

**Sam Cousins**  
**Jesus is calling**  
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When I was at school I loved playing football. I was the star striker/ one of the best players in our team. I scored a lot of the goals.. We were a pretty good team. The secret to feeling like you're a good team is to only play teams that are worse than you. In reality we were pretty rubbish. Because we were such a small school we didn't get to play in any competitive games.. Just friendlies against rubbish teams.

So when I finished school and moved to sixth form, I was super excited to join the football team and play in the college league. I had never really been in a proper football team before.

but what I hadn't really thought about was that moving from a school of 250 pupils to a sixth form of almost 2000 students, there was going to be a lot more competition for spots on the team...

I went to the trials anyway... To my disappointment, I didn't get selected for the A team... or the B team.. or the C team! in fact I didn't get into any of the teams but they said I should keep coming to training anyway and if I progressed, maybe I'd make the cut.

As time progressed, I wasn't getting selected for games or getting moved up to the C team training. I became more discouraged and so I started missing more training sessions. Until eventually I had all but stopped going.

So imagine my surprise when I walked past the locker rooms one day and glanced at the C team team sheet for tomorrows home game. There, in the middle of the pitch, centre midfield, was MY name! SAM C. I had been called up! I had finally been given a chance to prove myself. The next day, nervous but excited I headed to the changing rooms for the prematch brief, kitted up, boots in hand. I opened the door the room was already full.. everyone seems to be there already.. The only seats left were on the other side of the room. I was just about to make my way across the room to find a seat.

I'm just going to pause here and say that the moments that followed, I have spent the last 8 years trying to forget...

As I started to make my way across the room, the room fell silent. Now if you walk in a room and it goes silent, It's generally not a good sign. It gets worse.. As I felt every eye on

me, the manager says, 'Can I help you mate?' (I wanted to disappear!!!) 'Yeah, um my name was on the team sheet? SAM C? I think I'm playing in midfield?'

"Oh, that's awkward.. this here is Sam C... Sam COLLINS.." "Sorry mate, Sam Collins passed the trials and has been training with the team so that's why we picked him.."

What I heard was "Sorry mate, you're not good enough to play in the team, you didn't qualify, you don't belong here"

I wanted to disappear!!! Is anyone cringing for me right now??

I desperately wanted to be on the team, I wanted to be good enough, I wanted the chance to play but I just wasn't good enough to qualify for this team. What hurt the most was that **I was written off before I was even given a chance.**

Maybe you haven't experienced such a publicly humiliating let down but you're here today and all you've ever wanted was to qualify, to be wanted, to be endorsed, to be chosen? But situations or experiences and made you feel like you're not good enough. Maybe you've been told your whole life that you're not good enough.

'You're not good enough for that **team**'

'You don't qualify for that **position**'

'You're not the right person for this **job**, or that **promotion**'

'You're **not intelligent** enough for those UNIs'

Maybe you've convinced yourself your whole life that you're just not good enough.

'No one likes you'

'You've messed up too many times, you'll never amount to anything'

'You're not worth anything, that's why your dad left'

'She left you for a reason.. in fact so did the last one. Probably best if you give up

Whatever situation it is, I'm speaking to someone here today who doesn't feel like they qualify. You feel like you won't make the cut. You fear you may never be able to shake off the labels that have attached themselves to you?

Maybe particular situation has jumped into your mind as we've been talking about this? Or a particular incident?

We can feel this way about so many situations in life. Maybe you're even embarrassed about it because you **think it's too small of a situation** but you know you've been effected by it.. it's knocked your confidence, you've lost your motivation, your direction?

Maybe it's an **accumulation of small instances** that keep beating you down? Or maybe it only took **one significant moment** for your world to come crashing down around you and now your confidence and self belief are shattered?

I don't know but **maybe I'm not even talking to you?** You're sat here today and all you can think of is that friend or family member who is struggling like this right now?

Whether I'm speaking to you or a friend today,

Either you've been told by others or you've convinced yourself, you don't think that you're good enough.. You've written yourself off. Maybe the case is that you have fallen short, you've made mistakes and now you don't know if anyone would ever believe in again.

Well I've got some good news today.. I'm here to tell you that God looks at you differently to the ways people might. The way Jesus qualifies people is different to the way people do.

Now if you're here today and you wouldn't consider yourself a christian or even believe in a God, hang in there, I hope you will be able to be encouraged by what we talk about today. I want to read a passage from the bible in Mark chapter 2. We believe that the bible is the word of God and that it is just as relevant for our lives now as it was when it was written.

So Mark chapter 2..

In this passage we read one of the accounts **where Jesus calls someone to follow him and be his disciple**. A disciple is basically a follower of Jesus. A pupil, someone who learns and lives by Jesus' teachings. Now the people in that area had begun to hear about Jesus. **Jesus had just started his ministry** not long before this story occurs. He had already performed some miracles at this point, **people were beginning to talk..** Like Jesus had been **healing** people, casting out demons, forgiving sins, adding some **impressive things to his ministerial CV..**

Now the people **you would expect** Jesus to be adding to his **elite team of followers** would be people who have some experience right?? Imagine if you were head of Jesus' disciple recruitment team. What would be some of the requirements you would list for potential candidates?

Definitely no criminal record. No hit of immoral activity. An upstanding citizen. Maybe someone religious right (especially if this was a ministry job)? Someone who worked in the temple and knows the word and laws of God? Maybe a fresh graduate of Hillsong bible college?

This is the kind of person you and I would probably chose to be disciples of Jesus Christ; Son of God.

So far.. Jesus has chosen a couple of uneducated fisherman.. rough hands, rough clothes, rough talking fishermen.

So let's see who Jesus choses to recruit next.

**Mark 2:13-17 (NIV)**

**13** Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. **14** As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him

Now I want to pause and explain why Levi is a rubbish choice in my opinion

1. Levi was a **tax collector**. Historically, in biblical times, the tax collectors in Israel were hated amongst the Jews. This was because not only were they collecting taxes from their own people to give to the Roman empire (making them traitors in the eyes of the Jews), many of them **abused their power and extorted** the jewish people taking cuts of the extravagant taxes for themselves. They were wealthy and they were despised. The religious people of the day viewed them as sinners.
2. Jesus was walking along teaching **a large crowd**. There were plenty of adequate candidates to chose from. People was following him and listening intently, but Jesus chose the guy who wasn't. Levi was at work behind his tax collectors booth.

"Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. **15** While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. **16** When the teachers of the law who

were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

See, finally someone who agrees with me!

**17** On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

**You see, Jesus doesn't call the qualified.**

**You may feel like you're down and out. You may feel like you don't belong. You may think that you don't measure up or that you're not good enough but friend, I've got good news for you today!**

**Jesus doesn't call you because of what you've achieved. He didn't chose you because of what you've done or because you're 'good enough' or because you 'qualify' to His standards.**

Hate to break it to you but none of us do... Not even the religious people/the pharisees of the day measured up to God's standards.

The bible says 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory fo God'. The word sin just means we've missed the mark... when we sin, we are living and acting outside of God's best for us.

We might not have chosen Jesus with our life style or our actions, we may not have been the ones following Jesus around the lake listening to his teachings... in fact, we may have been like Levi, sat behind the desk of our mistakes and past decisions not even considering the fact that Jesus would chose us but Jesus chose us regardless.

Levi was definitely not the bookies favourite to be selected for the Jesus' disciples A team. He was a tax collector, he was probably corrupt, he probably cheated people out of their money, abusing his power. If Jesus was choosing followers who measured up the religious requirements of the day, Levi would not qualify.

Why would Jesus pick a man like this?

**Jesus doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called.**

**Romans 8:10 (TPT)**

**10** Now Christ lives his life in you! And even though your body may be dead because of the effects of sin, his life-giving Spirit imparts life to you because you are fully accepted by God.[i]

It goes on to say...

**17** And since we are his true children, we qualify to share all his treasures, for indeed, we are heirs of God himself.

**Jesus doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called.**

You see Jesus doesn't overlook those that others have written off. This is shown countless times throughout the new testament as Jesus calls and empowers those, others had deemed as unworthy, unqualified.

Jesus qualifies you when He calls you.

**John 15:16 (TPT)**

You didn't choose me, but I've chosen[n] and commissioned you to go into the world[o] to bear fruit.

Jesus didn't come to pick out the best of the best, the most worthy, the qualified. the Jesus wasn't looking for the finished product. He is looking for someone that would answer his call. Why? So he can show you how to live out the incredible purpose and plan He has set out for you.

The name of my message today is 'Jesus is calling'. Jesus is calling and He's just looking for someone to answer His call.

That's exactly what Levi did. **He decided to follow Jesus** and step into the purpose Jesus had set out for Him. He may not have been qualified in man's eyes by Jesus chose him and for Levi, that was enough.

1. Follow Jesus. Accept his call.

The first thing we have to do is answer His call. We don't have to pass a test or jump through hoops or memorise the whole bible.. We just need to be obedient to the call of Jesus.

For a lot of us doing just that is a lot harder than it sounds right? You know thinking of Levi's situation, if I was in his shoes I'm not sure I would have been to quick to leave everything and follow a man (I had never met) at the drop of a hat. **If someone walked into your office at work** followed by a large crowd and said \*name\* follow me, turned around and walked out, would you follow him? We've been told since we were children not to follow strangers right?

But for Levi, that was enough. In that short encounter with Jesus, the Son of God, everything changed for Levi. Levi was compelled to follow Jesus. All it takes is an encounter with Jesus to compel us to follow His call.

You know, we know more about Jesus now than Levi did when Jesus called him. Some of us are here waiting for Jesus to come to us so we can encounter him. Some of us are waiting for some big sign, for Jesus to literally call out '**follow me**' so we are convinced He is calling us. Can I tell you that if you want to encounter Jesus, you don't need to build a time machine, all you have to read the New Testament. You will encounter Jesus and you will be compelled to follow His call.

**The problem is for so many of us, we've already decided that we don't qualify for a calling, so we deny ourselves an encounter with Jesus.**

We put up excuses. We try and convince ourselves that God doesn't need us or want us. I'm mean look at all the people who follow Him already, surely He is content with them. He doesn't want me.

God doesn't care how messy your past is! He isn't concerned about your shortcomings! He is calling you and says if you would just look up and leave behind your past come out from behind your desk, come out from behind your failures, come out from behind your insecurities, come out from behind your shame and walk with me, I can show you your purpose, I can show you your calling.

Spend time with Him, read His word, Let Jesus reveal to you the purpose He has placed on your life!

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Jesus is calling. Answer the call. You don't have to feel like you've got everything together. You don't have to be qualified because when Jesus calls you, He qualifies you. And Jesus doesn't just call a select few. Jesus is calling to everyone, to each and everyone of us.

When Jesus commissions the disciples before He ascended to Heaven, he said this:

**Mark 16:15 (NLT)**

And then he told them, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone.

And this is what I love about Levi’s story. Did you notice the first thing it is recorded that Levi did after his life changing encounter with Jesus? Does anyone remember?

Let’s look back. I like how this account is told in the book of Luke.

**Luke 5:29 (NIV)**

*“Follow me,” Jesus said to him, **28** and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.*

**29** Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. **30** But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

2. Throw a party

The **first thing Levi did after his life changing encounter with Jesus was to throw a party**. He invited all his tax collector friends. All the people who had known him in his previous life. All the people who knew him as a tax collector.

You see, **Levi’s encounter with Jesus was so great that he couldn’t wait to introduce his friends to the man who had turned his life around**. The man who had given him a second chance, the man who had given him hope, a new identity and a new life.

Jesus had called to him and said follow me, I choose you!  
 Even though other people have written you off, I choose you!  
 Even though you don’t measure up to the standard, I qualify you!  
 Even though you don’t think you’re good enough, I love you!  
 Even though others have given up on you, I believe in you!

Levi knew that if Jesus could call him, could choose him (the least qualified) then there was hope for everyone! Levi knew that the invitation to follow Jesus is for everyone. He just had to find a way for the people he knew to encounter Jesus.

Now that we have encountered Jesus, we need to introduce our friends to Him!

You know interestingly, Levi didn't invite his friends to church straight away either... He wasn't like 'Right guys, I've just had the most incredible encounter with Jesus. Who wants to come listen to him do a speech at the temple with me?'

No instead Levi threw a banquet. An environment where people would feel comfortable. Where they could eat together, drink together, laugh together. Where people could encounter Jesus. Where they could meet other people who's lives had been transformed by the call of Jesus in an informal environment.

I don't know if you guys know, but we're throwing a party tonight here at the space. It's an informal environment with food and drinks where people can come and encounter other people, who's lives had been transformed by the call of Jesus.

Just like Levi, we cannot keep the power of a transformational encounter to ourselves. The call of God is for everyone!

Everyone has to make the decision for themselves on whether they will answer Jesus' call and get up and leave the desk. We cannot make that decision for anyone.

Our goal is for our friends and family to meet Jesus and summer nights is such a great environment we've created for them to do just that

Maybe you've asked already but they can't make it tonight. No worries! Why not invite them round to your home for dinner?

*Dinner parties are such a great facilitator of this exact invite but whilst they are on pause for the summer, don't wait!*

Could you organise a group of friends to get out for dinner and invite them too? What would work around your life style?

Can I remind you of a verse we read earlier?

**Romans 8:10 (TPT)**

**10 Now Christ lives his life in you!**

Maybe your friends first encounter of Jesus could be through you?

I recall from Hillsong Conference that one of the speakers said that we ***owe everyone an encounter with God.***

So why not invite someone to summer nights tonight? It's never too late to drop someone a text or give them a call. Maybe you could drive out and pick them up?

Organise to have someone for dinner this week? Why not get a group of people from Church?

Who do you need to invite to the party?

Imagine what would happen amongst our group of friends, our families if all of us began to answer the call of Jesus.

The call of Jesus is **more than just a call**.

The call of Jesus is **a call to live a new life**.

**Free from the burden of your mistakes, your past.**

It is a call to **live a full life** with **Jesus guiding your steps**, pointing you in the right direction.

It is a **new identity**, not based in your failures or shortcomings but **based on** the fact that you are **a new creation** in Christ Jesus.

God has called us to be His sons and daughters!

The call to live within the new life, the new identity, the new purpose He has assigned to us will transform not only your life but the lives of those around you too. **Who in your world needed to hear this message today?** Who do you know that is struggling with identity, self-worth, purpose?

When we start to live out the call of Jesus, we become a living testament to the transformational power of Jesus Christ. Your life becomes a walking advert for an encounter with Jesus.

**Hey, I was broken but Jesus fixed me.**

I was **a screw up** but Jesus gave me **a second chance**.

I was **a sinner** but Jesus **forgave me**.

I was **lost** but Jesus pointed me in the **right direction**.

I was **unqualified** but Jesus chose me **anyway**.

I was **ashamed** but Jesus gave me a **new identity!**

Jesus called me. He chose me and He chooses you too!

Imagine how many people could experience a transformational encounter with Jesus if we would answer His call and step out from behind our (tax collectors) desk and leave behind our past and follow Him!