

The car accident I had in La Crosse two weeks ago is fairly interesting given the fact that it was a six car pile-up. Also, I knew the guy in front of me and gave two of his passengers a ride home to Viroqua afterward. How often does that happen, right? Thankfully no one was seriously hurt and I did get some good news this week. The payout on the totaled Honda was more than I paid for it and all the money I had put into it. So in a year where I had the transmission

fail on three cars, this car story turned out better than I had expected.

Because preaching is part of my job, you have to listen to me tell you stories from my life. But we all love to share stories with each other. If something interesting happened to us, we are likely to tell someone about it. If one of our children accomplished something significant, we share that story. If we just saw a great movie or read a fascinating book, we will most likely tell someone about it.

This is exactly how Christianity has spread since the very beginning. At the end of the first chapter of John, we see the first evangelists spreading the good news about Jesus.

*35 The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38 Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you*

*seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” 39 He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. 40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. 41 He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). 42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).*

*43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” 46 Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” 48 Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” 49 Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” 50 Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” 51 And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”*

Have you ever wondered why the first disciples immediately dropped everything and followed Jesus?

*18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him (Matthew 4:18-22).*

That’s pretty impressive, is it not? Most of us conclude that Jesus had such great success because after all, he is Jesus! He snaps his fingers and they immediately follow him. But the first thing we need to realize is that when these men left their nets, their livelihoods, their safety and security to follow Jesus, this was not the first time they had met him. This was not a magical encounter where they blindly followed Jesus like we was the Pied Piper. They had all met Jesus before and this passage in John tells of that first meeting.

So our first point is that...

### **1. They encountered Jesus gradually.**

In the first part, John the Baptist was with two of his disciples. Remember from last week that John had quite the following, so much so that the religious elite thought that he might be the Messiah. One of John’s disciples was Andrew and the other is not named. Most scholars think that the other person was John since this whole encounter with Jesus seems to be written with a first person viewpoint. Most of you know this, but don’t confuse John the Baptist with John the apostle who wrote this gospel. John the Baptist’s whole purpose was to reveal Jesus so he was

glad to lose some followers to the Messiah. In John 3, John the Baptist said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

Remember that just the day before John had seen Jesus and declared, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” He pointed to Jesus as the Anointed One but that day, none of his disciples were close by. But the next day he again pointed out Jesus so his own followers would know who he was. As soon as John said this, John’s two disciples stopped following him and immediately took after Jesus.

This was their first ever encounter and it was a gradual one. This is the same way that almost everyone encounters Jesus. It’s a good reminder as we share our faith with others. I have heard statistics that it can take between 5-20 presentations of the gospel before they are converted. I have no idea how true that is but it is encouraging to see that even the eventual twelve disciples encountered Jesus gradually.

## **2. They encountered the true Jesus.**

This may seem terribly obvious since they actually met Jesus but my point is that they had an accurate understanding of who Jesus was. Here are the confessions of three men who met Jesus.

John the Baptist: *“Behold, the Lamb of God!”*

Andrew: *“We have found the Messiah”*

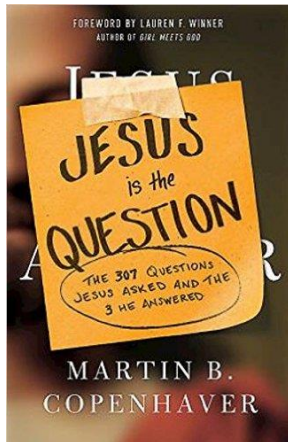
Nathanael: *“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”*

Collectively, this is an amazing list of titles for Jesus. In a day when people create Jesus in their own image and to their own liking, it is absolutely imperative that we present an accurate picture of Christ to others.

## **3. They encountered Jesus through his probing questions.**

We know that Andrew started following Jesus and for the sake of convenience, let’s call the other man John. If you were walking on the street and noticed that two strangers were obviously following you, what would you think? It’s kind of funny to think of Andrew and John as a couple of creepy Jesus stalkers but in a very real way, that is what they were doing. They were following a complete stranger through town.

You’ve got to love Jesus’ first question. *“What are you seeking?”* The NIV translates this as “What do you want?” That may capture the basic meaning but I greatly prefer the ESV—what are you seeking? Jesus knew the hearts, minds and futures of Andrew and John. Jesus was not seeking information, was he? He was drawing out Andrew and John. He was gently probing them with simple questions.



If this author is correct, Jesus asked 307 questions but only answered three questions. Think about that—307 questions! And these are just the ones that were written down for us. This was obviously a key tool for leading his disciples

Questions are a powerful tool for witnessing and for simply caring for others. One person has said that “[Answers] give us more of a feeling of success and closure... Easy answers instead of hard questions allow us to try to change others instead of allowing God to change us.”<sup>1</sup>

You may know that I like to use the Evangelism Explosion question when I witness. “If you died tonight, why would God allow you into Heaven?” I don’t recall ever having anything other than a good response from this question. I could just start by saying, “I am going to tell you why you are a miserable sinner and are headed to hell” but a simple question is so much more effective, don’t you think? In the same way, Jesus could have said, “Here’s how it’s gonna play out. You men will eventually follow me but you will have debates among yourselves about who is the greatest, you will almost never understand my teaching and when the times get tough, you will run away like scared children.” He could have said that because it was the truth but instead he met them right where they were at with the perfect question: what are you seeking?

That’s still a good question for us. What are you seeking from Jesus? Do you just want a ticket to Heaven? Are you seeking someone who will make you feel better when life gets hard? Or are you seeking your only hope in life and you feel you can’t live without him?

Andrew and John answered Jesus’ question with one of their own. “*Rabbi, where are you staying?*” In other words, we want to hang out with you. And they did. From 4 in the afternoon they hung out with Jesus and probably spent the night with him. This was the start of an amazing relationship with the Creator and Messiah.

#### **4. They shared Jesus immediately.**

John the Baptist shared with Andrew and John.

Andrew shared with Peter.

Philip shared with Nathanael.

New believers make some of the greatest evangelists. There is a genuine excitement when we are first saved and often that is turned into evangelistic zeal. Unfortunately, it seems that the longer we are saved, the less we share our faith. For many of you, your evangelism is inversely proportional to the number of years you have been saved.

#### **5. They shared Jesus with their relatives and closest friends.**

They did not just share randomly on the streets. They shared strategically and naturally. John the Baptist shared with his own disciples. Andrew shared with his brother, Peter. Philip found his friend Nathanael and told him the good news. Friends and relatives are the most natural relational links in our witnessing.

Friends and relatives may be the most natural relation links in our evangelism but they can also be some of the most difficult. Most of you have experienced this. When D.L. Moody was converted he immediately shared with his own family. His mother responded with complete hardness of heart. She told her eighteen year old son, "I will always be a Unitarian." It would take another twenty years before she was also converted, and it happened the first time she ever heard her son preach.

Again, I know it can be challenging to share your faith with those closest to you. While you visited with these folks over the holidays, you may have tried to share something but were not received well. It's odd that even over Christmas people don't really want to hear about Christmas. Maybe you just decided not to say anything at all this year because you knew full well that it would create family conflict. I understand that struggle. But it is encouraging to hear of stories like Moody's where one of the greatest evangelists ever took 20 years of prayer and pleading to lead his own mother to faith in Christ.

#### **6. They shared Jesus out of their ignorance.**

As I said before, these men recognized who Jesus was, calling him the Lamb of God, the Messiah, Rabbi, the Son of God and the King of Israel. These were accurate titles for Jesus but the disciples had not filled up these titles with their full meaning. In other words, they were saying more than they really understood. They would not truly understand who Jesus was until after his resurrection.

My point is that even in their relative ignorance they still shared their faith. And as we already said, they wasted no time in doing so. Here's my encouragement to you. Please do not hold back on sharing your faith because you don't feel like you have enough knowledge. You've never been to Bible college or seminary. Maybe you don't feel equipped to share the gospel with others so you never do. These exuberant, largely ignorant fisherman and commoners were not held back in the slightest bit. Not only that, but just how long can you use the excuse of ignorance? If you don't feel you know enough now, what have you done to change your situation? If you do not feel equipped, have you ever asked for help?

Sometime in the next few months our new Pastor of Equipping is going to arrive. What is Ryan going to do when he gets here? He's going to equip people, right? But what if relatively few people want to be equipped? It will be our responsibility to set up ministries and avenues by which people can be equipped. Due to my own restraints on temperament, skill set and time, I have not been able to accomplish this sufficiently. But the two of us together should be easily able to set down some goals and strategies for making this happen. That's on us. However, if we have a church filled with people who are not willing to be equipped, we're going to run into a brick wall in a hurry.

Understand this, we won't ask you to hop out of your chair and preach a sermon or sing a solo up front, though perhaps that is in the future for a few of you. All we ask is that you be willing to allow the Holy Spirit to move you forward. We ask that you be ready to step out of your comfort zones and say yes to small things. Even if you say to yourself, "Well I've never done anything like that before" we will say back to you, "Yes, but are you willing to give it a go?" Listen, every Christian starts out ignorant until they are equipped. We know that Andrew, John, Peter, Philip

and Bartholomew were green as they could be and very rough around the edges. Why did Jesus eventually call each of them to be in his inner circle? One reason is simply because they said yes. They were willing to follow Jesus and take the next steps in their faith journey. That's all we ask of ourselves and that's all we ask of you.

### **7. They persevered despite skepticism.**

Philip was all excited to tell Nathanael about Jesus. *"We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."* If only Philip had left out the part about Nazareth because Nathanael seized on that point. *"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"* If Philip had told him Jesus was from Bethlehem, Nathanael may have taken notice and been more interested, but Nathanael knew that Nazareth was certainly not in any prophecies about the Messiah.

Skepticism is the typical response that we get from most people. I happened upon an email exchange from ten years ago with a woman who was in our diversity group I mentioned a few weeks ago. The first part seems like she might be open to examining the truth.

"But for me, I haven't dedicated my life to looking for these answers. I don't even have the questions. I haven't examined the historical accuracy of the resurrection in great detail. I can't begin to know what happened when Jesus was found alive after three days."

She admits a lack of knowledge and perhaps the appearance of honest inquiry. But her final paragraph leaves no doubt as to where she stood.

"One more thing - you say that the resurrection proves Jesus' claims to absolute truth and divine status. How can you prove the resurrection? You can't. No one can. It's only in faith that such stories are "proven." Without the faith, they remain stories."

D.A. Carson shared this insight. "Honest inquiry is a sovereign cure for prejudice."<sup>2</sup> As we share with others, that's what we hope and pray for—simple honest inquiry. You may not often get this kind of response but it is exciting when it does happen. Even when we do meet with skepticism, we must persevere, whether it be with that person or the next person God brings into our path.

### **8. They shared from their personal experience with Jesus.**

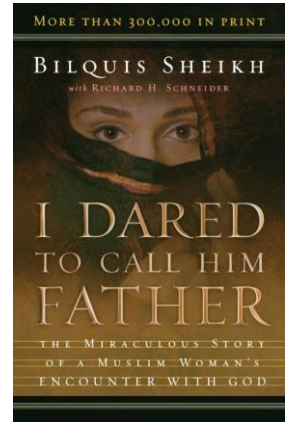
Just imagine being in Nathanael's shoes that day. *Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"* <sup>48</sup> *Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."*

How did Jesus know this secret knowledge? He may not have been omniscient in his humanity but he had this perfect relationship with his Father who could tell him anything at all. This had a huge impact on Nathanael.

Andrew had his own personal experience when he spent the afternoon with Jesus and then went to find his brother, Peter. I noticed something I had never seen before. The text reads: *He first found his own brother Simon.* I had not noticed the word "first" before but I think we can assume

it has some significance. Andrew must have went and told others about Jesus after Peter but John did not include that part. For his purposes, Peter was first and most important.

For Christmas, Ryan got me this wonderful book, *I Dared to Call Him Father*. It is so good I read almost a third of it on Christmas Day. It’s an amazing story about a Muslim woman in Pakistan who finds faith in Christ through miraculous means. Not surprisingly, she is rejected by all of her family. She received multiple warnings and would hear of death threats rumbling around town. Even though all of her family considered her an outcast of the worst sort, she felt the Lord urging her to attend the funeral of a cousin with whom she had been close. It was an awful experience with all eyes trained upon her with anger and suspicion. She greeted her aunt but said only two or three words and then left.



A little while later, her Muslim aunt stopped by her house and shared her gratitude. “I just had to come personally to tell you something. At first, at the funeral, I didn’t see you see among all the people. But I need to tell you how much comfort you were. It’s...I don’t know...Something new. Something warm and special.”<sup>3</sup>

This new believer took a great step of faith and simply shared out of her experience with Christ. Jesus had comforted her so she in turn offered comfort to others—and they felt it.

**9. They shared Jesus through simple invitation.**

Jesus had the most simple invitation he could offer to Andrew and John. “*Come and you will see.*” Remember, this is the first meeting between Jesus and these future apostles. Look at the difference between this meeting in John and the later one in Matthew 4.

<b>John 1</b> “come and see”	<b>Matthew 4</b> “follow me”
Andrew, Peter (and John?)	Andrew and Peter
Philip and Bartholomew	James and John

It just so happens to include almost the exact same people but the intent is vastly different. In Matthew, he asked them to leave everything behind and only follow him. But here in John he merely asked them to come

and see what he was about.

Most people we meet on the street will not be ready to leave everything and only follow Jesus. But many of them will be OK with the simple invitation to “come and see.” And this is exactly how Philip disarmed Nathanael’s skepticism. “Come and see.”

Sometimes I think we can get caught up in trying to answer people’s skepticism when what we should be doing is offering a simple invitation to them: Come and see.

Maybe that’s an invite to attend a church service. A good “come and see” response is to encourage them to read the Bible. A great place to start is the Gospel of John. Virginia has a good supply of pocket sized gospels of John that she is willing to share with you. You can sweeten that deal by inviting them to study with you. Is that something you could do?

As we celebrate the Lord' Supper together, I would encourage you to think of one person to whom you can give a "come and see." Most of us can think of at least one person and if not, ask the Lord to bring someone to mind for you.

**Rich Maurer**  
**January 3, 2016**

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<sup>1</sup> John Dear, *The Questions of Jesus: Challenging Ourselves to Discover Life's Great Answers*, Doubleday.

<sup>2</sup> Carson, John, p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> Bilquis Sheikh, *I Dared to Call Him Father: The Miraculous Story of a Muslim Woman's Encounter with God*, Chosen Books: Grand Rapids, © 1978, p. 108.