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Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

*"Give Me Five": Lessons in Beginning Discipleship*

John 1:19–51

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series: Come and See

Have you ever thought about the ominous and even sacred nature of first meetings? So often we focus on "the last time" we saw someone, but it seems to me the first time can be every bit as momentous. I recall walking into a meeting as an 18-year-old college student and randomly sitting down next to a young lady I'd never seen before. I introduced myself. Little did I know I'd spend the rest of my life with her! You see, the thing about a first meeting is you never know. You never know what will become of your relationship with that person. Of course, your first meeting could be your last meeting, but it could be much more. You could have just met your future spouse. You could have just met a person who will become your best friend. You could have just met someone who will forever change your life, but you don't know.

We're continuing our study today in John's gospel. Last week we looked at the Prologue to this gospel where John introduced Jesus from the perspective of eternity. He's the eternal Word who was with God and was God but who also came into the world as a human being. Today we pick up the story in v. 19. Starting there and into the rest of the chapter John moves from eternity to time; from the glory of the eternal Word to ordinary people in the midst of everyday life. This is very much a story about first meetings. John gives us a portrait of five men and how they met Jesus for the first time and what they learned about him. I'm sure they didn't know what they were getting into when they met him, but they'd never be the same. Each of them would become a follower/disciple. Even in these first meetings, we see something of what that means.

### **John the Baptist**

The first portrait is of John the Baptist. What impresses me about him is he knew who Jesus was and he knew his role in relation to Jesus. The story starts with a bunch of priests and Levites who come and ask John who he was. There was a lot of expectation about the coming Messiah, but in verse 20 John says, *"I am not the Messiah."* Then they ask, *"Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"* The Jewish people expected Elijah to return and in many ways John reminded people of Elijah, but he says, *"I am not."* Then they ask, *"Are you the Prophet?"* They also expected a great prophet to come in line with a prediction Moses made in Deuteronomy (18:15, 18). He answered, *"No."*

Verse 22 goes on, *"Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us."* John says, *"I am the voice of one calling in*

*the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'*" It's like that TV show *The Voice*. He reaches back 700 years to the prophesy of Isaiah and says, *"I'm nothing but a voice, trying to prepare the pathway to the Messiah."* Then he says something shocking in verse 26, "He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." In those days, that's what a slave did for his master. John says he was wasn't even worthy to do that for Jesus!

John's outstanding quality is humility. Humility isn't saying or thinking you're nothing. Humility is knowing and accepting your role. John's spiritual credentials were impressive. He was the son of a priest who took a Nazarite vow. From the time of his birth he never cut his hair or drank alcohol. He ate grasshoppers. He lived a solitary life of total commitment to God. Jesus even said he was the greatest of all men. Yet John never forgot he was just a voice, pointing people to Jesus.

Verse 29 continues, *"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"* Not only is John humble, he shows extraordinary insight about why Jesus came. John's preaching was convicting. He called a spade a spade. He pointed his long boney finger at people and called out their sin. But here he recognizes Jesus as the cure for that sin. He's the Lamb of God who will take away that sin. Every Jewish person who heard that would have thought of the lamb provided by God for Abraham to sacrifice instead of his son (Gen. 22). Then they would have thought of Isaiah's prophecy that the Servant of the Lord would be like a lamb led to slaughter for the sins of God's people (Is. 53). Finally, they would have thought of the Passover lamb of the Exodus story that allowed the angel of death to pass over the Israelite's houses. John the Baptist sees that this lamb will wipe away the sin of not only Israel but the whole world!

But that's not all he'll do. In verse 32 John remembers back to his first meeting with Jesus. He was baptizing in the Jordan River when Jesus came to be baptized. He says, *"I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven as a dove and remain on him."* God had told him, *"The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit."* Not only does Jesus have the Spirit, the Spirit remains on him. Not only that, he'll also give the Spirit to others. Then he adds, *"I have seen and testify that this is God's Chosen One."*

Throughout this section John referred to Jesus in several ways. He's the Messiah (v. 20), the Lamb of God (v. 29), the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (v. 33) and the Chosen One of God (v. 34). John knew who Jesus was and he knew his role in relation to Jesus. Because of that, the next day when he saw Jesus, he said to two of his disciples, "**Look, the Lamb of God!**" And they left and followed Jesus.

John wasn't really a disciple in the same way these other guys were. He never really "followed" Jesus. Yet John sets the stage for others—even us—to follow Jesus. He shows us it's not about us; it's about him. We have a role to play, but all eyes are on him. Being a disciple means knowing who he is and who we are in relation to him. We must understand **who** we're following. We're not just thoughtlessly following around a cool guy named Jesus. We're following the long-awaited Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the One who bestows the Spirit upon us, the Chosen One of God. Our job isn't to point people to ourselves, but like John, to point people to him.

### **Andrew**

This leads to the second portrait of Andrew. He was one of the two guys who had been following John but started to follow Jesus. Most scholars agree that the other fellow was the writer of this gospel, the apostle John.

**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 they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. 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) (John 1:37–41).**

Andrew is the first follower of Jesus to be identified by name. He's one of those guys who goes kind of unnoticed in the gospels. The reason for that is right here in the text: he was Simon Peter's brother! I'm sure that's how most people identified him, not as Andrew the disciple of Jesus, but as the brother of Simon Peter. We've been hearing a lot this week about two brothers. Sometimes one lives in the shadow of another. I grew up with a brother who was always big for his age; I was small. He was an All-American who went to USC on a football scholarship; I was a walk-on at Cal Poly. Maybe you can relate. It should bring you some comfort to know you're not alone. You can be assured God doesn't value one life more than another. As Andrew's story unfolds, you can see how much Jesus values the Andrews of this world.

I love how Jesus asks Andrew and his friend, "**What do you want?**" On the surface, it seems to be a simple question, but it has deeper implications. What do you want? Eventually, when we start to follow Jesus he'll ask each of us this question, "What do you want?" In other words, why are you following him? What do you really want from him? What are your motives in following him?

They respond by calling him "Rabbi" ("Teacher"). We can add another title to his resumé. Back then it was customary for a Rabbi to be surrounded by men who wanted to attach themselves to him and learn from him. In calling him Rabbi they're saying, "We want to learn from you. We want to hang out with you." So they ask where he's staying and he says, "**Come and you will see.**" This is more than just an invitation to find out where he's staying; it's an invitation to come and learn from him.

Do you know what's great about this? They don't have to have it all figured out before they become his disciples. Jesus begins where they're at and he encourages them to take small, ordinary steps in the right direction. It's like when a birth takes place there's a process and you can't rush it too much without doing damage. Some of you are just starting out in your discipleship. You don't have to have it all figured out. You don't have to know everything. Just take one step at a time and he'll show you more as you go along.

Apparently, Andrew did learn more, because after spending time with Jesus he finds his brother and says, "**We have found the Messiah.**" Another word for Messiah is "the Christ" (Anointed One). Andrew had made this discovery and the first thing he wanted to do was tell his brother.

Right here at the very beginning of it all we see the secret of the miraculous growth of Christianity thorough the centuries. Remember how Jesus told the parable of the mustard seed? What is the kingdom of God like? It's like a tiny mustard seed that grows and grows until it becomes so large that all the birds come and nest in its branches. Well, how does it grow so big? I'd expect something extraordinary, something with a big splash. No. It happens through ordinary relationships with friends and family. It happens when someone like Andrew shares with his brother a personal discovery: "We have found..."

Edward Gibbon is arguably the most important historian who ever lived. He wrote *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In it he said something profound about why Christianity spread like wildfire throughout the Roman Empire. He said, "It became the most sacred duty of a new convert to diffuse among his friends and relatives the inestimable blessings he had received." So simple! So true! Did you know that most people don't become followers of Christ through gospel preaching but through the personal witness of friends and family. So often, it's those newly infected converts (like Andrew) who are the best witnesses. Why is that? Let's face it, they're usually more excited about it all than

those who've been around awhile. There's nothing more annoying than a new convert! They don't care what people think. Then after a while we become more tactful and cautious. Not only that, they haven't been Christians long enough to cut off ties with non-Christian friends. That's what happens, right? You become a Christian. You change a few bad habits. You start going to church; make new friends. Before long, all your friends are believers and there's no one left you really know to share your faith with. That's a tragedy. We have to find ways to continue to connect in meaningful relationships with lost people. Andrew reminds us that fundamental to being a disciple is sharing with friends and family what you've discovered about Jesus.

## Peter

The third portrait is rather brief. We're talking about Simon Peter. What's rather surprising in this first meeting between Jesus and Peter is that Peter says nothing. As the story unfolds, Peter will become known for always having to take his foot out of his mouth. But in this first meeting, he says nothing. Look at verse 42.

**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).**

His given name at birth was "Simon son of John." Jesus gives him a new name which is Cephas or Peter, both of which mean "rock."

I wonder if he saw in Peter something Peter didn't really even know existed. He knew Peter better than Peter knew himself. Peter is rock-like. Peter will become a leader that others can depend on and build on. And if Peter didn't feel adequate for that, he could be assured that Jesus would make him that. Actually, Peter would have to be broken of his own self-dependance before he would really discover his rock-like strength.

Have you ever thought about the fact that he knows you? He knows you better than you know yourself. Not only does he know you, but he knows what you can become. He sees in you potential that you may not even know you have. He's able to make you into something more reliable and useful to him than you ever imagined. We're all sinners. We're broken, fallen people. But never lose sight of the possibilities of grace. He has a vision for your life. He wants to make you useful in ways you may have never dreamed. That vision he gives you of your future will help you realize your potential. Emerson once wrote:

Could'st thou in vision see  
Thyself the man God meant,  
Thou never could'st be  
the man thou art, content.

In other words, if you could see the vision God has for your life, you'd never again be content with the person you are now. Being a disciple means we're on a journey with One who knows us better than we know ourselves; One who has a vision for us that's greater and more meaningful than anything we could

have dreamed, and One who is able to make us into that person by his own power and grace.

## Philip

The fourth portrait is of Philip. Philip is another one of those less prominent disciples. He hardly shows up in the other gospels. What we know about him we mostly learn from John. He's usually linked with Andrew, as we see here. Verse 43 literally reads like this, "*The next day he purposed to go into Galilee, and he found Philip.*" The person who went to Galilee and found Philip might have been Jesus but it's more likely Andrew. Andrew found Philip and brought him to Jesus, and Jesus then said to him "Follow me."

One of the things it shows us is Jesus deals with each of us as unique individuals. Each of these disciples is different and Jesus deals with them according to their unique personalities. There's no cookie cutter mentality here. It's all very personal. He didn't give Andrew a new name, but he gave one to Peter. And Philip is the only guy of these five who Jesus calls to follow him. Later, he'd say that to the others but only after they knew him for a while. Perhaps that's because he knew Philip was a bit reticent and pensive. Whenever he shows up in the gospels he seems to be a guy who asked hard questions and liked to think things through before he made a commitment. So perhaps he needed a very clear-cut call to follow Jesus. But this is the essence of what being a disciple means—following Jesus. Philip did just that. Again, he didn't have it all figured out but he followed. As he did, he made his own discovery. Look at verses 44–45.

**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."**

As he followed Jesus, Philip discovered Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, was the One he'd been reading about in his Old Testament. He shares what he's learned with a friend named Nathanael.

## Nathanael

Nathanael makes up our fifth portrait. He's another one of those lesser known disciples. Philip tells him about Jesus of Nazareth and look what he says in verse 46:

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

**"Come and see," said Philip.**

Nathanael comes across as rather negative and skeptical. He has a hard time believing anything good can come from Nazareth. Nathanael's hometown was Cana, which was just four miles from Nazareth. It seems there was a little rivalry between these two towns. I grew up in Los Altos and even though Mt. View was just across the El Camino we'd never think anything good could come from there! It's the same thing here. Yet Philip invites him

to “Come and See” just as Jesus had said earlier. The great thing about Nathanael is he did. He could have let his doubts and prejudice and skepticism keep him from doing that but he didn't. He was in for quite a surprise. Look at verses 47–51.

**When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”**

**“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 will see greater things than that.” He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.”**

Jesus pays Nathanael quite a compliment. He's truly an Israelite without any guile or deceit. He's a guy who you can take at face value. There's no duplicity. What you see is what you get. Even though people like that may offend us and be hard to get along with, at least we know what we're dealing with. That's a good thing and Jesus sees that in Nathanael. When Nathanael asks *“How do you know me?”* Jesus responds by saying, “I know you better than you think. I saw you under the fig tree even before Philip came along.” That's all the proof Nathanael needs. He declares, *“Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel.”* Here is a skeptic who meets Jesus and finds Jesus knows him better than he ever could have imagined. That's all the proof Nathanael needed. And he comes to even deeper insight than the rest: *“You are the Son of God.”*

I hope we have a few skeptics here today. I hope we have a few Nathanaels. Like Nathanael you've made a big step in just coming. My hope is that in coming you'll discover the One who knows you and knows where you've been and wants to be in relationship with you. No one around here will shove that down your throat. This is between you and him. You have to make your own discovery.

And Jesus promises even more. He says you'll see heaven open and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Throughout this meeting, Jesus was thinking about the Old Testament story of Jacob. His name means “schemer.” Jacob was a deceitful schemer. But after finally surrendering to God he was given a new name, “Israel.” So when Jesus says Nathanael is *“truly an Israelite with no deceit,”* he thinks back to Jacob. Jacob

also had a vision where he saw the angels of God ascending and descending on a ladder. He called it Bethel (the house of God). Jesus says, “Nathanael, you'll see the same thing Jacob did. But guess what? I'm that ladder. I'm the place where heaven opens up. I'm the house of God where heaven and earth meet.”

Do you want to experience heaven here on earth? Do you want to have your life be about more than just what you can see and do down here? Do you want to hear the rustle of angel's wings? Follow Him. He's the intersection between heaven and earth.

Wow! Talk about meeting someone for the very first time and that meeting becoming something life-changing down the road! I told you in these meetings we learn something of what it means to be a disciple. Well, what have we learned? Three things:

First, being a disciple means we understand who Jesus is. Look at all the terms used to identify Jesus in this story. It's like more and more about Jesus is revealed as the story unfolds. You can't separate your discipleship from real knowledge of who Jesus is. This is a challenge to not just love Jesus but to know Jesus. Do you know him this way? Our faith involves personal commitment but it also involves content. There's content and substance to our faith. A pastor once asked a committed believer in his church why Jesus was called the Lamb of God and the guy answered, “Because Jesus is gentle and nice.” That won't do it. It's not like we have to have it all figured out, but we need to grow in our knowledge of him.

Second, being a disciple means we follow him personally. Each of these five men was different. Jesus didn't treat them like clones. But each of them had to make the personal decision to follow him. Learning about him took place in the context of following him. You don't have to know everything to follow him. It's like a treasure hunt with clues along the way that show you more and more. Take what he's given you; take what you do know and act on that, and he'll show you more.

Finally, being a disciple means we share him with our friends. Think about what happened in this story. It started with John the Baptist. He pointed Andrew to Jesus. He spent time with Jesus and then Andrew told Peter and Philip about him. They spent time with Jesus and then Philip told Nathanael. It's like one lighted torch lights another. That's how it always works. How many of you are here because someone invited you? How many of you are a Christ-follower today because a family member or friend shared with you their own discovery? It would seem to me that's most of us. The question is, are **you** passing it on?

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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