

**The Eternal Word**  
**Studies in the Gospel of John**  
**Jesus is seeking disciples today!**  
**John 1:35-51**  
**Preacher: Roy Summers**

**We are all followers**

On Tuesday afternoon I was driving along a quiet country lane when a shepherd's helper stepped into the road and asked me to stop the car.

A few moments later a flock of sheep appeared one by one; moved from a field on the left hand side of the road to a field further on the right hand side of the road.

So for five minutes or so I watched sheep! And this is what I noticed: sheep follow sheep! The first few turned left into the main road and the next few followed the first few, and so it went on until the shepherd showed up, at the end.

Sheep follow sheep. But is it not also true that people follow people? In our age of social media this is perhaps more noticeable with the practice of "following" or "subscribing."

Human beings are natural-born followers. But why? On the surface we follow others because they are friends we want to keep in contact with, or perhaps they are experts in a field that interests us, or their posts are interesting.

But the deep Bible reason we are followers is because we have been created to be worshippers, or God followers. We've been designed to reach out to Someone greater than ourselves, Someone who can bring meaning and significance to our short lives.

And being designed to seek, if we do not reach out to Him, then we will find ourselves following something or someone else: sportsmen, hobbies, celebrities, successful or wealthy personalities, and so on. But tragically we'll never find rest in those things. "Our hearts are restless, until they find rest in you" is how Augustine o put it.

In today's Bible five men follow Jesus. These verses, John 1:35-52 have been written, not merely to tell us how *they* began their journey, but to encourage us to follow Jesus in whom is to be found purpose and joy. Let's retell this story and then draw out some simple lessons for today:

### The Story

Jesus has just begun his three-year ministry at the age of 30 years old. His career as an ordinary carpenter, an ordinary working-class bloke, has prepared him for his divine calling. He has just been baptised by the rough-looking John the Baptist, He has just been tempted in the wilderness for 40 days, and now, at last he's coming out of obscurity into public view. John the Baptist introduces him to the world: *"the next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said (to everyone around) "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (verse 29)*

That was yesterday.

#### ***Disciples 1 and 2: Andrew and John***

Today, verse 35, "The next day," John the Baptist, along with two of John's own disciples saw Jesus passing by again, "Look the Lamb of God." That's all the encouragement these two disciples of John need, they leave John and begin following Jesus!

By the way, this one-line sermon about Jesus, is the main truth we all need to hear. "Jesus is the Lamb of God" who takes away our sin. Our biggest problem is that we are sinners who stand in need of God's forgiveness. Jesus came into the world to become "the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world." You may not be aware this morning that sin is your greatest problem. You may think it's money or health or something else. (After my mother passed away many years ago, we learnt that she had a heart condition she knew nothing about. Her biggest health problem was completely unknown to her.) And this morning when I say "Your biggest problem is your sin, your wrongdoing, your wrong thoughts, your wrong words, your wrong deeds" that may come as a surprise to you. But it's true, our sin has estranged us from God and to be reconciled to the God who made and loves us our sin must be forgiven. Jesus is the Lamb of God, the substitute who died in our place so that we can be forgiven for every evil thought, every wrong word, every sinful deed. Praise God! "Look, the Lamb of God" was enough to draw two of John the Baptists' disciples, Andrew and John the apostle to become followers of Jesus. (The text doesn't give us the name of the other disciple, it only names Andrew, but John who

wrote the story has a habit of not mentioning himself, so most people believe that he's the other one). "When the two disciples heard this ("Look, the Lamb of God") they followed Jesus."

Jesus wants to know what Andrew and John desire – there are good and proper reasons to follow Jesus and wrong reasons to follow Jesus. "What do you want?" Jesus asks Andrew and John. It turns out that they want to learn more about Jesus and so they spend that whole day with him, they're convinced by all they hear and become true followers of Jesus Christ that day.

That's two disciples so far. Now watch how the third disciple is added.

### ***Disciple Number 3—Peter***

Andrew tells his brother, Simon, who Jesus renames Peter! *"The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah. And he brought him to Jesus."*

Peter is impetuous, fervent, impulsive, eager, passionate! But look at what Jesus says to him: *"You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas (which, when translated is Peter, [which means rock])."* "Peter you may not think of yourself as steady, constant, solid, faithful, but God is going to accomplish such a deep and wonderful work, that you are going to become a rock, so I'm going to call you rock, Peter." Jesus changes everyone who follows him for the better! We can't change ourselves, Jesus does that work! George Muller, who lived in the 1800s, was a thief, a gambler and a liar, but one day he became a follower of Jesus who turned his life right-side up! He raised millions of pounds to care for orphans, more than 10,000 in his lifetime!

So now we have three disciples, Andrew, silent John and Peter. Andrew and John became followers through a one-line sermon, Peter became a follower when his brother told him about Jesus! The next day Jesus heads north, we're not told why, but it's where Andrew and Peter come from.

### ***Disciple Number 4—Philip***

And here in Bethsaida Jesus finds a fourth man by the name of Philip and calls him, out of the blue, "Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me!" This is remarkable! Jesus just goes up to this bloke and says "Follow me!" and from that moment onwards Philip becomes a disciple of Jesus! Jesus can call at any moment of any day! Are you ready

to respond to his call? That's the Question!

### ***Disciple Number 5—Nathaniel***

And guess what, Philip tells his mate Nathaniel, who was sitting under a fig tree! See the pattern? Andrew tells Peter, Philip tells Nathaniel? *“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.”*

Nathaniel already believes in God. He was true Old Testament believer! There were not many true believer's around in Jesus day, true religion had gone to seed, most of the Israelites were believers only in name—like many folk in the UK today who tick the “Christian” box in a survey, but it's nothing more than a family tradition. Nathaniel, was the real deal! But he had a problem! When his friend Philip told him that the Messiah had come from Nazareth, he said “Can anything good come from there?” Nazareth was an insignificant town off the beaten path, never mentioned in the Old Testament, a place you could spend a whole week by spending a morning there! *“What the Messiah, God's King, came from Nazareth, you're joking me, right?”* Nathaniel needs some convincing, but Philip doesn't argue— he just says “come and see.” Sometimes that's the best approach isn't it? Just come and see for yourself! Jesus knows that Nathaniel needs convincing so he says three remarkable things to him:

***First*** he tells him that he knows that he is a true believer “Here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false.” This isn't flattery, this is Jesus revealing that he is divine - “I've never met you before but I know you are a true believer.” “How do you know me?” asks the stunned Nathaniel!

At which point Jesus reveals a ***second*** miraculous act—Jesus saw him while he was sitting under a fig tree before Philip called him. This must mean that from his location, Jesus could not have physically seen Nathaniel, but through his power as the Son of God, he knew that Nathaniel was sitting there. *“Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”* Nathaniel has completed his journey of faith, from OT believer, to NT believer; he has found the Messiah of whom the OT points.

The ***third*** thing Jesus says to Nathaniel seals the deal. Nathaniel is steeped in the stories of the OT, some of them quite unusual. There's a story about Jacob, in a dream, seeing a ladder stretching from earth to heaven with angels walking up and down. (Genesis 28). Nathaniel would have heard this story as a boy. “You believe because I

told you I saw you under the fig-tree, You shall see greater things than that, I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man.” The ladder Jacob saw in his dream was a type of Christ, the One who connects people on earth to God in heaven. Well, Jesus tells Nathaniel, one day you will see and understand that Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, is the ladder of God, the One who connects, who reconciles God to sinners. Jesus uses language this religious man would understand. The lessons from this passage of Scripture are blessed and simple.

### (1) Jesus calls different kinds of people!

Andrew, John and Nathaniel came from quite a **religious** background, but we’re not told that of Peter and Philip. Jesus calls people with all kinds of spiritual backgrounds—and none.

Jesus calls people who have a **sceptical** turn of mind, who have questions, like Nathaniel, and he calls those who only need to hear the words “Follow me” and they are off!

God calls people with outgoing personalities like Peter, and those with shall we say, more ordinary dispositions.

Jesus calls all kinds of people! Men and women, young people, older people, all types!

No-one is beyond the reach of his loving call.

### (2) Jesus uses different methods to call people

Sometimes Jesus calls people through **sermons!** John and Andrew heard a one-line sermon, that Jesus was “The Lamb of God.” Sometimes Jesus calls people through their relatives! Andrew went right away to find his brother Simon, and brought him to Jesus.

Have you told your relatives that you are a follower of Jesus? There are a thousand homes into which no pastor or evangelist can venture, but a brother can, a sister can! You can!

We saw this happen in Wolverhampton in the 1970s and 80s and 90s, one Indian would come to Christ and tell their family members, and before long, a whole family believed! Many of you know Juge and his brother Roop; and there are many other members of the family who were converted too. Tell your relatives about Jesus! You may be the only one who can reach them! Sometimes Jesus calls people through **friends!** Philip told his friend Nathaniel! Friend bringing friend!

See how Jesus uses the natural relationships we all have, whether kinship or friendship?

And sometimes here is no human agency involved at all! Jesus calls Philip directly, "Follow me!" I have a friend who became a believer just by reading through one of the Gospel accounts. As he read the life of Jesus he kept saying to himself, "What a Person, I've never come across anyone like Jesus."

Jesus uses many different methods of calling people to follow him! We should not be surprised when we hear conversion stories very different from our own!

Jesus calls **all kinds** of people, he uses different methods, because folks are all different.

### (3) Jesus asks all his followers to obey him

But whoever Jesus calls and however he calls them, there is something the same in every call, and it's the request, the command to follow Jesus Christ. John, Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathaniel—very different people—were all called to the same exciting journey: Leave your old life behind and follow Jesus. For the next three years, they literally followed Jesus everywhere he went and after Jesus ascended into heaven they continued to obey him. You ask, what does following Jesus mean today? Jesus is in heaven, not here, how can I follow him? Can I spell it out in three steps?

You must believe something—that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who has come into the world to take away your sins, so that you can be in a right relationship with God.

You must turn from something - your old life, sin and selfishness.

And thirdly you must turn to Someone and something -turn to God, and to a new life in Christ. A life of obedience. Which starts with baptism.

### Conclusion

Bob Dylan got this one right:

*You may be an ambassador to England or France  
You may like to gamble, you might like to dance  
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world  
You might be a socialite with a long string of pearls*

*But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed  
You're gonna have to serve somebody  
Well, it may be the Devil or it may be the Lord  
But you're gonna have to serve somebody*

Jesus invites us to follow him today. He says, *“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* (Matthew 11:28-30)