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## John 1:35-51 *Jesus Calls His Disciples!*

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Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study [www.intothyword.org](http://www.intothyword.org)

**General Idea:** The following day after the baptism, Jesus walked by John the Baptist and he proclaimed, *Look, there is the Lamb of God*. Then Jesus began to call His twelve Disciples personally. He used different approaches that seemed daring and obscure. Using a direct approach, a challenge (“Why do you want this?”) He used them to call others too. Then, two of John’s disciples, John and Andrew, started to follow Jesus, but He challenged them, asking “what do you want?” He called His first two disciples with a challenge; Andrew, the first one, was so excited he told his brother Simon he had found the Messiah. Then, they stayed with Jesus. Jesus changed Simon’s name to Peter; He then went to Galilee to call the other Disciples. He called Philip who was from the same town as Andrew and Peter. Philip got so excited; he told Nathanael that he found the One about whom the Prophets foretold. Nathanael could not believe that the Messiah could come from such a rough part of the county as Nazareth, but Jesus reassured him by telling him who and where He was and Nathanael believed and proclaimed that Jesus was the King of Israel and the Son of God. Jesus told him, “you will see even greater things—even heaven opening up with all the angels going up and down.”

### Contexts and Background:

This passage is about transitions. The first transition is John the Baptist, who lived in the age of Law, and his ministry was preparatory to Christ. He transitioned his ministry and mission and his disciples over to Jesus the Christ. The new age and Covenant begins from the age of Law to the Covenant of grace. Jesus becomes the Bride as the Church is (Matt. 11:1-19; John 3:29; Eph. 5:25-27, 32). The second transition is the Disciples migrating from their positions to His position. Jesus is calling His first followers, those with whom He would spend three, close, intimate years, teaching them all they needed so to know God. They would be the authority to be the foundation that Christ used to form the Church to worship Him and proclaim the new age of the Kingdom of God. Jesus transformed their lives from fisher-men to fishers-of-men, from the rough and dirty to the pure of heart with a bold purpose and mission. They would be transformed by grace and be the bearers of grace and the prime instruments by whom others would be transformed too.

### Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Two of his disciples.* A disciple is someone who pledges to be a learner under a teacher. A Rabbi or Priest would undertake apprentices who would learn their trade, sacred texts, and be trained both formally and by example; they would, in turn, gather disciples unto themselves to teach. It was very rare that a teacher would tell his students to go to someone else. This would be an act of great humility. However, John had the confidence and insight and trust in Jesus that He would take care of his followers.
- The unnamed Disciple, John is the other one of the two, brother of James, who describes himself as *the beloved Disciple, or the Disciple whom Jesus loved*. He was the writer of this Gospel, three Epistles, and Revelation (John 21:20-24). Known as the *Son of Thunder*, he seemed to be quick in judging others (Luke 9:49, 54). Jesus called to him from the cross with His last few words, telling him to care for His mother (John 13:23; 19: 26-27). He was among the first to see the Resurrection (John 20: 2-8; 21:7). He was exiled at the island of Patmos, and is thought (possibly; not definitely) to have established the churches of Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Thyatira, all to whom he writes in his book of Revelation. John was the only Apostle to avoid being martyred; however, he was exiled to a primitive island. His humility does not allow a reference of himself here (Mark 1: 16-20).
- *Look.* Jesus is the One to whom we are to look!
- *They followed.* They turned their allegiance from John to Jesus and walked with Jesus literally and eventually, spiritually too. This is more of an act to state that one wants to follow and learn from a rabbi or teacher. This was also a sign of respect (John 10:4).
- *What do you want?* Jesus asked question “what do you want in life?” to see where the person’s heart and motives were. This is key before we can grow; what do we want and does it line up to with Christ wants and has for us?

- *Where are you staying/where thou dwell.* A student first seeks to make sure his master is taken care of. This was also an act of hospitality and respect because then it was late in the afternoon and too far for Jesus to walk to his home. This also means “where do you dwell” concerning our mindset, faith, and “where is your hope and trust placed (John 15:4-7)?”
- *Come...Follow me.* This is the simplest message and heart of the Gospel; *come to Christ and see.* How has Jesus said this to you? Students of a rabbi would follow behind him literally—like a puppy—but Jesus wanted more than a puppy-approach to the Gospel. He wanted a deep commitment from the heart and then action by the feet. Some of the great philosophers, like Socrates, called their disciples in this way to make sure they got real commitment and so their time would not be wasted. In Jewish culture, the parents usually chose their children’s teachers or school (John 13: 36-38; 15:16; 21:15-22; Eph. 2:20)
- *Andrew.* He was the brother of Peter, a disciple of John the Baptist, and a fisherman; he was also one of Jesus’ first disciples. He was zealous, excited, and driven; he took the initiative and became the first witness even before being called or instructed in how to do it. Andrew brings his first convert, someone who would later come to be far greater than himself—Peter. Later on, he and Philip introduced some Greeks to Jesus. It is believed he went to and preached in Bithynia, Scythia, Greece, and among the Parthians. He was then imprisoned in Greece, and finally, crucified on a cross. The two ends of the cross were fixed crossways in the ground (like an “X”), the pattern of the “St. Andrew’s cross” (Matt. 4:18-20; John 1:35-40; 6:4-9; 12:20-22).
- *Simon Peter.* Simon, who was called Peter, was introduced to Jesus by his brother, Andrew. He was a fisherman called to become a fisher of men. He was very impulsive. He acted first and thought later (Matt. 14:25-31; 16: 21-23; 26: 31-35; John 18:10-11; Gal. 2:11-13). He even denied our Lord, but was restored and made the first Church leader (Matt. 26:69-75, John 21:15-19; Acts 3-6; Gal. 1:18; 2:1-10). The Catholic Church sees Peter as its founder and the first Pope. He possibly preached the first gospel sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41). He is thought to have traveled to Rome and even Babylon, and then crucified upside down in Rome (1 Pet. 5:13).
- *Cephas.* Peter and Cephas are the same name in different languages, *Cephas* is Aramaic meaning “a stone” and *Peter* is Greek “petros” meaning a rock. Jesus told Peter he would become much more than he was at that time. Many teachers would give their students nicknames. This is also a new beginning—a new life—away with the old and now in with the new (Jer. 20:3).
- *The first thing...Brought him to Jesus.* There is no greater blessing than to have found the Lord. He is not lost, we are. Andrew introduces and instructs us as to the best way to evangelize. “Tell a friend.” Introduce Jesus like you would introduce a friend to another friend and let the Holy Spirit do the rest.
- *We have found the Messiah.* Messiah means *the Anointed One*, which in the Greek is “Christos,” meaning *Christ*. It comes from the practice of Jewish priests anointing a king with oil to show they were approved by God, and pointed to the One God would ultimately send (Lev. 4:3; 1 Sam. 16:1-6; Psalm 89:19-21; 105:15; Isa. 61:1; Matt. 1:1; John 6:15).
- *Philip.* He was called by Jesus the day after Peter and Andrew were. Then he led Nathanael to Jesus. Later we will see him make a bold request to Jesus, “*Show us the Father*” (John 14:8-9). Later, he ministered in Phrygia, and then was scourged, thrown into prison, and crucified.
- *Bethsaida.* This was also a fishing village. Fisherman in that day usually had more than one port for home; this is why Mark states that Peter’s home was Capernaum, because they sailed back and forth from those two locations (Matt. 2:23; Mark 1:19).
- *Nathanael,* also called Bartholomew, was a simple man who was forthright in character and who sought the Lord through prayer and ponder; but when Jesus came, he had to make sure He was the One.
- *Moses wrote about.* Jesus was the fulfillment of Scripture. Moses represented the greatest Prophet and the Law as founder of the Jewish religion. He foretold, as did the veracity of the Old Testament Scriptures, the

coming of the Christ. Christ was to complete the redemptive work that the Law prepared people for and that the Prophets foretold (Deut. 18: 15-19; Isa. Chaps 9, 11, 53; Luke 24:25-27; 44-47; Acts 2:29-32; 3:18-21; 7:52-53; 8:30-35; 10:43; 26:22-23; 28: 23; Rom. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:10-11; Rev. 19:10)

- *Jesus of Nazareth.* Where Jesus grew up and called “home.” You were known by your father’s name, like “Jesus son of Joseph” or where you were from, “Jesus of Nazareth.”
- *Son of Joseph.* This was a reference to where one was from, a city or family clan or tribe. Philip was identifying some of Jesus’ human lineage for Jesus is the son of Joseph, His adopted father (Matt. 1:24).
- *True Israelite/Israelite indeed.* Meaning a person who trusted God who was of good character, or a person who was known for his dishonest or devious behavior, then turned his life around as did Jacob whose name was changed to Israel. These were also the people that anticipated a Messiah who would cleanse them, whereas others wanted a militant Messiah to fight and kick out the Romans (Gen. 27:35; 31:26).
- *Under the fig tree.* Supernatural knowledge was only in the realm of a real miracle worker, a Prophet, or a con. In this passage, the Disciples make sure Jesus was the real thing before committing (John 2:24-25).
- *Rabbi.* A name for a *teacher*, usually a priest or a Levite but not always, who taught the Law and ways of God, like a teaching pastor today.
- *King of Israel.* This was a title for the Messiah, meaning *one who will lead the people out of despair*. This is what the people shouted at Jesus’ Triumphal Entry we celebrate at Palm Sunday, and what the inscription on the sign on the cross stated (John 19:19).
- *Greater things.* The miracles of Jesus were not just a show or to heal a few people; they were a “proof text” that stated He was who He said He was. These disciples would see Jesus’ redemptive work firsthand; wow! what a marvelous thing to experience—the promise fulfilled and the greater work of how Jesus used them and us in the lives of others as agents of redemption!
- *Heaven open.* Meaning a major revelation, which is that *we are reconciled!* An example would be Jacob’s experience, “Jacob’s Ladder,” a glimpse into heaven, and later the disciples observing the Transfiguration, and by the Person and work of Jesus. This was a promise that God would heal the separation we have as humanity to Him, as God, through Christ’s redemption (Gen. 28:12; 32:28; Ezek. 1:1).
- *Son of God.* A title for both Jesus’ humanity and divinity that enables Him to take our place in the wrath of sin and redeem us. This is a bold confession of who Jesus Christ, the eternal God, is; without preparation, training, or discipleship, Nathanael knew. Liberal commentators say this is just an exaggeration or an overreaction, but the text tells us that he comes to Christ by reason, not sensation or sentiment, and was skeptical not emotional; he was persuaded by Philip’s testimony, Jesus’ character, and by the prophecies of the Old Testament (Dan. 7:13; Matt. 8:20).
- John says nothing about himself or even states directly that he was the first one called; rather, his humility extols the virtues of the others.

### **Devotional Thoughts and Applications:**

Look! Look to Christ! See who He is and what He has done! Jesus is the great Victim, the pure, sinless One who sacrificed Himself for the dirt of humanity and the dirt of life; He lived and breathed as we do, experienced all as we do so He would know our burden and then lift it from us. Jesus is the Lamb of God who came to save you and lift your burden from you and give you a triumphant, new, eternal life of real, effectual hope and wonders beyond wonder. Think about this: if each one of us was more like Andrew, excited about our faith and bringing even just one to the Gospel, how much stronger the Church would be; how much more could be done.

Look! Look to Christ! This is the message that the preacher gives, not to have us look upon him but upon Him. *Look to Christ and not to me.* Any true Christian leader will always point people to Christ and not to

themselves. Ministry and life are about Christ, not about “me;” it is not selfish or self-focused—it is always about Christ and nothing else matters. When a leader draws attention to himself or is prideful, it is a certainty he is not from above, but from down below; you can count on that they are up to no good.

**The Essential Inductive Questions** (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. When you were growing up, what convinced you that what a friend or a sibling said was true?
2. Why did the Creator, Lord God of the universe, call His twelve Disciples personally? How did He call you?
3. Why do you suppose Jesus used different approaches that seemed daring and obscure?
4. Why did Jesus call His first two disciples with a challenge?
5. What major transitions have you experienced in Life? How has your faith helped you?
6. Why did Jesus use fisherman (they had seminaries and religious schools then) as the foundation to form the Church to worship Him and proclaim the new age of the Kingdom of God?
7. Why is it important that Christian leaders not look upon themselves but to Jesus? Why would they not? What enables pride and presumptions to take over? How does this diminish our Lord and damage His Church?
8. Where do you dwell (what consumes your thoughts and ideas and concerns) in your mindset and faith; where do your hope and trust lie?
9. How does Andrew introduce us to the best way to evangelize? What can you and your church learn from his approach?
10. What motivated Andrew to be so excited and driven? How can you be better at taking the initiative to be a good witness?
11. If Jesus asked you *what do you want in life*, what would you say? He is asking; so what do you think He sees in your heart and motives? Is what you want lined up with what Christ wants and has for you? What do you need to do?
12. What did it take for you to have the confidence and realization and trust in Jesus so you knew He would take care of you? How can you have more confidence? What gets in the way?