

Grow Out : Outreach Means Invitation
By Pastor Daniel Dennison
John 1:43-51
August 29, 2021

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, ^[m] you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

About 3 years ago I had a friend call and offer me a very intriguing invitation. It was the Wednesday before the Big 12 championship game. This was going to be an historic game because it was going to be the first time in 100 years that they played each other for a 2nd time in the same season. So on Wednesday evening, 3 days before the game my friend calls me and here’s her opening line: Hey Daniel, what are you doing on Saturday for the Big 12 championship? Now I immediately went into analyzing and processing mode. I’m assuming that I’m about to get an invitation to a watch party. I already have a standing invitation from some other friends, but I played it real cool because I wanted to see if maybe this was going to be a better offer. And so I played it pretty safe and I said “well we’re not really sure, we have an invite to watch it with some friends, but we haven’t really decided if we’re going to go.”

At this point my friend on the phone says “ok, well, I have some extra tickets to the game and I just thought you might want to go.” Things just got interesting! Now immediately I’m back into processing mode and I’m thinking “ok... that would be pretty amazing, but you know I’m going to have a nice view from my couch and if I go to the game I’ll be crammed in with a bunch of strangers and it won’t be nearly as comfortable as watching from home. So I himmed and hawed a bit and then my friend upped the stakes on me and she said “Well if it helps you make a decision or not, these tickets are in my dad’s suite that he owns at AT&T Stadium.”

Oh man, there’s no way I can say no to this, right? But gosh I’m going to have to spend 8 hours in the car getting to and from Dallas. I’ll probably have to go down the night before and get a hotel. And so I said “yea, I think I want to go, but can I think about it and let you know tomorrow. I’m just not sure I can afford to spend 8 hours in the car and have to come in the night before. And then... my friend says “my dad is going to let us use his private plane so we don’t need to leave until 8am on Saturday for the 11:00 game and you will probably be home before it’s even dark.”

To which I said: Ok, so what time are you picking me up on Saturday? You better believe the next time my friend calls me and asks me what I'm doing on the weekend I'm going to say "I don't have any plans. I don't need to pray about it, I don't need to talk to Mindy about it, I'm in, what are we doing?"

Invitations come in all different shapes and sizes, right? **(SLIDE)** Some invitations are very informal. Hey we're going to dinner on Friday, do you want to come? Some come via email. It's an Evite. You can click on that Evite and figure out who is going and who isn't going before you decide whether you want to commit to it or not. Sometimes invitations are very formal. They come on cardstock and calligraphy, and they say that something important is about to happen. Now regardless of how the invitation is delivered, an invitation says "You are wanted. You are welcome. You are included in what is about to happen."

And isn't that a message that the church cannot do enough? Shouldn't we ALL be saying as much as we possibly can "you are wanted and you are welcome and you are included." We have come to the very end of a summer long series where we have looked at what it means for us to grow up, and then what it means for us to grow together. And for the last month we have been looking at what does it mean for us to grow out. A big part of us growing out is that we need to be better about inviting people and welcoming them into our lives, into our homes, into our church, and into our spheres of influence.

And we see that going on in our text this morning, but there's a whole lot more than just invitation. I think the key phrase in our text is v.46, Philip says "COME AND SEE." I absolutely LOVE that invitation. Hey, just come and see and check it out for yourself. But Come and See has a lot of meaning and that's what I want to explore this morning. I have 4 points for you.

#1 Come and see means come and think. **(SLIDE)** Come and examine the evidence. Let me show you what I mean. The first time we see this phrase of "come and see" is actually in v.39 and it comes from Jesus. At this point the disciples are kind of nervous. They're told that Jesus is this incredible person and so they're just following him trying to figure out what he's about. And so Jesus says to them in v. 38 "What are you seeking?" And the answer is that they are trying to figure out if what they are hearing about him is true.

And notice Jesus doesn't demand belief right there and then. He doesn't say "don't you know who I am, I can't believe your lack of faith." No... he says come and see! Come and watch me. Come and see me live and see how I speak and how I treat others. Come and examine the evidence for yourselves.

The second time this phrase of "come and see" comes up is when Phillip comes to Nathaniel in v.45. And he says: we have found the Messiah. And Nathaniel comes back with an extremely valid and difficult question. Because everyone knew that the Messiah would come out of Bethlehem and so he looks at Phillip and he says "How can he be the Messiah, he's from Nazareth. This can't be the Messiah. And what does Phillip say? He doesn't say: How dare you question the Messiah! Where is your faith!? No, he says "come and see. Let's go find out. Let's study it and learn it and examine all the evidence."

Now let's put this in modern context. A modern day Nathaniel wouldn't say "how could the Messiah come from Nazareth?" Instead we would say things like: Christianity... how can there be a loving and merciful God when the world is so messed up and so full of pain? And how does Jesus respond?

On the one hand he does NOT say what modern day spirituality would say which is "it doesn't matter what you believe, just figure out what works for you." I mean how convenient and lazy is that? No thinking necessary, just do what works for you. Modern day spirituality and progressive Christianity says that, But Jesus doesn't. On the other hand, Jesus also doesn't say what traditional conservative religion has often said: "Don't question, just believe what we're telling you. If you had faith, you wouldn't question this." No Jesus doesn't say that either, he says "come and think. Come and examine."

So how do we do that? Friends, it's right here in front of us. An eyewitness account of Jesus' life. We examine the evidence by studying the scriptures. 5 times in the first chapter of John it tells us that John "Saw and he said." Some translations say "he bore witness to." It's the same Greek word each time. And it's a word that means "I was actually there, I really saw this, and now my testimony is admissible in court." John is not talking about an inward experience or an impression, he is saying "I am seeing this for myself."

And all throughout this passage we see the marks of this being an eyewitness account. For example: How long did they go to see Jesus? V.39 (**SLIDE**) tells us they came and saw where he was staying and stayed with him that day until the 10th hour, which would have been 4:00. If you're going to read a modern novel you would read a detail like "he stayed until 4:00." But ancient fiction never used detail. Epics, legends, myths, they never used detail. You wouldn't ever read and then Odysseus went to visit his wife Penelope at around 4:00. Because ancient literature never includes details like that.

But John does. The details that John provides is his way of saying this is my eyewitness account. This isn't a legend or just something I heard; this is my eyewitness account. I'm showing what Jesus said and what he did. And so you need to study it and examine it and you need to decide for yourself. Each and every one of us, believer or non-believer, needs to start by slowing down and studying and examining the evidence that is before us.

Ok so #1 come and see means come and think or come and examine the evidence. But secondly it means come and process this with friends (**SLIDE**). One of the things that is so interesting about this is that John the Baptist leads Andrew to Jesus. Andrew leads his brother Peter to Jesus. Philip leads Nathaniel to Jesus. When Philip says come and see he's saying "let's go together." Let's go figure this out together. There are exceptions, but the rule in general is that we will almost always come and meet Jesus and get to know Jesus through a friend or a loved one. Rarely will you find Jesus unless you are found by a friend who has already found Jesus.

Let me just be very practical here. A lot of you have come to Asbury through friends. But many of you haven't. With a big church there's a lot of word of mouth, or you drive by and see our big building, and so many of you didn't come here because of or with friends. Let me just give you a

warning: Many times you will not be able to really process what you're hearing and learning here unless you do it with friends. If Christianity was a philosophy by which you saved yourself then the main way you would come to Christ is probably through a great teacher. But since Christianity is an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ the main way you will see in the Bible over and over again, especially in this morning's text, is that the main way we learn about Jesus and grow is through friends.

Some of you have been coming to this church for years and you have never been in any kind of Bible study or small group or community. I want to encourage you to "come and see" how you can learn and grow with friends by taking a look at the [Fall Discipleship Class](#) brochure. There are multiple classes and groups which can help you grow in your understanding of Scripture, of prayer, or defending your faith, as well as our [Lifecare](#) groups which can help you grow your marriage or get through difficult seasons in life. For whatever season you are in, we can help equip you to follow Jesus. Most of these meet on Wednesday night following our Wednesday dinner beginning in 10 days. It's also not too late to join a Magnificent Story small group. I hope you will jot down the website up on the screen behind me and take a look at that this afternoon and sign up for one of the many groups we will have going. <https://asburytulsa.org/joingroup>

All of those things I mentioned are short term groups which are great for learning. But if you really want to grow then we want you in an ongoing group. The best way to join an ongoing group is to become a part of an Adult Discipleship community. I was in our new young adult discipleship community a few weeks ago and I asked the group why they were there. And over and over so many of them said "my parents have been in an adult discipleship community here at Asbury and for years they have had many of the same people doing life with them. And I really want that in my life." We all need that. I hope you will be bold and explore some of our communities. I want you to email JLAMBERT@ASBURYTULSA.ORG to find out about the right group for you.

So come and see means come and examine, come and process with friends. But thirdly it means come and invite (**SLIDE**)! Philip didn't get into a theological debate with Nathanael. He simply said "Man I don't know, just come and see." Philip knew that if he could just get his friend into the presence of Jesus, Jesus would change everything. And what I believe with all my heart is if we could just get our friends and our family and our neighbors into the presence of Jesus, Jesus will change them. His presence can change anyone and anything, but it takes us inviting them.

I want us to be a come and see people. Telling everyone we know: Hey you gotta come and see. I don't know everything but trust me you just gotta come and check it out. And here's the reality for every one of us in here. The only reason any of us know Jesus is because someone else at some point in our life said "come and see." Someone told you about Jesus, someone invited you to church. I wonder who it is in your life that is waiting for YOU to say "hey, come and see."

Many of you have an awful lot to offer to others but you're not finding anyone for Jesus. What are you doing to reach out and invite and welcome NEW people into the faith? Once we have been led by friends or family into a relationship with Jesus, we need to now become that friend that is helping point other people to Jesus.

Now once we invite people, let me just remind you of what Tom talked about last week: We have to be hospitable to people! Last week Susan Stockwell who you will regularly find out front warmly greeting people pulled me aside and she said “the most heartbreaking thing just happened to me. A woman who has been coming here for months thanked me for welcoming her and said I was the only person that has ever talked to her.” Church, we can do better than that! Are we creating an atmosphere not just in worship but also in our discipleship communities that is winsome and inviting NOT just for members, but for a new person? And not just for someone that looks like you and is in the same political party and socio economic class as you. Do we want to be a church that is open only to people like us or do we want to be a church that reflects the Kingdom of God where every tribe, tongue, and nation is welcome?

One of my most memorable moments from my college ministry days was I believe in 2013. And one of my students who was on our leadership team saw a girl who clearly looked lost on campus. So Danielle stopped and said “hey, are you lost, can I help you?” Gloria said “yea, I’m trying to get to the law building, I’m already late, I don’t know where I’m going.” Danielle said “hey, you need to go this way, take a left, then a right, boom you’re at the law building. Hey, by the way, I go to this campus ministry called the Wesley Foundation, we’re having a cookout tonight, you should come.”

Gloria showed up to the cookout that night because she wasn’t just new to OU, she was new to the United States and she knew nobody. Gloria met some people, she felt welcome, and so she came back. And she kept coming back. Gloria was at OU on a student visa from Nigeria to get a law degree. Gloria finished her law program and then she walked away from it all to go into ministry. She came on our staff and helped us build a stronger program for international students and a stronger prayer ministry. **(SLIDES)** Gloria is halfway through an MDIV at Asbury Seminary. 8 years later and the trajectory of Gloria’s life has completely changed, 100s of OU students have found a spiritual home because of Gloria, dozens have given their life to Christ because of Gloria, and a handful have gone into full time ministry. All because Danielle said to Gloria 9 years ago “Hey, come and see.” Invitations are powerful and life changing, but they are also full of joy.

Think about fishing for a moment. There is a lot of joy that comes from catching a fish. That’s why people always take pictures with the fish they catch. Everyone is smiling when they are holding that fish up. **(SLIDE)** Nobody ever has a frown on their face. I want you to know something, there is an indescribable joy that comes when you know that you have been used by God to help someone go from darkness to light. To help someone step out of death and into eternal life. It may have been a conversation you had; it may have been a simple invitation you gave. But when you are a part of helping someone along in their faith journey, there is tremendous joy! So we need to examine, we need to do it with friends, and we need to be fishing for people and invite others.

But finally come and see means come and **WONDER (SLIDE)!** Look at the last 2 verses with me: **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, ⁵² you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”**

Jesus is saying I am THE STORY of which all of the other stories are about. He's saying I am THE story and all of the other Biblical stories are about me. Do you remember the story of Jacob's ladder? He's fleeing for his life and he falls down in exhaustion. Listen to **(SLIDE) Genesis 28:12, And Jacob dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder^[b] set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!**

When he woke up from the dream, he was so moved that he put down a little pillar and inscribed it "this is Beth-El the house of God, the gate of heaven." And Jesus shows up to Nathaniel and says let me tell you something beyond your imagination. Something that should cause you awe and wonder. I am the gate of heaven that Jacob saw. That was not just a dream, that was a promise. That story was about me. Because all of the stories point to Jesus!

When John the Baptist says "Behold the Lamb of God." Why does he say that? Let's remember the story from Exodus. God's justice is going out all throughout Egypt, BUT the people who took the blood of the lamb and left it on their doorposts were spared God's wrath and justice. John the Baptist is saying God's wrath and justice was not turned aside because of some wooly little lamb. Jesus is the lamb! That story was about him. About his life and his death.

But it goes beyond even that. When Jesus tells Nathaniel I am the door and the gateway into the cosmic reality behind everything. He's not just saying all of the Biblical stories are about him, he's saying ALL of the stories are about him. Let's think about some of the great stories. Beauty and the beast. The idea that sacrificial love will transform. Sleeping beauty. We're not really asleep, we're under a spell. We're not really dead, we're under a spell. And there's some great prince who can break the spell.

Don't you remember all of the times you read those stories and watched those movies and you thought I wish I could get into that story? If only I could get into the story where death leads to resurrection where spells are broken and where sacrificial love brings transformation. Jesus is saying you can. You can get into my magnificent story. Because my story is the story about which all of the other stories are pointing. You can know me and then into your life will come my love and grace. And then you will be in the story and spells will be broken in your life. And Transformation will happen and resurrection life will be possible in your own life.

The key is not to go and do. Jesus doesn't say I'm at the top of the ladder and you need to figure out how to ascend to me. He doesn't say angels are ascending TO me. And so if you try really hard you can too. Jesus says angels are ascending ON the son of man. Jesus is saying I am the ladder, I came all the way down to bring you to God. I lived the perfect life that you could not, and I died the death that you deserved.

So friends, this morning I invite you to trust in him and surrender your life to him. Come and see and think. Come and see and explore your faith with friends. Come and see and invite others into this magnificent story. But come and see and sit in awe and wonder and be amazed at his grace. Be so moved and mesmerized that the creator of the universe loves you and knows you and

desires a relationship with you. Be so moved by that love, that you cannot help but give your life to Jesus and then invite others on the journey with you.