disciples IRL ...** in real life!

The disciples learned lessons from Jesus that can help us in our real lives!

Let's check it out!

OPENING GAME

Telephone Text Message

Objective:

This game will challenge preteens to work as a team and get creative with communicating a message.

Game Prep:

Each team will need a small whiteboard and marker or a piece of paper and pencil to record their answers.

How to Play the Game:

In this game, preteens will compete in teams to pass a whispered message down a line like the classic game of telephone, then creatively shorten that message into the briefest version possible so their team's guesser can correctly figure it out. Teams earn points each round by accurately communicating the original message using the fewest letters and numbers. Students can use emojis, symbols, abbreviations, etc., in order to write the shortest message.

Split the group into two teams. Have each team line up as if they are playing a game of telephone. Choose one player from each team to stand away from their team – they will be the guesser.

SAY: I'm going to tell the first person in line a silly message to pass down the line like a game of telephone.

The person who receives the message first will turn and whisper the message to the next person in line, who will whisper the message to the next person, and so on.

But there is a twist to this game of telephone!

When the message gets to the last person in line, that person will have to turn the message into abbreviations and symbols.

The goal is to make the message as short as possible while still making sense to their team's guesser!

And there's another twist!

At a random time in the game, I might send the message down the line again to help your team get that message right, so pay attention.

Whoever can get their guesser to guess the message using the fewest letters or numbers wins the round!

You can use any emojis, abbreviations, numbers, or symbols.

Make sure the guessers can't hear the original message, then prepare the first person in each line with the message.

If both guessers are correct at the end of the line, the winner is whichever team used fewer characters in their final message.

- Round 1: I ate a juicy watermelon before school.
- Round 2: Just kidding about my BFF, talk to you later!
- Round 3: I don't know about sea monkeys, see you soon.
- Round 4: I can't right now, my penguin stole my homework.
- Round 5: My elbow says thank you for the pizza.

When the game is over, debrief:

SAY: What about that game felt tricky or difficult?

Pause for responses.

SAY: The message wasn't perfect by the end, and then you had to figure out how to communicate it clearly!

That's a hard task.

Over the next few weeks we're going to see how Jesus took imperfect people and shaped them into people who could communicate His message clearly in real life – like we took our imperfect messages and tried to communicate them clearly.

And – spoiler alert – Jesus still does that same thing today!

TEACH

SAY: We live in the 21st century, when texting and silly abbreviations are normal, but back in Bible times, there were no fishermen saying, “LOL, I’ve got a huge fish RN.”

There were no Roman soldiers saying, “BRB, I’ve got to get some ‘za for my fam.”

(‘Za = pizza)

It was a different time!

Sometimes people think that the stories in the Bible took place so long ago that they don’t really connect to our lives today.

But I’m excited to show you how everything that happened more than 2,000 years ago can absolutely help us in our lives today.

That’s why our series is called **The Disciples IRL** – The Disciples in Real Life.

The disciples that Jesus chose to follow Him weren’t made-up characters in a fake story.

They weren’t superheroes or super geniuses or super anything.

They were just people that said yes to Jesus.

When we learn about the disciples, we can actually learn about how to follow Jesus ourselves!

Let’s ask God to help us learn from the lives of the disciples in prayer.

PRAY: God, thank you for helping us connect the Word to our lives today. Help us to see how the disciples were a lot like us today and how Jesus helped them to grow!

SAY: Today, we are going to start with a guy named Simon.

Technically, Simon was his name until Jesus gave him a new name, which was Peter.

Since Jesus called Simon Peter, I’ll call him Peter today too!

When Jesus first met Peter, he wasn't preaching about God or being super amazing and spiritual.

ASK: Does anyone know what Peter was doing when he first met Jesus?

Pause for responses.

SAY: Peter was a fisherman!

He was a smelly, hardworking fisherman trying to make a living on a boat.

And it wasn't always an easy job.

In fact, in **Luke 5**, Jesus found Peter on a rough fishing day.

Let's read **Luke 5:4-7**:

Allow preteens to find the passage before you begin reading out loud.

4 When [Jesus] had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish."

5 "Master," Simon replied, "we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again."

6 And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear!

7 A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.

SAY: Remember, Simon and Peter are the same person – he goes by both in the Bible.

We see here that Peter experienced a miracle!

As a fisherman, I can only imagine how amazing it was to experience that many fish appearing out of nowhere.

But Peter had an interesting response to Jesus.

Even though he was amazed at the miracle, he didn't feel worthy of it.

To most people, Peter was just a regular fisherman.

And what kind of amazing thing could ever come from a regular, smelly, uneducated fisherman?

Well, here's what happened next, in **Luke 5:8-11**:

8 When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, "Oh, Lord, please leave me—I'm such a sinful man."

9 For he was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him.

10 His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed. Jesus replied to Simon, "Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people!"

11 And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus.

SAY: Peter didn't expect anything amazing could come from his day of fishing, but he met the most amazing man of all – Jesus!

And then Peter followed Jesus and he was totally perfect, right?

Pause for responses. Allow preteens to shout out "yes" or "no."

SAY: Not at all!

Even though Peter started following Jesus, he was still a regular guy with human problems.

If you read more about Peter, you will see that he had a lot of the problems that you and I might have.

He got angry.

He got scared.

He fell asleep when he was supposed to be praying.

He was ordinary in so many ways.

So why did Jesus pick him?

ASK: Why do you think Jesus picked ordinary people to be His disciples?

Pause for responses.

SAY: Jesus could have picked the smartest people in Israel ... or the richest people.

He could have picked people who were more brave, more loyal, or more honest.

Instead, He picked people like Peter, a fisherman.

He picked a hated tax collector and another man who was known for anger.

He chose men who had weaknesses!

That doesn't sound like a dream team, but it was the team that Jesus chose.

And there is a story in the book of Acts that points to a really amazing reason why Jesus chose imperfect, ordinary people to follow Him – people like you and me!

There was a moment after Jesus had died and was resurrected when the disciples were left to tell Jesus's story.

In this incredible moment, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking about Jesus to big crowds of people.

Let's read about this amazing moment in **Acts 4:13**:

13 The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus.

SAY: The people who heard Peter teaching about Jesus were amazed!

It was so unexpected.

They thought, "Wasn't this guy just a fisherman?"

They were amazed because Peter was an ordinary guy, but he was doing something incredible!

You see, when ordinary, imperfect people follow Jesus, people see how great God is!

God is so great that He can take ordinary, imperfect people and shape them to be more and more like Jesus.

Even though Peter had weaknesses, God moved in His power through Peter ... and then everyone got to see how great God is!

Jesus does the unexpected.

Jesus calls imperfect, ordinary people to follow Him, be shaped by Him, and show others God's greatness!

This isn't just a story from ancient Bible times – it's true today in our lives too!

Jesus continues to call on people like you and me to follow Him, even though we aren't perfect.

Did you know that Jesus doesn't count you out, no matter what you've done in your past and no matter what challenges you might be facing?

He sees kids who struggle with school, and He invites them to follow Him.

He sees kids who struggle with doing the right thing with their friends or in their family, and He calls them to be lights in this world.

He sees the temptations that you face in your life and wants to help you grow and overcome them.

When we follow Jesus, He shapes our hearts to be more and more like Him.

When real people with real challenges like you and me follow Jesus, God can do miraculous, amazing, great things through you and me!

There are two important questions to think about.

First, are you following Jesus?

He paid the price for all of your imperfections so that you could follow Him.

This may be a great moment to give a Gospel presentation and lead preteens through a prayer of salvation.

SAY: If you follow Jesus, how do you think God wants to shine through your life?

For preteens like you, that might mean you speak about Jesus to others like Peter did.

It could mean that you go to people, like Peter did, and show God's love to them by praying for them or helping them when they have a need in their life.

You could show other people God's greatness by speaking words that lift others up or doing something kind for someone.

This may be an opportunity to have preteens pray or share ideas of how they might show God to others through their life.

Jesus calls imperfect, ordinary people to follow Him, be shaped by Him, and show others God's greatness ... and that includes you and me!

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

In this activity, preteens will anonymously write down something they feel is ordinary or imperfect about themselves, place it in a basket, and then take turns drawing and reading the papers aloud. (If it would work better for your students to write down more general ideas not specific to them, change the instructions you give.)

After each one is read, the group will discuss how that struggle or weakness connects to the disciples and how God can still use someone like that to reflect His greatness. The goal is to help preteens see that ordinary, imperfect people – just like them – can be shaped and used by God in powerful ways.

Each preteen needs a small strip of paper and something to write with. Prepare a bucket, hat, or basket to put the papers in.

SAY: Today, we are going to see how God can grow ordinary people into people who show His greatness to others in unexpected ways!

God used a cupbearer named Nehemiah to help build up the walls of Israel and tentmakers named Priscilla and Aquila to grow the early church.

God used an English plumber named Sam Wigglesworth to be an evangelist and a farm boy named Billy Graham to share the gospel with millions.

Do you see how amazing God is?

Let's imagine what He can do with people like you and me.

On your piece of paper, write down something that is imperfect or ordinary about you.

Alternately, have the preteens put something that is typical of preteens that feels imperfect or ordinary.

SAY: We won't be putting names on the papers, but we will be reading them out loud ... so make sure it's something you don't mind being shared.

When you are done, fold your paper in half and pass your paper to me.

Next, I'm going to ask someone to pick one of the papers and read what it says.

Then I'll have that person answer some questions about what is written on the paper.

Each time someone chooses a paper, ask that preteen the following three questions. If they are having a hard time answering all three, ask the rest of the group to help.

ASK: Is that something that one of Jesus's disciples might have experienced?

If you know a specific disciple's story that connects, share that story or have a preteen share what they remember about the disciples having human experiences.

ASK: Even if someone in our group is dealing with that, can God use them to do things for Him?

ASK: What is one thing that a person like that could do for God while they are an imperfect, ordinary preteen?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Peter and the other disciples said yes to following Jesus?
2. What do people usually think makes someone great, and how is that different from what God thinks makes someone great?
3. What is something that people usually see as ordinary or a weakness, but God can actually use for something unexpected?
4. Why do you think Jesus chose ordinary people to be His closest disciples instead of impressive religious leaders?
5. What challenges might come up if Jesus asked someone to follow Him, but that person thought of themselves as amazing or perfect?
6. How did people see God's greatness through Peter and the other disciples?
7. How could people see God's greatness through ordinary preteens in our group?
8. What in your life makes it hard to imagine that God can use you for something that shows His greatness?
9. How might your life look different if you really embraced the idea that Jesus can use imperfect people like you and me?
10. What is one thing that you could do this week to show God's greatness to others?