



The Gospel of John

Session 3: The First Disciples of Jesus

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

This week we will look at Jesus's disciples and their first introduction to Him. The invitation to "come and see" originated from Jesus to Andrew and another disciple and then extended outward as they invited others to "come and see" Jesus.

God uses all kinds of people to fulfill His mission. Our unique personalities, talents, and relationships can all be means through which God uses individuals to reach others for Christ. Take note of the different relationships and personalities in this account and how each person was a part of Jesus's mission.

Every believer has a part to play in making Jesus known. We never know how God will use our lives to reach others.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

John 1:35-51

THE MAIN IDEA

When we respond to Christ's invitation, He not only draws us into relationship with Himself but also works through our unique relationships and personalities to invite others, equipping us to play a distinct role in His mission.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How has God uniquely made me, and how can that be used in sharing the good news of Jesus?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

John 1:35-39 When two of John the Baptist's disciples heard their rabbi declare, "Look, the Lamb of God!" they wanted to know more. Curious, they asked where Jesus was staying. "Come, and you'll see" he replied. Their spiritual curiosity started a lifelong journey with Jesus. Each of our spiritual journeys begin with an invitation to "come and see" who Jesus is. Drawing near to Jesus isn't a one-time event, but a relationship we are meant to pursue throughout our lives.

John 1:40-46 When Andrew encountered Jesus, he immediately went to his brother, Peter, and invited him to "come and see" for himself. After meeting Jesus, the natural "next step" for believers is to tell others the good news about Jesus. Much like Andrew, this often happens in the context of relationships. We are not responsible for people's response, but sharing Christ is the Great Commission command and the privilege of all who know Jesus.

John 1:47-51 When Phillip found Nathanael and invited him to "come and see," he was met with skepticism. We will encounter people who are unsure about the claims of Jesus, too. We can share what we know to be true, and like Phillip, trust Jesus to do the rest.



START HERE

God calls men and women from all walks of life to follow Him, and He uses each person's unique personality, relationships, and talents to reach others for Christ. In today's lesson, look for ways that God used the first disciples to invite others to "come and see" who Jesus is.

DISCUSS

When was a time when your talents or relationships gave opportunity for you to share your faith with someone?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. Responding to Christ's Invitation

John 1:35-39: The next day, John was standing with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

The two disciples heard him say this and followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and noticed them following him, he asked them, "What are you looking for?"

They said to him, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

"Come and you'll see," he replied. So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon.

Unpacking John 1:35-39

Invitations mark an opportunity to acknowledge a change in direction in someone's life or celebrate a significant milestone. An invitation to accept a new job or say "yes" to a first date might be the beginning of a new season. Likewise, accepting an invitation to someone's baptism, wedding, baby shower, or graduation is an opportunity to celebrate the start of a new chapter. As we examine today's text, we will look at Jesus's invitation to some of his first disciples and see how their response sparked an invitation for others to meet Jesus as well.

This portion of the text begins the day after John the Baptist boldly declared Jesus, "*The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*" (v. 29). Standing with his disciples, John again proclaimed, "*Look, the Lamb of God!*" (v. 36). "*Lamb of God*" was used by both John the apostle (John 1:9) and John the Baptist. This designation references the Passover lamb of Exodus 12, and the prophetic words of Isaiah 53:7 and 12. John the Baptist was clear—Jesus was the long-awaited sacrificial lamb and Savior of the world.

John had his own disciples, including Andrew, and another unnamed man (possibly the apostle John). When Jesus's public ministry began, some of these disciples began following Jesus instead. Others remained with John the Baptist until after his arrest and death at the hands of



Herod Antipas. Those who remained came to meet Jesus after John's arrest, seeking to reassure their rabbi that his suffering was not in vain, and Jesus really was the long-awaited Savior (Matthew 11:2-3).

When the two disciples of John the Baptist saw Jesus on this day, and heard John's declaration, they began to follow Jesus (John 1:37) and John the Baptist did not try to stop them. His ministry as the forerunner to the Messiah was to prepare people for Christ's arrival. Now that Christ had appeared, it was appropriate to leave and follow Jesus. In John 3:29-30, John the Baptist would say this about Jesus's growing ministry: *"He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom's friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom's voice. So this joy of mine is complete. He must increase, but I must decrease."*

When Jesus noticed the men falling in step behind Him, he asked, *"What are you looking for?"* (John 1:38) Their response did not answer His questions but rather indicated their desire to spend more time with Him. *"Rabbi"* (which means "teacher"), *"where are you staying?"* These students of John the Baptist had spiritual curiosity about Jesus, even if they did not yet understand who He was.

People come to faith in a variety of ways. Some people first connect with Jesus as a good teacher. Others may not know exactly why they are drawn to Him, only that there is something about faith in Christ that compels them. Jesus offers each person the same invitation he extended to John's disciples—*"Come and you'll see"* (John 1:39). The starting point of faith is a willingness to get to know the person of Jesus, and enter relationship with Him. While our understanding of Jesus may begin with an awareness of Him on a surface level, a sincere search for Christ will not end there. As we *"come and see"* who Christ is, our understanding deepens to see Him as Savior and Lord.

As we grow in relationship with Christ, the call to *"come and see"* never ends. Through individual study of God's Word, prayer, meeting together in small groups, worshiping together with God's people, and other means of drawing near to Him, we are brought again to the feet of Jesus. In this life, we will never exhaust the process of getting to know Him. John the apostle expressed this reality when he closed his Gospel by saying, *"And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if every one of them were written down, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written"* (John 21:25).

DISCUSS

- *What's the best invitation you have ever received? What made it so special?*
- *How did the actions of John's disciples show he had faithfully fulfilled his role and they had rightly understood his message?*
- *How can we maintain a "come and see" attitude toward experiencing Christ throughout our lives?*



2. Sharing Christ Through Our Relationships

John 1:40-46: *Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed him. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated "the Christ"), and he brought Simon to Jesus.*

When Jesus saw him, he said, "You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which is translated "Peter").

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. He found Philip and told him, "Follow me."

Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth."

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael asked him.

"Come and see," Philip answered.

Unpacking John 1:40-46

Have you ever received an opportunity for a plus-one on a party invitation? It can be fun to bring along a date or a friend to celebrate. Whether it's a wedding, company party, or birthday celebration, a plus-one gives a party-goer the opportunity to share the joy of the celebration with someone else.

As followers of Jesus, we have received the ultimate plus-one. In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), Jesus gave the command to *"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations."* But this is not a limited invitation. We can invite everyone to join in the joy and celebration of living life with Christ. In response to Jesus, John the Baptist's disciples moved from *"come and see"* to *"go and tell"* as they shared Jesus with others.

In verse 40, we learn the identity of one of these disciples; Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. From an invitation to *"come and see"* just a couple of verses before, Andrew boldly proclaimed to Peter, *"We have found the Messiah" (which is translated "the Christ")* (v. 41).

After Andrew encountered Christ, he wanted his brother, Peter, to meet Him as well. Though Andrew had just met Jesus, he knew enough to know he wanted to share Jesus with someone else. Andrew brought Peter to Jesus, and Jesus was the difference for Peter. When Jesus saw Peter, he declared, *"You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which is translated "Peter")* (John 1:42).

As you might recall from the first week of this series, the Gospel of John is not a synoptic Gospel like Matthew, Mark and Luke, meaning John's intent was to tell the story of Jesus thematically and relationally, as opposed to chronologically. John's Gospel tends to focus on different facets of Christ's earthly ministry. That being the case, it is possible this meeting with John the Baptist and his disciples happened before the later accounts of Jesus calling the brothers on the shores of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:2-11). We



might consider John's account as Andrew and Peter becoming acquainted with Jesus, "come and see," before the other writer's described their ultimate calling of "Come, follow me".

While John the Baptist's disciples took the initiative to meet Jesus, in verse 43, Jesus is the one who sought out Philip. The text says Jesus saw him on his way to Galilee. Philip, Andrew, and Peter were all from a town called Bethsaida, or "house of fishing." While these fishermen did not yet realize that Christ would call them to "fish for people" (Luke 5:10), their actions demonstrated they were already on mission with Jesus. Just as Andrew immediately invited Peter, Philip found Nathanael and said, "*We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth.*" (v. 45).

Notice Philip's early apologetic (defense of the faith). Philip first identified himself with the other disciples, "*we have found the one.*" While his faith was brand new, he positioned himself in agreement with others who believed Jesus was the Messiah. Second, Philip acknowledged that both the law (Moses) and the prophets said God would send a Savior. Third, he identified Jesus in the family line of Joseph, which Matthew 1 makes clear was the line of David. Philip's testimony, though brief, gave evidence to his conviction that Jesus was the long-awaited Savior.

Nathanael's response, though brief, pointed out what he believed to be a flaw in Philip's logic surrounding Jesus's hometown of Nazareth. "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" *Nathanael asked him.*" Nazareth was a poor, rural town in the region of Galilee about fifty-five miles north of Jerusalem. People in the area looked down on Nazareth as being culturally and economically inferior. His condescending remark, and Philip's reference to Old Testament prophesy, could be evidence that Nathanael was a well-educated Jewish man, and had formed his own opinions about the lineage through which he believed God would send the Messiah.

Philip responded with a simple challenge, "Come and see" (v. 46b). Notice Philip did not get caught up in a philosophical or theological debate. He did not make an argument about how the Old Testament said the Savior would come from humble circumstances (Isaiah 53:2-3). He did not try to explain how the Messiah could come from a rural community. He simply invited Nathanael to find out for himself. Philip is a good example for us.

Evangelism doesn't begin in some future moment when we have completely sanctified lives and perfect doctrine. It begins when we identify with Christ, share what we know, and invite others to experience Jesus for themselves. As we spend time with Christ, our natural desire should be to make Him known. We are not responsible for the results. Our job is to share the seed of the gospel and entrust the growth to God.



DISCUSS

- *When was a time you were happy to have a “plus one” opportunity for an event?*
- *How can the way we live and talk about our faith either draw people to Christ or push them away from Him?*
- *Have you ever been afraid to share your faith because you don’t think you know enough? How can Andrew’s invitation to his brother Peter or Philip’s invitation to Nathanael encourage you?*

3. Called and Equipped Uniquely

John 1:47-51: *Then Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said about him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”*

“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you,” Jesus answered.

“Rabbi,” Nathanael replied, “You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!”

Jesus responded to him, “Do you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” Then he said, “Truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Unpacking John 1:47-51

Have you ever received an invitation with a confusing dress code? What do “resort chic,” “dressy beach” or “Gatsby-themed” even mean, and can you attend without the right attire? A confusing or unclear invitation can make even the most confident party-guest feel a little self-conscious. While dressing for the occasion can be a fun way to celebrate, a little clarity (and maybe an example) from the host or hostess can go a long way in making everyone feel comfortable and included.

When we come to a text like John 1:47-51, it can feel a little like trying to interpret a confusing dress code. What did Jesus mean? Why did Nathanael have no deceit? And what does a fig tree have to do with anything? Just like you might call up a party host and ask for some clarification on the culturally appropriate way to dress for an occasion, understanding the culture of the New Testament can help us understand these tricky verses.

First, Nathanael positively responded to Philip’s invitation to come and see for himself. The text says the man was “*coming toward*” Jesus. Something about Philip’s sincere invitation sparked Nathanael’s curiosity, and he was willing to move toward Him. Like the parable of the farmer scattering seed in Mark 4, we are not responsible for the fruit of our sowing. We are simply



called to spread the seed of the good news and allow the Holy Spirit to do the rest. Philip invited; Nathanael moved toward.

In verses 47-51, Jesus revealed Himself to Nathanael. First, Jesus greeted Nathanael with a claim about his sincere faith: *“Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit”* (v. 47). Deception is not revealed in someone’s countenance but is visible through their thoughts and actions. Jesus was saying he could perceive Nathanael was an honorable Jewish man even before he spoke.

When Nathanael asked Jesus how He knew him, Jesus responded with a seemingly strange revelation—*“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you”* (v. 48). Not only was Jesus able to discern Nathanael’s motives, but he also knew the man’s previous whereabouts. Further, in Old Testament times, rabbis often read the Torah under the shade of the fig trees, and throughout Scripture God used the fig tree as a referenced to his provision and blessing, and fruitlessness as a symbol of spiritual stagnation. It is possible Nathanael was reading God’s Word under the fig tree, intent on studying and obeying God’s law. Regardless, Jesus acknowledged the sincerity of his faith, and then Jesus revealed He is the One Nathanael was searching for.

In response, Nathanael replies, *“Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!”* (v. 49). There was something about Jesus knowing not only Nathanael’s whereabouts but also his spiritual seeking that convinced Him that Jesus is the Christ.

Jesus received Nathanael and pointed him toward greater miracles that he would see as one of His disciples: *“Do you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” Then he said, “Truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man”* (vv. 50-51).

Jacob was the second son of Isaac and could certainly be described as someone in whom much deceit was found. He tricked his brother into giving up his birthright and deceived his father to steal his brother’s blessing. In Genesis 28, Jacob had a dream. In it, *“A stairway was set on the ground with its top reaching the sky, and God’s angels were going up and down on it”* (Genesis 28:12). Jacob had openly lived in deception. However, God still blessed Jacob and fulfilled His promises, based not on of Jacob’s worthiness, but on God’s grace.

Jesus used this imagery to speak to Nathanael. Unlike Jacob, he had no deceit in him. And he, too, would receive God’s blessing. He would see *“heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”* Nathanael was invited into relationship with Jesus based not on his own righteousness but based on God’s grace. And the stairway to heaven is Christ himself, connecting sinful man with a holy God. Through Christ’s sacrifice, all are invited in—from those who wrongly believe they are righteous to those who know they have blatantly disobeyed God. The ladder to heaven is Christ Himself, and all are invited to enter through Him.



Jesus saw Nathanael for who he really was. Like Andrew, Peter, and Phillip, Nathanael came to Jesus with questions and doubts. Nathanael became a follower of Jesus and is best known through the other Gospels as the disciple Bartholomew. He saw the risen Lord (John 21:2) and was present at Christ's ascension (Acts 1:1-11). Tradition says he went on to evangelize in Persia and India and died a martyr's death.

Jesus calls people from all walks of life to follow him. Our unique personalities, backgrounds, ethnicities, and histories are all tools God can use to reach others. We do not have to be theological experts to share Christ. Like the earliest disciples, we can share within our sphere of influence to invite others to simply come and see Jesus.

DISCUSS

- *How do you handle questions you have about Jesus and who He is? How can we wrestle with these with God's help?*
- *Why do you think Jesus described Nathanael as having "no deceit"? Do you think God desires us to set aside intelligent and academic debate to come to faith? Why or why not?*
- *Why are different personalities within the church a good thing? How have you seen God use someone's unique interests, traits, or personality to reach others for Jesus?*

DEEPER FOCUS

We know more about the depth of Peter's ministry than we do about Andrew's ministry throughout the Gospels. However, if not for Andrew's invitation under God's providence, Peter would not have a noteworthy preaching ministry. Not everyone is meant to be a Peter, and not all are to be Andrew. God uses all kinds of people and personalities to make His Name known.

Think about the specific ways God has wired you to help others experience Jesus. Jot those traits down and reflect on how God delights in using the unique parts of you to bring Him glory. Ask Him how He might use you to draw someone's attention toward Him this week.

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *Do you remember the first time someone invited you to "come and see" who Jesus is? What was that experience like for you?*



RESPOND TO THE TEXT

Think of a time you invited someone to church, or to hear more about Jesus and they said “yes,” How did that encounter impact your faith? Theirs?

How could you take a step toward inviting someone to “come and see” who Jesus is? If God brings a particular person to mind, commit to praying for an opportunity to share.

APPLY

How could you “*come and see*” Jesus in a fresh way this week? What spiritual discipline or prayer practice might help encounter Christ throughout your week?

REFERENCES

Why did John the Baptist call Jesus ‘the Lamb of God?’ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/why-did-john-the-baptist-call-jesus-the-lamb-of-god.html>