

Will You Be Jesus' Disciple? — John 1:35–51

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

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

"Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."

"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."

Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:35-51)

It all started so small. This unusual character named John the Baptist was out preaching in the wilderness,

pointing the way to Jesus. As he did so, two of his disciples decided to leave John and to follow Jesus, the man from Galilee. And then one of them recruited his brother. And then a fifth man from Bethsaida joined the little band, followed by another guy named Nathanael from Cana.

The number increased until there were a dozen followers (called disciples) in the band that confessed allegiance to Jesus Christ. But if you counted the other people — friends, women, those who were healed, those who were fed — the number grew into the thousands. In fact, it seemed at times like a huge movement was in the making, until the crucifixion. And then, in the aftermath of Calvary, the number of followers dwindled down to 120. Only 120 were willing to confess Jesus Christ in those dark days after the crucifixion and before the resurrection.

Even after the resurrection the number didn't jump significantly until that wind of the Holy Spirit came sweeping in on the day of Pentecost and then the number swelled to 3,000 more in one day. Before long there were tens of thousands. The numbers mushroomed until the Roman Empire officially moved to eliminate the Christian faith and its followers.

But the way of the cross was triumphant over the way of the Caesars until eventually one of the Caesars himself in the fourth century A.D. embraced the way of the man

of Galilee and declared the entire empire to be Christian. And then it spread beyond the Mediterranean basin to the rest of Europe, Asia and Africa — eventually across the oceans to North and South America, Australia and the islands of the sea.

That which started so small has grown to embrace hundreds of millions of people on every continent, in every nation, in every era who are followers of Jesus Christ. The way it happened is the way it began back there in John 1. It all happened through New Testament evangelism which works the same way now as it did then.

That's what Jesus was teaching his disciples and that's what he is teaching us now in John 1 — the great principles of evangelism. There are four great principles. They are powerful and well worth learning.

The first principle is that evangelism begins with those who put Jesus first. It's taught in verses 35-37. The model is John the Baptist, a man deeply committed to the Savior. We cannot help but be impressed with John. He was always looking for Jesus and al-

...evangelism begins with those who put Jesus first.

ways speaking about Jesus. He didn't just talk about Jesus in public and about other things when he was with his friends. His message and life in private were the same as in public. While standing with two of his disciples, his gaze was fixed on Jesus and he couldn't help saying again, "Behold the Lamb of God." It's as if he is expressing in those few words the feelings of his heart and he is saying, "Look, can you see him? Can you believe? Isn't he wonderful? Isn't he amazing? Touch him! Hear him! Know him! Look, you guys, look — the Lamb of God!!!" The evangelism that eventually rocked the world began with the commitment of the man named John the Baptist.

John the Baptist was committed to the Savior and he was content to be second. You see, he was willing to let his disciples leave him so that they could follow Jesus Christ. They must have reasoned that it was far better to follow the King than the man who announced the King. It was far better to follow the Son of God than the prophet of the Son of God. It was superior to latch on to the real thing than to just have a cousin of the real thing. So John's commitment meant that he lost two of his friends, two of his disciples, two of his followers.

You know that's not easy to do. It's not easy to give up relationships and status and prestige and power and all those things to someone else. It's hard to wear the silver medal when you're used to winning gold. It's hard to be somewhere lower in the hierarchy when you've been at the pinnacle of the hierarchy. And so we might guess that there would be at least a twinge of jealousy in the emotions of John the Baptist. But apparently there was no jealousy, no bitterness, no resentment, no hostility, no feeling of betrayal.

John knew what he was doing. He knew that his disciples would leave him for Jesus — that was exactly what he wanted! His goal was not to make disciples for himself, but for Jesus. He wasn't building a kingdom; he was simply pointing the way to Jesus Christ. That's the way evangelism begins, with those who put Jesus first.

And we should be the same way — not looking for disciples of our own but pointing the way to Jesus Christ. We want to be committed to the Savior and, like John the Baptist, content to be second. We want the message that we speak and sing and pray on Sunday to be the same one that we live in the shop and in the home the rest of the week. Yes, you and I want to be counted with John the Baptist as being among those who put Jesus first.

The second principle of evangelism is that most people come to Christ through natural chains of relationship. Four different types of relationships are talked about in John 1:35-51. The first type of relationship mentioned (in John 1:35-37) is that of teacher. John

the Baptist was a teacher who had a great impact upon his disciples. The two disciples mentioned here are Andrew and probably John the Evangelist, the man who wrote this book. These two disciples were impressed with their teacher, John the Baptist, and thus were impressed with what impressed him. They followed Jesus because of the influence that their teacher, John the Baptist, had over them. Teachers definitely have influence over their students. A teacher is watched and scrutinized in the classroom, on the playing field, in the cafeteria and throughout the week. Teachers have influence and that influence ought to be used significantly to point the way to Jesus Christ.

The second type of relationship that brings people to Jesus is relatives and that is mentioned in verses 40-42. Relatives are significant in bringing people to the Savior. Donald Gray Barnhouse, who was a Presbyterian pastor in Philadelphia, pointed out that relatively few people in distant lands come to know Christ as a result of missionaries, but that most come to know Jesus through their relatives. Take Andrew, for example. He went to his brother Simon and told him what little bit he knew. He said, "We found the Messiah." And in response to that little bit which his brother Andrew knew, Simon believed.

Now let's pause for just a second here to talk about Andrew. We don't know much about him compared to other disciples of Jesus. Other than his name, he is only mentioned three times. The first mention is here when he is introducing his brother Simon to Jesus. The second time is in John 6 when Andrew brings a little boy who has five loaves and two fish to Jesus and Jesus multiplies the boy's lunch to feed a multitude. The third time is in John chapter 12 when Andrew introduces to Jesus a group of Greeks who were inquiring after the Savior. Isn't it interesting that we're only told about the man three times other than his name and in each of those three occasions he's introducing someone to Jesus Christ? What a great example he was!

Andrew brought his brother Simon to the Savior. It's a reminder to us that the most fertile field for evangelism is among our own relatives! When Jesus Christ changes our lives, the people who really see the difference are the people in our own families — and these are the people for whom we are most responsible. The people that we can best influence for Christ are our children, our parents, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, cousins and aunts and uncles.

Another link in the chain for bringing people to Jesus Christ is our relationship with neighbors. Look at verses 43 and 44 where the next addition to Jesus' disciples is Philip. He heard Jesus' call and decided to join the band. Apparently, he was influenced by the fact that he knew Andrew and Peter and they were from his hometown of Bethsaida.

People are frequently influenced by their neighbors — neighbors whom they know and respect. The people in your neighborhood will be far more influenced by an invitation to come to church from you than they will by one thousand newspaper ads. Study after study has proven that again and again. The people in your neighborhood are more likely to come to Christ by an invitation into your home for an informal weekly Bible study than by a whole year of religious television programs. Neighbors were influential in first century Bethsaida and they still are today.

Then the fourth type of relationship that influences people to come to Jesus is that of friendship. John 1:45-51 tells us that Philip and Nathanael were friends even though they were from different towns. Philip used his friendship to do what friends are supposed to do and that is to share good news with one another.

Nathanael is an interesting guy. At first he was cynical. Philip came up to him and said, “I found the Messiah, Jesus from Nazareth.” Friends can be blunt with one another and so Nathanael said, “Jesus from Nazareth? Can anything good come out of that dump, Nazareth? You’ve got to be kidding, Philip.” You see, Nazareth wasn’t a very impressive place. It was a caravan town, a place with a lot of commerce, a lot of problems and a bad reputation. By contrast, Nathanael was from Cana — just down the road from Nazareth. You know how communities, particularly rural communities, have a built-in rivalry with one another? Combine that with Nazareth’s bad reputation, and Nathanael’s comment is logical. It was unthinkable for the Messiah to come out of Nazareth!

But Nathanael came to Jesus anyway. In spite of his skepticism he was influenced by his friendship with Philip. His friendship with Philip was enough to balance out the cynicism that he had toward Nazareth. We want to share Jesus with our friends as well, using our friendship to influence them away from the cynicism that they might have towards Christ, the church and the way of the cross. That’s another important link in the chain of evangelism — pointing our friends to Jesus.

I have a file folder in my office that contains the findings of an interesting survey on how people come to know the Savior. It shows that less than one tenth of one percent come as a result of evangelistic crusades and evangelistic meetings. Less than ten percent come to Christ as a result of the ministry of pastors and other full-time Christian workers, missionaries, and other evangelists and people like that. But, seventy percent come to Christ through the kinds of relationships mentioned in John 1:35-51 — teachers, relatives, neighbors

and friends. These statistics unquestionably show that the most effective means of evangelism is through personal relationships.

I often enjoy watching this in the life of our church. I’ll be introduced to someone who comes to know Jesus Christ as Savior and then a few weeks later I’ll hear that a husband or a wife came to Christ. And then a couple of weeks after that, someone will stop me in the hallway to say that their children came to know the Lord, or a friend or a business associate, and so the links of the chain begin to form.

Between our services one morning, a lady shared her story with me that illustrates the teaching of John 1. She said, “I have been coming to Wooddale for a few weeks. Some of my children have a lot of religious questions that I couldn’t answer and so that is why I started coming to church.” Then she said, “You know, something great happened. I came looking for a church and I found Jesus Christ!” I asked her, “Tell me, how did you happen to come to Wooddale?” And she said, “I was invited by my friend, Linda.”

You see, the way it started in John 1 in the first century is the way it still works today. The application of this great principle is obvious and powerful. You and I are the persons who can and should introduce our students, our relatives, our neighbors and our friends to Jesus. We are privileged to follow the example of John and of Andrew and of Philip and of Nathanael.

The third great principle of evangelism is found in verses 39-42 and that is that being with Jesus makes us want to introduce others to him. The gist of these verses is that Andrew and John had just met Jesus and they followed him home and they spent the night visiting with him. We’re told that the conversation began “about the tenth hour.” In the first century the Jewish way of reckoning time was to start

Jesus saw Peter for what he would become instead of what he was.

counting with sunrise, so the tenth hour was approximately four in the afternoon. They spent from four in the afternoon until early the next morning with Jesus. Verse 41 says, “The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon.” What happened was that Andrew spent from four in the afternoon until, let’s say, eight in the morning – a period of 12-16 hours, some of which probably was spent sleeping. But in that time he saw enough of Jesus Christ that he was motivated to go after his brother and bring him to the Savior.

We don’t have to spend too long with Jesus to be so motivated. The point is that the more time we spend with Jesus Christ the more we want others to know him too. Sometimes the difficulty in our lack of motivation is rooted in the fact that we really have not spent

time with the Savior because spending time with him makes us want to introduce others to him as well.

The fourth and last principle of evangelism is woven into principle number two in verses 39-51. It's the principle that the best argument for influencing non-Christians is, "Come and see." Few people have come to the Savior through philosophic argument. The best logic is simply exposure to Jesus Christ.

The essence of the "come and see" in verse 39 is the invitation to come and see Jesus up close. When John and Andrew, disciples of John the Baptist, started shyly following Jesus from a distance, Jesus turned around and spoke his first recorded words in the entire gospel and he asked, "What do you seek?"

That's a good evangelistic opening. "What are you looking for in life?" It's a good way to open up the conversation. They responded with a question. "Where are you staying?" They were indicating that they wanted to spend some time with Jesus. Jesus replied, "Come and see. Come and look at my life. Come and see the way I live. Come and listen to me. Come and watch my life." You see, when we come and see Jesus Christ up close then we want to follow Him as Savior.

In verse 42 you are invited to come and see how Jesus sees you. In John 1:41-42 we meet one of the Bible's most interesting characters, Simon Peter. This is a guy who is intelligent, impetuous, troublesome and volatile. His brother Andrew says to him, "We've found the Messiah," and brings him to Jesus. Jesus takes a long, perceptive look at Simon, a tough Galilean fisherman, and says, "So you are Simon the Son of John? Well, from now on you will be called Cephas" (the Aramaic word for rock or "Peter" which is the Greek word for rock).

"Simon" came from the Old Testament character Simeon who was cursed by his own father for being unreliable, angry, fierce and cruel (Gen. 49:5, 7). It was not a good name to have. Jesus was saying that Simon wouldn't be his name anymore. His new name was "Rock" and Jesus foresaw that this man called "Rock" would be a great apostle upon whom Christ's church would be built. Jesus saw Peter for what he would become instead of what he was.

It's said that one day when Michelangelo was chipping away at a huge rock someone came up and said, "What are you doing?" The master artist replied, "I am releasing the angel imprisoned in the marble." You see, the master could see that which was to come, even though it wasn't apparent in the present form. And so it is with Jesus, he sees in us that which he will accomplish, not just the way we are now. Come and see how Jesus sees you.

Then in verse 45 we are encouraged to come and see what the Bible says about Jesus. When Philip went to Nathanael he said that he had found the one of whom

Moses and the prophets spoke and wrote. That's always a powerful way to witness, saying that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies that were given centuries before. So today we can say, "Come and see what the Bible says." As early as Genesis 3:15 there is a prediction of Jesus Christ. Throughout the scriptures, from the description of how he would die in Isaiah 53 to the foretelling of his birth by the prophet Micah, it's all there — come and see.

In verses 46-49 the message is to come and see how Jesus knows you. It's the moment when Jesus and Nathanael met and Nathanael discovered that Jesus had him all figured out. Jesus knew that Nathanael was different than the others in that band of disciples. There was no cunning, no manipulation, no deceit and no guile in him. He was a man who lived up to the highest standards of what an Israelite ought to be. Jesus said, "I know you. I saw you under the fig tree."

As the all-knowing Son of God, Jesus was able to know Nathanael's thoughts and dreams from a distance! Nathanael was impressed that this man could know so much about him when they had just met. In the same way, we cannot help but be impressed when we come to the Savior and discover that he knows us better than anyone knows us, better than we ever could know ourselves.

Jesus said to Nathanael "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." And that's what Jesus does for all who come to him, he not only knows their thoughts and dreams, he goes beyond them.

Twenty centuries later it's not so different. We live in a world of people with pretty much the same names that these men had back in John 1 — names like John and Andy and Phil and Pete and Nat — the same names, the same kinds of people that still need to be introduced to Jesus Christ. And you and I have the privilege of introducing them.

What do you say? Let's do it! Let's take the same principles of evangelism and apply them. Let's put Jesus first and let evangelism begin with us; let's take advantage of the God-given chains of relationship we already have as teachers, relatives, neighbors and friends; and let's spend more time with Jesus so that we will have more desire to introduce others to him.

Let's tell others to "Come and see Jesus Christ."

Faith Matters is the Broadcast Ministry of
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church
6630 Shady Oak Road
Eden Prairie MN 55344
952-944-6300
www.wooddale.org
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