

3. The First Disciples of Jesus

John 1:35-51

The Gospel According to John

While the Lord Jesus walked this earth all that He did was with a view to training by modeling those whom He called to Himself. The ministry He started began small, but like leaven or yeast added to bread, it would slowly grow by touching one life after another (Matthew 13:33) and, thereby, to reach the whole world. That is why, right at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus started a small group composed of thirteen individuals. He would bring the twelve into relationship with Himself and change their character by disciplining them through on-the-job training. Then, over His three years with them, He would also model how to do the same with others to multiply. □

When we consider the kinds of people with whom Christ chose to associate, to train, and to multiply, we see that He didn't find them in the upper schools of learning. He deliberately chose individuals just like us, i.e., ordinary, everyday people. The twelve were not superstars. This choice of men was to show us today that no one is disqualified from serving God and from being used by Him.

Those who have been walking with the Lord for some time often hear of beautiful stories of how people have encountered the Lord Jesus, and so many have wished their account of meeting Christ would have been more glorifying to the Lord. □

Often, we can look at individuals who are being used by God, and it is easy to think that, if only we were born in a different country, or if we had gone to Bible school, or we could have got a better job, then we could have been in a better position to serve God. However, when we examine the Gospels, those whom the Lord called were not all powerful stories of conversion.

Today, we look at the stories of four of the first disciples who encountered Christ. We should not think that there is a contradiction here between the other three Gospels because John the Gospel writer is writing about their first meeting with Christ; whereas, the other Gospels are talking about their call to service.

Jesus' First Disciples

³⁵The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹"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. ⁴⁰Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴²And 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).

Verses 29 and 35 of John's Gospel tells us that on two separate days John the Baptist pointed away from himself to the Lord Jesus, calling Christ, "The Lamb of God." John was coming to the end of his ministry of pointing people toward repentance and preparing hearts to receive the Messiah. He sought to send his followers away from himself to follow Christ, the true Light of the World. It was time for John's influence to decrease and Jesus' ministry and impact to increase. The servant of God will seek the good of his Master and not his own. □

Who were the two disciples mentioned in verse 35? John, the Gospel writer, tells us that one of them was Andrew (v. 40), but he omits telling us who the other one is. It is very likely that it is John, the Gospel writer himself, who accompanies Andrew. We can assume this because Jesus so impacted John's life that he even remembers that it was the tenth hour of the day (4 p.m.) when they met Christ and began to follow Him. Few people can ever forget the day and the hour they met Jesus, for such is the change in their lives.

John repeatedly neglects to use his name in the Scriptures. Five times in his Gospel, he refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20). John's humility shines forth by his refusal to speak of himself. Perhaps, he learned this from John the Baptist who had said, speaking of Christ, "**He must increase, but I must decrease**" (John 3:30). He was a man who perceived that Jesus loved him personally. Paul the Apostle also wrote of this personal love of God when he wrote of his perception of Christ's love for him: "**I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me**" (Galatians 2:20).

Question 1) How important is it to faith in God to know that God personally loves you? How can we grow in our knowledge of the intimate love of God? What do you think needs to happen for you to be secure in God's love?□

John, the Gospel writer, seems to have a depth about his walk with God, for he was confident and secure in the fact that God loved him. When a person knows that God deeply loves him, he can go through any trial.□

When we read that the two disciples followed Jesus (v. 37), it doesn't mean in a discipleship sense; they were literally following Him. They were walking along behind Jesus, hoping for some personal time with Him. They were inquisitive. They did not know Christ, for they had not yet met Him. All they knew about Him was John the Baptist's preaching and calling Him the Lamb of God.

When a man or woman is curious about Christ, it is because there is an inner awakening, i.e., there is a need or a thirst in one's soul. Jesus said: "**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day**" (John 6:44). If there is an interest or desire to know more about Christ, it is a good indication that the Father is in the act of drawing that person to Christ.

When Jesus became aware of two men following Him, He turned around and asked them what they wanted. He was aware of their hunger and tried to satisfy it. I love that about the Lord Jesus. He always has time for people. He could have carried on walking. Most busy people that are leaders need their own space and their own personal space, but Christ made time for those who were hungry for God. □

The Lord always made space in His life to disciple those who wanted to follow Him. Were you following at a distance at one time? How did Jesus invite you closer to Himself? Were you curious about the things of God? □

Following after the Lord Jesus is not enough, we must follow Him for the right reasons. We have to lose our lives to follow Him. **“And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:17).** There were some who followed Jesus for political reasons, hoping that He would lead a revolt against the Roman occupation. There were some, like Judas, that had mixed motives for following Him, as in dipping his hand into the money bag and stealing their resources (John 12:6). Jesus allowed the two following Him to voice what was going on in their hearts by asking them the question, **“What do you want?” (v. 38).**

Question 2) If Christ were to ask you that question, “What do you want?” how would you answer Him? What do you want from Him?

"Where are you staying?" was their answer. It was almost like they were asking, "Can we accompany you to where you are staying and get to know you?" What a wonderful experience it would be, i.e., to sit with Jesus and to visit Him in the place He was staying. What graciousness we see in Christ as He welcomes them back to wherever He was lodging and chooses to enjoy the company of two smelly fishermen.

The Conversion of Peter

John tells us that it was the tenth hour by Israeli reckoning at the time. The day was divided up into twelve, one-hour segments, so for us today it would have been around 4 p.m., and the sun was already setting when the three went to the place where Jesus was staying. It could have just been a campfire, for the Jordan River Valley can be quite warm in the evenings the year round. It seems that they got to talk with Jesus into the evening. What was the result of Andrew and John's spending the rest of the day with Jesus (v. 39)? The next morning, Andrew could not contain himself in his excitement, and before he could do anything else, he had to find his brother, Simon.

Every time in the Scriptures where Andrew is brought into focus, he is recorded as introducing people to Jesus. The first is here in this passage when he goes immediately to tell his brother, Simon Peter. The second is found when he brings a boy with his packed lunch to Jesus to multiply it (John 6:8-9), and the third is when some Grecian Jews wanted to meet Jesus (John 12:22). Wouldn't that be good on your exam paper when you get home? □

There are two good indications that people have had a remarkable turnaround in their lives. The first is that they are prayerful, such as Saul who became the Apostle Paul after his conversion on

the Damascus Road (Acts 9:11). The second indication is that a person will immediately begin to tell family and friends. Andrew went excitedly to his brother Simon, also known as Peter. He said to him, "We have found the Messiah." It's possible that Andrew and John had gone to John the Baptist on a mission to find the Messiah. "He who seeks will find, he who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:7).

Andrew's enthusiasm hooked Peter; he came to where Christ was. When Peter stood before the Lord, we are told: "Jesus *looked at him and said, 'You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which, when translated, is Peter)*" (v. 42). The Greek word *emlepein* is the word translated into English as "looked at." It means to gaze with a concentrated, intentional look. It is the gaze of the Son of God who can look deep into a person's heart and see everything that a person is and what he has done (John 4:39). □

Character, commitment, and faith are just some of the qualities He can see, even though they are not yet fully formed in Peter's life. When the Lord looks at Peter, He can see the inner qualities of a strong leader, but He can also see the wavering and undependable side of his heart, too. Seeing all this, He still chooses him. Christ sees what we are on the inside.

When Samuel the prophet was sent by God to anoint a new king for Israel, the Lord told him to go to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem. Jesse paraded his sons before Samuel, and when he saw the eldest, Eliab, Samuel was immediately taken with the size of this young man and thought that Eliab was to be the one to anoint on account of his size and strength. God saw things differently: □

⁶When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD." ⁷But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:6-7).

When the Lord looks at men, he not only sees what a man is but also what he will become. God alone can shape our lives as a potter does the clay, i.e., to bring about what He has purposed for each of us to be and do. It's as if the giving of the name will remind Peter of the person that he is to become: a rock, and not the undependable and impetuous Simon, who spoke without thinking.

The Gospels indicate some experiences that served to shape Peter into the man his new name would represent. It was not an easy transformation; it took time and included lessons that Peter had to learn. At the Last Supper, for instance, when an argument broke out among the disciples as to which of them was the greatest, Jesus turned to Peter (more than likely because he was the source of the argument). Jesus called him by his old name before he met Christ as if to mildly rebuke him for turning to his old ways and old lifestyle. ³¹"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. ³²But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32).

Peter's response indicated that he thought he had the personal capacity to pass any test to his devotion with flying colors. He would never deny his Master! The final test came as he followed Jesus on the night He was betrayed. He was confident that he would never forsake Christ, yet three times when Peter was under pressure, he denied he ever knew the Lord. Later at the High

Priest's residence, Peter even called down curses on himself to try to hide the fact that he was a disciple (Mark 14:71). □

It is possible that the whole experience Peter had to undergo was fashioned by the Lord to reveal where Peter was spiritually. His heart needed to be broken and refashioned on the Lord's potter's wheel. Peter needed to repent and turn from his Simon lifestyle to finally be the rock God was making him be. The changing of his name from Simon to Peter helped remind him of how God sees what is within his spirit. □

Tommy Lasorda, former manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers, tells the story of a young, skinny pitcher who was new in the Dodgers' minor league system. The youngster was somewhat timid, but he had an extraordinarily powerful and accurate arm. Lasorda was convinced that the young pitcher had the potential to be one of the greatest ever. However, Lasorda says, the young man needed to be fiercer and competitive. He needed to lose his timidity.

So, Lasorda gave him a nickname that was precisely the opposite of his personality: "Bulldog." Over the years, that is what Orel Hershiser became—one of the most tenacious competitors who ever took the mound in the major leagues. The nickname became a perpetual reminder of what he ought to be, and before long, it shaped his whole attitude.¹

Question 3) If you could change your name, would you? What would you change your name to and why?

The Lord changed the name of Simon to change his character to be that of a rock. A change of our character can affect whole generations that come behind us. As an example of a changed and fruitful life, let's take a look at the legacy of one godly man, Jonathan Edwards, the famous preacher and revivalist from the eighteenth century. See how God used this one life to affect the lives of many.

The father of Jonathan Edwards was a minister, and his mother was the daughter of a clergyman. Among their descendants were fourteen presidents of colleges; more than one hundred college professors; more than one hundred lawyers; thirty judges; sixty physicians; more than a hundred clergymen, missionaries, and theology professors, and about sixty authors.

There is scarcely any great American industry that has not had one of his family among its chief promoters. Such is the product of one American Christian Family, reared under the most favorable conditions. The contrast is presented in the Jukes family, which could not be made to study and would not work and is said to have cost the state of New York a million dollars.

Their entire record is one of pauperism and crime, insanity and imbecility. Among their twelve hundred known descendants, three hundred and ten were professional paupers,

¹ Told by John MacArthur in his book, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, published by W Publishing Group, Page 34.

four hundred and forty were physically wrecked by their wickedness, sixty were habitual thieves, one hundred and thirty were convicted criminals, fifty-five were victims of impurity, only twenty learned a trade (and ten of those learned it in a state prison), and this notorious family produced seven murderers.²

The simple truth is that you cannot take people further than you are yourself. Leaders reproduce after their kind. Apple trees bear apples, pear trees produce pears, sheep beget sheep, and Christians breed other Christians. What you are is what you will reproduce. □

John Wimber was a church growth consultant for some time before he became the pastor of Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Anaheim, California. One day, as he was teaching a group of pastors how to grow their churches, he hadn't gone long into his teaching before one impatient pastor stood up and said, "I know all this. Just teach me how to add more people to my church."

John was very patient with him the first time, but when the frustrated gentleman interrupted a second time and said the same thing, John had a strong thought or a word of wisdom for the man. He looked straight at him and asked him the following question about his church's growth, saying, "How many more like you do you want?" The man fell backward into his chair as if floored by the thought, saying, "I don't want any more like me. I want them to be like Jesus!"

Leaders that are led by the Spirit of God help to create leaders in the Body of Christ, and that has always been the need in the Church of Jesus. What we are is what we reproduce. God is committed to shaping a person He intends on using. □

In the example of our study today, He transformed the life of Peter to be the broken pot Christ had shaped. Peter was the one who preached the Gospel on the Day of Pentecost and saw three thousand come to Christ. He also was used to share the gospel to the Samaritans and the moving of the Spirit among them, and later, to open the door for the Gentiles (Non-Jews) to be saved in the house of Cornelius, the Roman centurion (Acts 10:34-35).

We can't all be like Peter, but the Lord Jesus has a purpose and a unique plan for each one of us. Not everyone is called to be a preacher; we all have differing gifts, which add to the building up of the Body of Christ. Our calling, each of us, is to be all that we can be by responding to the Spirit's work in transforming us. Jesus looked into the heart of Peter and began this transformation of his character by changing his name. Let's go on to the next passage in John's Gospel.

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵Philip 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." ⁴⁶"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in

² As told by J. Oswald Sanders in the book *Spiritual Clinic*, published by Moody Press, 1958.

whom there is nothing false." ⁴⁸"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." ⁵⁰Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." ⁵¹He 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 1:43-51).

The first thing we see in this passage is that Phillip did not go after Jesus. Jesus came looking for him! Here, we see Jesus, the evangelist. Some of us, like Andrew and John, heard about Christ through the preaching of the Word of God by John the Baptist. Peter heard by listening and seeing the passion of his brother, but Phillip has the Lord Jesus Himself looking for him and finding him (v. 43). How wonderful to be found by the Lord Jesus, viz. the Creator of the universe seeking and finding His sheep like a Shepherd. Let the thought that each of us is highly valuable to God sink into our souls and that He has sent His Son to find each of us.

Question 4) What do you think was the thoughts of Philip when he realized that this was the Messiah and that He had personally come looking for him? Have you ever felt that God was initiating things in your life because He wanted to reach you where you were?

Our God is the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep and comes looking for each of us. The God that created the octillion stars has time for every one of us! Isn't that amazing? None of us are outside of His gaze and His care. He knows exactly where we are at every second of the day. □

¹O LORD, you have searched me, and you know me. ²You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. ⁵You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. ⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. ⁷Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast (Psalm 139:1-10).

A relationship with Christ is worth more than the world. Nothing on earth can compare with coming into oneness with Christ. This is the true riches that last forever (Luke 16:11). It is natural to want to tell others about it. Philip could not contain himself. He had to find Nathanael and tell him. What was Nathanael's first response? Disdain and skepticism! Nathaniel lived in Cana of Galilee, just near the town of Nazareth where Jesus grew up.

However, something in Philip's facial expression and joy caught Nathanael like a hook in his heart. There was something different about Philip that, perhaps, intrigued him. Nazareth was near Cana, Nathanael's town, and maybe Nathanael knew some of the things that were going on in the city at that time, but Philip wouldn't argue with him about anything— "Just come and see" was the only thing that Philip would say.

If only the physical Jesus were around for us to introduce others to him today! Wouldn't that be easier to reach our friends and loved ones? "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did," was the testimony of the Samaritan woman in John 4:29. If only I could get my friends to meet Jesus. However, until He comes, you and I are the ones who represent Him.

Even while Nathanael was still in the act of approaching Jesus, the Lord, gazed into his heart and told him exactly what He saw. "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'" (vv. 47-48). Nathanael was convinced and converted on the spot with just those words. How could it be possible that a skeptic like Nathanael could have such a turnaround in his belief system after only one encounter? Again, we see Jesus reaching into someone's heart with just a few words. He saw Nathaniel and looked into his heart, just as He did with Peter. This brief encounter would change Nathaniel's life from that point onward.

We don't know for sure, but it was likely that Jesus was pointing out to Nathanael something that he had said to God, perhaps the day before while he was sitting under the fig tree. It may be that, in his frustration, he had sat down under the fig tree and asked God to reveal Himself to him. An open, pliable heart is all that God needs to reveal Himself to someone and turn his or her life around. The Lord does it all the time; it is not a hard thing for Him. We see many such stories in the Bible, and they are still happening.

Are you hungry to know God better? Are you confident that God deeply loves you like the Apostle John? God sees all that is within, good and bad, and still loves you with an everlasting love. If you seek Him, He promises to meet you where you are. Pray this simple prayer:

Lord Jesus, come into my heart and change me. I am tired of my empty life without You. I turn from my sin and selfish life to live for You. Forgive me of my sins and allow me to come to Your house. Reveal Your great love to me. Amen.

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