

# John's Gospel - What Does It Mean to Follow Jesus

by John Vissers

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*The sermon explores the true meaning of discipleship, emphasizing the importance of examining our motives and spending quality time with Jesus amidst the challenges of faith.*

**Duration:** 35:40

**Scripture:** John 1:19-20, John 1:29, John 1:33-42

**Topics:** "Follow Jesus"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of personal connections in leading people to become Christians. He highlights the role of family members in influencing others to connect with the church and the word of God. The speaker also discusses the expectations people have of Jesus and the disappointment that can arise when those expectations are not met. He references a book called 'Their Blood Cries Out' by Paul Marshall, which he believes will have a significant impact on the Christian community. The sermon concludes with a reflection on the discipleship of Andrew and John, who were determined to spend time with Jesus despite the challenges and hard teachings.

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## Transcript

We're continuing in our study of John's Gospel, and I would invite you to turn to the first chapter to the 35th verse, where we shall read from verse 35 through to the end of verse 42. John chapter 1 at verse 35. The next day, John was there again with two of his disciples.

When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, Look, the Lamb of God. When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, What do you want? They said, Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying? Come, he replied, and you will see.

So they went and they saw where he was staying and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus.

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, We have found the Messiah, that is, the Christ. Then he brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas, which, when translated, is Peter.

So far, the reading of God's word in this first chapter of John. May the Holy Spirit add a blessing as we hear that word this evening. Let's pray together.

Gracious God, our Father, we are so thankful at this season of the year for many things. And tonight we give thanks for your word, which is the bread of life, which feeds us, which nourishes our souls, which points us to Christ, which equips and empowers us to live for you. And tonight we pray that you would teach us from your word, particularly concerning this whole area of discipleship, what it means to follow you.

And, Lord, we pray that you would guide us in our study of your word this night. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

At the conclusion of the message this morning, I mentioned a book that I've just finished reading this past week called *Their Blood Cries Out*. And it's a book by a friend of mine, actually, whose name is Paul Marshall, who teaches here in Toronto. And my expectation is that this is a book which is going to shake things up a little bit, not only in the Christian community, but indeed around the world.

Paul has already been invited to give a presentation, to give testimony before the Helsinki Commission and other commissions dealing with human rights in our world. The book is somewhat disturbing. And it's disturbing because it's a documentation of the religious persecution of Christians around the world in the present time.

And what Paul documents, what Paul Marshall documents in this book, is that in more than 60 countries worldwide tonight, as I mentioned this morning, some 200 million Christians are being persecuted for their faith in Christ. And as I said this morning, these are not Christians who are simply going through difficult periods of circumstances, who are unemployed, who are homeless, but who are in fact being persecuted precisely for their faith in Jesus Christ. They live in daily fear of secret police, vigilantes, state repression, and discrimination.

And the sad thing is, and when you read this book, it becomes very disturbing, many of them are women and many of them are children. And what Paul is trying to point out and what others who are trying to point out when they write and speak about this reality is this, that the media in the West, in fact, have largely ignored this. The North American media and the media in the Western world, with its anti-Christian bias, largely ignores this persecution, both its extent and also its focus.

In fact, I was interested to read a piece on persecution in *The Star* on Saturday, but there was no mention of the fact that these were Christians who were being persecuted for their faith. Charles Coulson says that we must feel a sense of moral outrage that Christians in this day and age are being sold into slavery and are being tortured for their faith. Now, why do I want to start here tonight? Well, this morning we looked at the theme of worship, and I suggested, as we concluded, that there are many Christians in the world today who are suffering for the fact that they want to welcome the King of Glory into their presence.

And tonight we're going to consider together, in the few minutes that we have, the theme of discipleship, what it means to follow Jesus. And sometimes this theme of discipleship can become somewhat trendy, and when we think about it in Christian circles in North America, we draw out certain implications, but it seems to me tonight that as we ask the question, what does it mean to follow Jesus in our day, in our time, in our situation, what does it mean for us to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, that our sensibilities, that our faith, that our perspective, that our view has to be sobered by the fact that for many sisters and brothers in

Jesus Christ tonight, what it means for them to follow Jesus is suffering. And what it means for them to follow Jesus, in fact, has cost them a great deal, in some cases, even their lives.

And so it's with that heart and that burden and that sense that I want us to come tonight to this wonderful text in John's Gospel, chapter 1, verses 35 to 42, and think and reflect together for a few minutes on the theme of discipleship. Now our passage tonight, as we come to it, in fact, introduces us to the first disciples of Jesus. And the text, you will notice, in verse 35, begins with the words, the next day.

Now these are the same words that we noticed last week in verse 29, where verse 29 began, the next day. And just to get the pattern straight here and the context before us, this is now the third day that we're talking about. On the first day, which we looked at a number of weeks ago, this was the day that John the Baptist was interrogated by the religious leaders, by the priests and the Levites, who had been sent from Jerusalem to inquire of John who he was.

Verse 19. And it says in verse 20, he did not fail to confess, but he told them freely, I am not the Christ. And then they ask him some other questions.

Are you Elijah? No. Are you the prophet? No. Who are you? And he then replies that I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way or make straight the way for the Lord.

And then last week, we looked at day two, the second day. And the second day was when Jesus made his appearance on the scene, when John the Baptist sees Jesus and looks at him and points and says, behold, or look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And last Sunday evening, as we came to the Lord's table, we looked at what that phrase meant, what it means, all the richness of the Old Testament background in terms of the meaning of that phrase, the Lamb of God.

And John the Baptist also identifies Jesus on that day and in those verses, verses 29 to 34, as the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit, verse 33, and as the Son of God. I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God. Well, we now come to the third day.

The next day, John was there again with two of his disciples, and when he saw Jesus passing by, he said, look, the Lamb of God, the Lamb of God. So what's happening here is simply this. John is again there at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan where he was baptizing.

He was there with at least two of his own disciples. We know that one of them is Andrew because Andrew is identified in verse 40 as Simon Peter's brother. In fact, it's very interesting that Andrew is a key player in this passage as one of the first disciples of Jesus, but even at this point he's identified as a brother of Simon Peter.

He's kind of overshadowed by Simon Peter, although as we'll see in a moment, it's really through his witness that Simon comes to Jesus. The other disciple of John the Baptist is not identified, but it's most certainly John, the disciple John who wrote the Gospel, who prefers to remain anonymous in the Gospel and who's sometimes referred to as the beloved disciple or the disciple whom Jesus loved. And so as John is standing there, and you need to get the picture, he's standing there with two of his disciples, Andrew and John, Jesus walks by, and John the Baptist points to Jesus and he says the same thing that he said in verse 29, Look, the Lamb of God.

And again, all the fullness and all the richness of that phrase comes to the forefront, but this time somehow we get the sense that he's not simply pointing to Jesus, but he's almost giving a directive to his

own disciples. He's reminding them that this is the one about whom he's been speaking. This is the one about whom he's been testifying.

This is the one that he's come to prepare the way for. And it's as if he's almost saying, you get a sense, now it's time for you, my disciples, to leave from following me and to take up and follow Jesus. And that's what makes John the Baptist's witness so powerful and so effective and so rich.

If you think back to the first chapter, earlier in the first chapter of John, in verses 6-8, which we looked at a number of weeks ago, there came a man who was sent from God and his name was John. And he came as a witness to testify concerning that light so that through him all men might believe. And he himself was not the light.

He came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. And what we see here is really the expression now, the fulfillment of those words, that John the Baptist is pointing away from himself and pointing his own disciples, those who are following him, he now points toward Jesus Christ.

And so Andrew and John begin to come to terms with Jesus. And the text says, and notice this, in verse 37, they followed him. And verse 38, turning around, Jesus saw them following him.

Now this is the first instance that the words follow or followed or following are used in John's Gospel. And in fact, this becomes a key and a central theme in the Gospel of John. The idea of following Jesus emerges again and again and again throughout a number of texts, which we don't have time to trace through tonight, but we'll see them as we work through the Gospel together.

And here, what the word simply seems to indicate is that they took their first steps toward Jesus. They were willing to find out what it meant to become his disciple. Having seen Jesus, they wanted to find out more about him and find out what he was all about.

And as I've indicated, the idea of following then becomes an important theme throughout the rest of the Gospel. Now what I want to do from this point forward is to ask really what did it mean for Andrew and for John to follow Jesus? What did it mean for them to be confronted by Jesus, and what does their following of Jesus indicate to us or illustrate for us, or how does it help us in our own Christian walk, in our own life of discipleship today? And so let's look briefly at what it meant for them. The first thing that we notice as we look at what happens in this passage is that Andrew and John were forced to examine their motives.

Now why do I say that? Well, notice what happens. They decide that they're going to follow Jesus. Verse 37.

Verse 38. Turning around, Jesus saw them, and he saw them following, and he asked, What do you want? What do you want? Now, I don't know about you, but I find this a rather startling response on the part of Jesus. I find this a rather startling question for Jesus to ask of these two disciples of John, John the Baptist, who have now decided to leave John the Baptist and follow Jesus.

One would have thought that Jesus would have been thrilled with the witness of John the Baptist. One would have thought that Jesus would have been delighted that the message was getting through, that two of these disciples of John the Baptist now turn and begin to follow Jesus. We're not told with what tone or in what manner of voice Jesus spoke these words, but I can't help but find and think that they're rather startling words.

He says to them, What do you want? What are you looking for? I find it a rather curt question, a rather pointed question to these two young men who turn from following John the Baptist and now turn to inquire about Jesus. Now, Andrew and John may indeed have had all kinds of things in mind as they pursued Jesus, and Jesus probably knew what some of those issues might have been. For example, they knew that there were many problems in their own time, in their own day, that many were looking for political solutions, and so it may well have been that Jesus wondered whether they were interested in the political solution to the problems of their own day.

It may be that Andrew and John came with all kinds of struggles and problems in their own lives, and Jesus wondered what they really expected from him in terms of his response. What do you want? Did they expect Jesus to help? In fact, they had been disciples of John. What did they now expect to receive from Jesus? William Barclay summarizes the question that Jesus poses in this way.

It is a very relevant question, he says. It's very relevant to ask that question in Palestine in the time of Jesus. Were these two young men legalists who were looking only for subtle conversations about little details of the law, like the scribes and the Pharisees? In other words, were they only interested in gauging Jesus at a kind of superficial level, trying to test him? Were they ambitious time-servers looking for position and power like the Sadducees? Were they nationalists looking for a political demagogue and a military commander who would smash the occupying power of Rome like the Zealots? Or were they, Barclay asks, humble men of prayer looking for God and for His will? Or were they simply puzzled, bewildered, sinful men looking for light on the road of life and forgiveness from God? You see, there could have been any number of things going through their minds, and Jesus asks them, what do you want? And I want to suggest to you tonight that that's the first question that any would-be disciple of Jesus must be confronted with.

The question that Jesus poses to Andrew and John, what do you want? This is the first thing about which we must be clear. What do we want from Jesus? What do we expect from Jesus? What do we expect Jesus is going to do for us? Why are we interested in Jesus? What do we hope to get out of it? Following Jesus, in fact, means asking hard questions about our motives, because even our purest motives, even our highest motives, are often mixed. And of course, we're living at a time when all kinds of people want all kinds of things from Jesus.

Many people are looking for self-fulfillment. Is that what Jesus gives? Many people are looking for peace or for security in their lives. Is that what Jesus gives? Many people are looking for prosperity.

And of course, there's a great deal of teaching in the church today about prosperity. If you come to Jesus, you will prosper. You will do well.

You will make lots of money. In fact, one of the reasons that SIM is having the pastors' book conferences in Nigeria and they're going on through the summer and into the fall, is in fact to provide for pastors solid Bible teaching, solid theological teaching to cut across, to combat this kind of prosperity teaching which has taken hold in large segments of the church. And we see it here in North America as well.

There's a great deal of therapeutic teaching in the church today that if you come to Jesus, you'll feel a whole lot better. And so we've got all of these things going on and the question we need to ask is what is it that we really expect from Jesus? Are we willing to follow Him not simply for what we can get out of Him, not simply what He can do for us, but in fact, because He is the way, the truth, and the life. Because He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Because He is who the Bible declares Him to be the Son of God. You see, that's the real question. And many people come to Jesus and they don't get healed.

And many people come to Jesus and they don't make lots of money. And many people come to Jesus and they don't always feel a whole lot better. Does that mean that Jesus isn't who He said He was? No, it means we need to be clear about our expectations and about the identity of Jesus as He's revealed to us in the Scriptures of the New Testament.

You know, there's a very sad verse in John's Gospel. There are a number of sad verses, but one of the saddest comes in the 6th chapter of John's Gospel. It's actually the 66th verse of the 6th chapter of John's Gospel.

Jesus was becoming more popular. He had turned water into wine at a wedding ceremony. He had cleansed and cleared the temple out.

He'd healed a number of people. He had fed 5,000 people miraculously. He'd walked on water.

He had done all of these wonderful things and lots of people started following Jesus. Many people, it says, became disciples. But then, toward the end of chapter 6, Jesus starts giving some hard teaching about who He is and about what it means to be a follower of His.

And the 66th verse of the 6th chapter of John says this, from this time, many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him. What a sad verse. But it's in this context, you see, that Jesus asks this question, what do you want? What are your expectations? Jesus may be asking that of you tonight.

What do you want? What do you expect from Him? Who do you think He really is? What do you want? And then notice what happens as the story unfolds. And here we come, I think, to our second example or principle concerning discipleship. And that is that Andrew and John are determined to spend some time with Jesus.

Andrew and John responded to this question. They don't get defensive. They don't really give a full answer, but they say, Lord, where are you staying? Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying? And it's quite clear at this point that they're not interested simply in a casual conversation with Jesus.

They're not interested in just a superficial encounter with Him. They want to really talk to Jesus. They refer to Him as Rabbi, which is a term of respect.

And they want to spend, if we might use this term, quality time with Jesus. Interacting with Him. Asking Him questions.

They want to find out who He really is. So Jesus invites them to come. He says, come and you will see.

And the text says that they spent the day with Jesus. Wouldn't you have loved to have been there? I'm dying to know what they talked about. They spent numbers of hours with Jesus.

One of the thoughts that came to my mind as I was preparing the message is that it might have been the kind of conversation that we find in Luke 24, where Jesus encounters the disciples on the Emmaus Road. And in verse 32, they say, were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us? My hunch is that Jesus taught and spoke to them not only about Himself, but He spoke to them about Himself and God's redemptive plan of salvation in terms of the Scriptures of the

Old Testament. That He dealt with their questions.

That He spent time dealing with them and helping them to understand something about who He was. And so we're not told exactly what it was that they talked about, but one thing is clear. It changed their lives forever.

And I want to suggest to you that this is one of the most basic, one of the most simple principles of discipleship, and yet one we overlook again and again and again. What does it mean to follow Jesus? It means to spend time with Him. It means to be found in His company.

If you want to become an authentic follower of Jesus, it means remaining with Him, basking in His presence, spending quality time with Him, pursuing Him, asking Him questions. We need to respond to the invitation He gives to Andrew and John. Come, and you will see.

We need to be where Jesus is. We need to spend that time with Him. How do we do that? Well, there are lots of very obvious ways.

One of the ways, of course, is that we meet Jesus in His Word, the Bible. We spend time with Jesus as we read His Word. And one of the things that excites me about the Bible is when you begin to understand that the Bible is not simply a book to be memorized or information to be mastered or to be learned, but when you come to the Bible and realize that it's the voice of God speaking to you, that as you enter the study of the Scriptures, you're really entering a conversation, that as you ask questions, you find answers, that you speak to God as you study the Scriptures, which leads then to the second way that we spend time with Jesus, and that's through prayer.

One of the best things I've done in the last couple of years in terms of my own personal Christian life has been to develop and to keep a prayer journal where I actually write down my comments, my thoughts, my prayers as I study, as I do my devotions. And actually, sometimes I write my prayers out in full as they just come. And it becomes a record then of my conversation and my relationship with Jesus.

And if you go to my prayer journal, some days you'll find very few words. The conversations are shorter. I just haven't been able to record them in a way perhaps that has been most helpful and most meaningful.

But other days you enter into this profound time with the Lord Jesus, and the pen just does not stop writing, and page after page it flows. And so spending time with Jesus in Scripture and in prayer, and then of course in fellowship, in the fellowship of His people. As we gather, we meet Jesus as He's in our midst as we gather together.

And then being found where Jesus is found out in the world, when we visit those who are sick or shut in, the widow, the orphan, as Scripture teaches us, those who are struggling when we meet a poor or homeless person, when we pray with someone going through a difficult struggle, when we pray for believers who are being persecuted for their faith, these are the places Scripture teaches us where Jesus is to be found. And those of us who are called to be disciples of Jesus should have in our hearts that desire to be where Jesus is. To be found where Jesus is found in our world.

Where is Jesus staying? Come and you will see, He says. And then finally, notice that Andrew, having been encountered by Jesus, then shares it with his brother Simon Peter. He shares this experience with his own brother, with a member of his family.

Andrew was so impressed with Jesus. He was so overwhelmed with this experience of having met Jesus, that he goes and he finds his brother Simon, and he tells him, we have found the Messiah, but he doesn't stop there. He brings him to Jesus.

And Jesus looks at Simon and says, you will be called Cephas or Peter, which means rock. And of course, as I've already indicated, Andrew only makes a few more appearances in the Gospel of John, and Peter now comes to the forefront. He becomes one of the key players in this band of disciples, which begins to emerge and converge around Jesus.

If you remember a few years ago, two years ago, a little over two years ago now, when we had Mission Ontario here in Toronto, the Billy Graham Crusade, one of the things that the Billy Graham Crusades are noted for is their program called Operation Andrew. This is the text from which that principle comes. Operation Andrew is simply this, that at a Billy Graham Crusade, you are encouraged, you are invited, you are indeed exhorted to bring a family member or a close friend to come to the crusade to hear the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's a very simple principle, but it's so basic to Christian faith and so basic to a life of discipleship. We place a great deal of emphasis on sending missionaries overseas to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that's an important and a Biblical principle, and we're going to be considering that and looking at the whole theme of missions in our Missions Conference. But one of the fundamental principles of discipleship, one of the Biblical principles of following Jesus, is that we begin to share that reality in our own circle of family, in our own circle of friends.

You see, the fact of the matter is that studies show that the majority of believers come to faith in Christ through the influence of a family member. That's true. That's the reality.

Most people in the world today are Christians through the influence of a father, a mother, a grandparent, a brother, a sister, a son, or a daughter who has helped them to make some connection, whether it's with a church, whether it's an evangelistic crusade, whether it's with some program, whether it's a Bible study, whatever. Those are the connections that matter. Those are the connections that make the difference.

And it's a reminder to me that my first responsibility as a Christian, as a disciple of Jesus, is to my own children, to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to raise them to be disciples of Jesus, and to those other members of my family who have not yet come to faith in Jesus Christ. I may have wider responsibilities. I certainly do as the pastor of this congregation and in other responsibilities that the Lord has called me to, but the first responsibility is to my own family and to my children.

Charles Spurgeon once observed this, I love the way he puts it, that although grace does not run in blood and regeneration is not of blood or of birth, yet it often happens that God uses one of a household to draw the rest to himself. He calls an individual and then uses that person as a sort of spiritual decoy to bring the rest of the family into the gospel net. And that's really what happened, isn't it, with Andrew as Andrew brought his brother to be encountered by Jesus and to be forever changed by him.

Perhaps there's someone in your own life tonight, in your own circle of family or close friends that the Lord wants you to pray about, that the Lord wants to lay upon your heart, that the Lord perhaps wants to use you to bring them to meet Jesus Christ. So what does it mean to follow Jesus tonight? Very simply it means to examine our motives, it means to spend time with Jesus, it means to be willing to share the reality of Jesus with others, particularly our own family and friends. What do you want from Jesus tonight?

What's that question mean to you? Are you willing to come and see where Jesus is staying? And having found Jesus, are you willing then to speak of him, to share him with others, and to bring others to him? Let's pray together.

Lord, we thank you tonight for these first disciples, for Andrew, for John, for their willingness to inquire and to follow our Lord Jesus Christ, and we pray tonight that through these principles and through their example, we might be reminded of your call to us. Lord, sometimes we make this whole theme of discipleship into some mysterious type of thing, and we lay all kinds of things on it, and yet as we look at your word, we see it so simple, that you have called us to follow you in the midst of life in very practical and real ways, down to earth ways, and whatever our circumstance tonight, whatever our need, whatever our situation, Lord, we pray that you would help us and enable us to respond, that we might know what it means to follow you, to follow Jesus in our day. Amen.

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