

[John 15:16a:] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit.

1. So said Jesus to His disciples in the upper room the day before He died. It's a good thing God calls us: [Philippians 2:13] for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. If we had to choose Him, we'd be in big trouble! That's the message Jesus shocked the people with as He wheeled around on them and confronted them. {Read verses 25-27.}
2. Jesus' popularity had been growing. It was now more than just His disciples that were following Him around now. In the large crowds following Jesus there were also the curious ... and the openly hostile. But following Jesus was not just something to do for now. And His enemies were angling for Him to go to the cross He alluded to. Jesus knew all of this.
3. Jesus' shocking statement began with a simple truth: "If anyone comes to me ... Can anyone come to Him—on their own, that is? The answer is absolutely not! The concept of hating is shocking but illustrates Jesus' point. Would we love God first—would we come to Him—if it meant that there would now be hatred between family members? Hmm. Maybe. But then here's the kicker: how about hating your own self? By nature, we love ourselves! We love our own accomplishments, our own dreams. By nature, we subordinate God to these. What I mean by that is that God has to fit into my scheme of how life should be. I hate a God to Whom I must submit. What about what I've done?! What about what I want?!
4. To be a disciple, to learn from Jesus, we learn a couple things as Jesus points us to the cross, which loomed larger and larger for Him as He made His way closer to it every day. He was *not* going to the cross for Himself. He was headed there for us! Born of the virgin Mary and conceived by the Holy Spirit, Jesus did not have that sinful nature we inherit from Adam. Perfect Son of God *and* perfect Son of Man, Jesus *did* put God first, and His Father's will and His will were one. What made "self" happy for Jesus was living the perfect life for God that we have not lived. When Jesus wheeled around on these people that were following Him, He was challenging them. What were they following Him for, anyway? Unless He called them, the life He offered was a life they by nature would hate. He calls us to conflict with the people around us who still want to make a god in their own image. He calls us to a conflict in our own hearts, too. He calls us to self-denial and humility, as we fight our sinful nature. Really, Jesus is preaching a sermon here about original sin.
5. "Aw, come on, it's not *that* bad!" our sinful human hearts cry out. That's a nice way of saying that *I'm* not that bad. So, whom do we believe: Jesus coming to us in this text or the devil who comes to us in our sinful nature? It's a good thing God calls us, or else we would never become a disciple! Jesus has to disabuse us of the notion that there's *something* good in us that would lead us to follow Him. He uses a couple of stories to show us there is not.
6. The first one directly tackles the sinful nature's thought regarding our accomplishments. {Read verses 28-30.} We're the foolish ones who try to build such

towers. We tell ourselves, "God, look at what I've done," pointing to a ruined foundation of what we've accomplished. The question of "Why didn't you finish?" makes us hate God for asking it. We hate Him by nature because He's the One to Whom we're accountable. We hate Him because He points out our failure to measure up to His standard. To have Jesus wheel around on us and confront us this way is hard.

7. Then Jesus continues, tackling our plans next. {Read verses 31-32.} No matter how much we plan, no matter how smart we are, no matter how much strength we have, we simply can't win the war of being good enough for God. And the sinful nature, instead of saying to God, "Alright, you win," goes down swinging when it didn't have to—at least as far as God is concerned. But as far as the sinful nature is concerned, it will fight to exert its will to the death—because it *is* dead. If it were not for God's intervention in our lives, there would be no "life" at all.
8. So, what does it take to have a change of heart? What does it take to live for God, to be His disciple? It takes an act of God. It's a good thing God calls us. {Read verse 33.} So, we see the divine truth of the nature of our conversion. We who, by nature, would not give up anything to God are told that we must give up everything to God. God must be first in all things—even family, even self! God must be first in our accomplishments, which means they have to be perfectly done for Him. God has to be first in our plans, which means we love doing them for Him. We do not do this by nature. That is both why Jesus came and why Jesus would be killed.
9. Thank God He's disabused us of the notion that there's just got to be something good in us, that is, in our sinful nature. No, God doesn't accept what I built on my terms. Jesus finished the work of our salvation, always being perfect for my "good enough." No, God doesn't owe me anything. Jesus gave me everything when He died in my place so that His righteousness counts as mine so that I follow Him to heaven. Jesus for us is the only way we give up everything because Jesus gave up everything for us! He is the One Who calls us to this understanding. Otherwise we would never have it. It's a good thing God calls us. And call us He did, overcoming that sinful nature we still fight to make us His own! Amen.