

Series: Unlikely Encounters

At the Tree

John 1:47-51

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, February 22, 2026

A reading from John 1:47-51: “When Jesus saw Nathanael, He said of him, ‘Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.’ ‘How do you know me?’ Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, ‘I saw you while you were still under the fig tree, before Philip called you.’ Then Nathanael declared, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.’ Jesus said, ‘You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.’ He then added, ‘Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man,’” the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Paul: I totally did that to him last night too. All right, let’s pray as we dive in today. Heavenly Father, Lord, as we begin this series, what we are calling Unlikely Encounters, looking at the gospel of John, where we see these moments of encounter that unlikely people have with you in unlikely places, God, I pray as we step into that journey today, as we begin this journey towards Easter, that Lord, you would just meet us in this space, that unlikely encounters would not just happen on the pages of scripture, but they would happen in our lives, that they would happen in our hearts, in our souls. Lord, so many of us are coming in this week with different things on our hearts and on our minds. Some of us are walking in, and it has just been the best week of our lives, and for some of us, this has been the worst week, and for others, we could not even tell you what happened this week, because it was just part of the mundane. Lord, I pray that you would just break into that today by the power of your Holy Spirit, and that you would speak to us, and we pray these things in Jesus’ name, amen.

All right, so as a pastor, I have a really common conversation with a lot of different people, and truthfully, this conversation is very common, and it happens with people, and it does not really truly matter what age or stage of faith or life people are in. I will meet with people, and this conversation will happen over coffee at shops at Atlas or Starbucks, or it will happen on a phone call on the way to pick up my kids. I will call someone from the church and see how they are doing, and the conversation typically goes something like this. It is someone sitting across from me who says, “Paul, I am doing all of the right things. I am showing up to church. I am praying. I am reading my Bible. I am a part of a small group, and I feel like I have just hit this place in my life where I feel like God is absent, or I do not really sense his presence anymore in my life.” Or maybe someone will come to me, and they say, “Paul, I know all of the theology. I could probably teach people about what I have learned about who God is, but I do not feel like I am experiencing that for myself at all,” and it is this desperation. Sometimes it is almost like a whisper, that they are almost afraid to admit it, and other times it is this quiet desperation, a frustration of like, “I do not understand why I feel like I am doing all of the things that good Christians are supposed to do, and I still feel like I can’t encounter God in my life, and I do not know what to do with that,” and truthfully, when I have those conversations, it rarely ever surprises me, because I have experienced that in my own life.

I have experienced those seasons when truthfully, even as a pastor, there was this time when as a student pastor, I was preaching. I was leading. I was teaching. I was seeing God do all of these great things in the lives of our students, and in my own life, I just felt like, “God, are you there?” and there was not anything wrong with my faith. There was not anything I was not doing right, or there was not some hidden sin. It just felt like God had withdrawn his presence from me in a way that felt tangible and that I could not quite name, and I do not know if you have experienced that before. Maybe in your faith journey, you have just been like, “Actually Paul, that is the majority of my faith journey. I just feel like I am not quite sure if my prayers are making it through the ceiling.” Or maybe you have had those moments where you encounter God in powerful ways, and He is making an impact in your life, and you feel His presence, and it feels like your prayers are being answered by Him and not necessarily even always the way you want, but it feels like you show up, and the songs you are singing just resonate on a deeper level, and you hear the sermon, and you are like, “Oh yeah, that feels like it was just meant for me,” and you can have those moments when you feel very seen by God, and then suddenly it feels like that just dries up, and it is gone.

I think sometimes there is this thing that happens in our faith where there is this gap between the knowledge we have about God and the experience we have of Him in our lives, and usually, I think it is so fascinating, because in our current culture, man, you can encounter God or find out knowledge about God in all sorts of ways. I mean, there are a million Bible apps. There are thousands of theological social influencers. There are even apps where you could like literally on your phone if you wanted to, you could learn Biblical Greek if you really wanted to, if you were that desperate. You can learn so much. You could even, I mean, I heard this week that they even have AI chatbots that will pretend to be God for you and answer questions as if they were Jesus Himself. Yeah, I mean, it is everywhere. If you want to know about God, there is no limit to the access you have at your fingertips about learning about who God is, and yet for many of us, there is a deeper longing that goes beyond just knowledge.

We want to encounter. We want something that is an experience that shows us that God is not just some idea that we analyze, but that He is actually living and active in our lives and in the world, and sometimes that gap between what we see on the news or what we experience in life and between what we know feels really heavy, and if you have ever felt that way, then I think this series is for you. Whether you are in that season right now, or you have experienced that season sometime in your life, you are like, “Paul, I have no idea what you are talking about,” I guarantee you that at some point you will, and so this series, *Unlikely Encounters*, the kind of question before us, unlikely encounters, Jesus encountering unlikely people in unlikely places, and the idea behind it is this. It is what if in the monotony of our lives, in the ordinary aspects of our lives, Jesus is actually far more present than we potentially realize? Maybe sometimes when we are just going through the steps of life, and we feel like God is absent, or He is not entirely present, or sometimes when we are just overwhelmed with the day-to-day, and we do not even take time to pause and to think about God, maybe He is actually more engaged with our lives than we might know or realize.

That is where the story starts today in John chapter one, verse 43. It is the story of a man who is under a fig tree, and what we will see is that this is actually a place of longing. He has this deep ache within him, a longing for God to show up in his life and in his world, and he is sitting there waiting for something to happen. What we will see is that in this unlikely encounter, something changes. Jesus

changes everything in this person's life. It is simply a skeptic in a small town in a quiet setting under a tree, and this is what it says in John chapter 1, verse 43: "The next day, Jesus decided to leave for Galilee, and finding Philip," Jesus found Philip, "He said to him, 'Follow me.'"

This is a fairly common occurrence in the gospels, where Jesus will approach someone, and He will invite them to come follow Him, which is essentially an invitation to discipleship. Jesus is saying, "I want you to come and follow me and be one of my disciples. I want you to learn from me. I want you to see the way that I understand scripture. I want you to understand how I live life, and I want you to become more like me as you follow me," but what is fascinating about the gospels is that this invitation to follow Jesus is actually, it blows out the typical rabbinical tradition of what it meant to follow someone or to call someone to come and follow you. In ancient Israel, what would happen was, young Jewish boys, they would study the Torah, they would study the scriptures of the Old Testament, and the ones who memorized it the best, the ones who understood it the best, if they rose to the top of their class, or if they were in town or whatever, they would go and find a rabbi, seek out a rabbi, and say, "Hey, I would love to follow you. Do I have what it takes?" and then there would be all sorts of quizzes and tests and resumes, and it was this application process to see if this person was worthy to follow this rabbi. Jesus flips all of that on its head, and He goes and finds Philip in a nowhere town, and He says, "I want you to come and follow me," and so Philip, he sees this, and what we are told is as Philip encounters this, it is like he's all-in right away.

What we are told in verse 44, "Philip, like Andrew and Peter, other disciples of Jesus, was from the town of Bethsaida, and Philip found Nathaniel, one of his friends, and said, '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.'" So, he goes, and he finds his friends right after encountering Jesus. He has just met Jesus, and there is something about Jesus inviting him to follow Him where he realizes this is not just a normal rabbi, that I am actually stepping into a story where all of the Old Testament, from the moment Moses wrote the Torah to all of the prophets, there has been this prediction, this messianic promise that someone will come into the world and set things right and make them the way they are supposed to be. He will be God's representative, who will restore things to the way they are supposed to be. I think I found Him. I think in this person, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, I think we have found the person that we have been waiting for. He has finally come. Now what you have to realize is in this statement of him talking about this excitement about I think we have found the person that we have been waiting for centuries for, is that he is stepping into this story of longing and waiting and an ache for God to show up in his world.

I know that we all know this feeling of knowing and waiting and longing for something to happen in our lives. It actually happened for me this week. because I do not know if it did this at your house, but it snowed just a little bit at our house, and I was like, "There's snow!" and it was just like flurries. It was not a blizzard. It was not a snowstorm. There was just like a little bit of snow in my truck, and I was so excited, because we have not had snow in Colorado in like a year, and it feels like we have been waiting for snow to happen. We are all nervous about what will happen this summer and forest fires and all that stuff, and I was like, "Oh my gosh, there is snow." I felt like a little kid on Christmas morning, and then Stephanie was like, "Yeah. I mean, yeah, I know, it is snow. It is just, it is fine," but I was so excited. I felt like I had been waiting for it forever, and we know that feeling when you have been longing and waiting and hoping, and most of the time it is in those spaces that are much more important to us than whether or

not it is snowing outside. It is those places where you are hoping and waiting and praying for God to show up in some way in your life, where He would maybe show up in the life of someone you love and bring them back to faith, or where He would show up in this longing, in this hope, this need that you have in your life, and it is this quiet desperation of waiting. When will God show up in my life? That is what Philip thinks he has found in Jesus at this moment, and so, of course, he goes and tells someone right away, and he has to let them know about this fact. That is the energy that Phillip has in these words. He says, “We found him, this person that we have been waiting for, this person that we have wondered, ‘Where is God? Is He distant? Is He absent? Where is He?’ It is actually happening now at this moment.”

So, he says this to his friend Nathaniel, who responds in a way that probably all of us would truly respond. In verse 46 he says, “Nazareth, can anything good come from there?” Nathaniel is just saying what we were all thinking. I know when you heard this story, and you heard Jesus was from Nazareth, you immediately thought, like, “What? No, Nazareth?” None of you thought that. Like none of you thought Nazareth has anything, like why would that be a big deal? But here’s what is going on in the story. Nazareth is nowhere special. There is nothing in the Old Testament that would say the Messiah is supposed to come from Nazareth. It is just a small rural Jewish town that does not really show up on the map anywhere. It does not have any significance at all, and so of course, Nathaniel at this moment is like, “Wait, what? He is from Nazareth? That is not even named in our scriptures. That does not make any sense.”

It would be like if I came up to you and I said, “Hey, I think we have found the next president of the United States, and they are going to be an awesome, awesome president of the United States. It doesn’t matter what side of the political aisle you are on. You are going to vote for this person. They are amazing.” They are like, “Great, where are they?” “Well, they are in, you know the abandoned strip mall on the side of the highway? If you just come with me there, I promise you will really like who this person is.” It does not make any sense, because Nazareth was so insignificant. There was nothing special about this place. There was nothing that was significant about this place, but Philip’s response to this skepticism about whether or not God could show up in a place as insignificant as Nazareth is so fascinating to me, because he says in verse 46, “Come and see,” and I love that invitation.

I think there is actually something we should learn a little bit about in this approach to evangelism and invitation, because notice what Philip does not do. He does not get into a debate with him. He does not try to prove to him that, no, you know what, like really, if you look at certain things in scripture a certain way, then you would see that Nazareth is really important. He does not try to prove anything to him. He simply says like, “I don’t know. Like fine, you are a skeptic. Why do not you just come and see who Jesus is? Because I think if you encounter Him, and you experience Him, you will see for yourself that He has the ability to change things.”

I think so many times in our life, we feel like we have to fight these battles for God, or we have to prove to other people that Jesus is impactful or the person we should follow, or we feel like we have to get into debates and try to do all of the different things to make the world understand the importance of Jesus, and I wonder what would happen if sometimes we just stepped back, and we said, “You know what? I get the skepticism. I get that honestly, sometimes faith doesn’t really make sense. Why don’t you just come and see? Why don’t you just give it a try and see what Jesus could maybe do with your life?”

That is essentially what Philip says to Nathaniel at this moment, and so having this invitation to come and see in verse 47, it says this, “When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, He said to him, ‘Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit,’” which is a really weird thing to say to a person you have never met before. If you call out someone’s ethnicity and then say that they are not a liar before you have even met them, that would be a little weird. If I were introducing Stephen today to come up and read, and I was like, “Hey, you know what? This is a really amazing Hispanic person, and he is not a liar,” that is not like a great introduction. All of you would be like, “What?” He would probably be offended, some of you would be offended, and you would be like, “What is Paul doing? Why is he sticking his foot in his mouth?” It is a really strange way to greet someone, so what is going on here? Why doesn’t Jesus say like, “Oh, here is Nathanael. He is a good guy”? Why does He get this specific with this language? It does not make any sense, and here is what you need to understand.

There is actually a detail that is happening in the story, that Jesus is trying to call us back to a story that is very foundational to what is happening here. He is trying to bring our attention back to the story of Jacob in the book of Genesis. If you are not familiar with Jacob’s story, what you need to understand is that he is one of the founding fathers of Israel. He is essentially the grandson of Abraham, and so he is a very important person in the story. In fact, he is actually the person, Jacob becomes Israel. His name is changed to the name Israel that the nation takes its name from, so very, very foundational, but what you need to understand about this person is that if I were to tell you that all of Israel’s story is founded on this person changing their name from Jacob, which means “the deceiver” or “the manipulator,” and he was someone who literally we are told he was born a twin, and when he came out of his mother’s womb, he was so, just trying to give you an idea of his personality, he was clinging to his older brother’s foot, trying to get ahead in life, from infancy, and then you see that pattern play out through his whole life. He is constantly deceiving and manipulating. He is tricking his father. He is lying to his brother. He meets his father-in-law, and he tries to trick and deceive him. He is a person who, everywhere he goes, he thinks he has to try to prove himself and deceive people in order to get or receive blessing, and that is his character, and so when you hear, “An Israelite in whom there is no deceit,” it is pulling back very specifically to this person, and Jesus is drawing a comparison: “One of our founding fathers, Israel, was a deceiver, but here is an Israelite who is from this person’s family tree, and in him there is no deceit.” He is trying to draw a contrast. It is as if He is saying, “There is something new happening here at this moment, and so I want you to pay attention to what is going to happen in this story.” So, in verse 48, Nathaniel responds to Jesus, and he says, “How do you know me?” Which feels like a really fair question. If someone has just greeted you, called out your ethnicity, and then told you that you were not a liar, like, “What? How do you know? What do you know about me?” and Jesus responds. He said, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip even called you to me.”

Now there are two things that are happening here. I think we can read that, and we can think, “Wow, this is Jesus’s way of showing us that He has some supernatural giftings, that He is empowered by the Spirit, and He is the Son of God, and so He can predict or understand and see things that normal people could not see,” and that is absolutely true. There is a miracle happening here, but there is something even deeper. The location is not just about Jesus knowing a detail He should not have known. It is calling out something that we are supposed to understand, that the fig tree was actually this Old Testament space that

was a sign of messianic promise, and so there are scripture passages that talk about when the Messiah comes and when He sets all things right, then you will be able to sit under the fig tree as if nothing is wrong with the world, and you will have peace. It also turns into this place where some of the prophets, talk about this longing that people have for the day of the fig tree, and so what you are seeing here is that this person, Nathaniel, it is not just that he is sitting under some random tree. What he is actually doing potentially is it is this call to the fig tree. He is experiencing this longing, this hope, this desire for God to show up and move in his world, and Jesus is saying here, “I see that longing. I see that desire that you have had. I see the way that you have been hoping and praying and waiting for God to do something.”

He is saying essentially that I know way more about you than you could even imagine. It is not just that I know who you are and that you are not a deceitful person. I actually know the longings and the desires of your heart, and something about that knowledge pierces through Nathaniel’s soul, and so he says to Jesus, in verse 49, “Rabbi,” teacher, “you are the Son of God, and you are the King of Israel,” and he moves from this declaration. I mean, this is the person who just like a few sentences ago was saying, “Nazareth, really? Like Jesus from Nazareth? That is the one that we have been hoping for and waiting for? That is the one who will solve all the deepest longings of our heart?” and now here declaring that Jesus is the King that he has waited his entire life for, that generations of his family tree have been longing for. The Son of God, that was promised all the way back at the beginning in the Garden of Eden, has finally come. It is this staggering declaration where he is saying this person, this Jesus of Nazareth, is the one that we have been waiting for centuries for.

I want to pause in the story in John 1, and I want to briefly take us back to Genesis 28, because in order to understand what Jesus says here and how He responds to Nathaniel’s claim, it is really important to understand this story about Jacob, because what happens in Genesis 28 is Jacob reaches this point in his life where he has deceived his brother, and his father has passed away, and he had deceived his father out of his father’s blessing, and then he essentially had taken the birthright of his older brother, and so once his father passes, his older brother says, “I am going to kill you for what you have done,” and so he flees, and he runs away, and he ends up in the middle of the wilderness with nothing. He literally has nothing. What we are told is in this wilderness place, he is so impoverished and destitute that he literally, all he has for a pillow is a rock. It says he lays down on a rock, because that is all he has between the ground and the heavens above. I mean, he is at the lowest of lows. You talk about longing, you talk about that ache, like he has nothing left. No future, no hope, nothing.

Jacob is in that space as he is sleeping with his head on a rock, and he has a dream, and in this dream, he sees heaven opened, and he sees a ladder descending from heaven to where he is, and he sees these angels that are going up and down this ladder, and at the top of this ladder, he sees the presence of God, which says to him, “Jacob, I will never leave you. Wherever you go, I will be with you, and I will never leave you,” and then Jacob wakes up, and he realizes that this place where he has fallen asleep in the middle of the wilderness with nothing else around him and nothing to his name is this declaration that God has given him that He will be with him. He literally sees the heavens opened and God declaring over his life, “I will be with you wherever you go,” and he is stunned, and this is what he says in Genesis 28, verses 16 and 17. It says, “When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.’”

I love that. Jacob is like, “God is here. Something has happened. I thought it was just a random place in the wilderness where there is nothing special about this place. It does not even have a name, and yet God is here,” and he realized, this realization about God being here, it causes him to fear. He was so afraid, and he said, “How awesome is this place. This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven.” Now when he says the gate of heaven, Jacob is waking up to the realization that God is in this ordinary ground, this ordinary place. It is not a special place, but there is something about it where God has chosen to reveal Himself in a very specific way, that he has seen heaven open. This is the place where something is happening, and access to God is available. This place is where God is making himself known to Jacob in a very tangible way, and he recognizes that the barrier between heaven and his circumstances is paper thin in a way he did not realize.

So, let’s go back to the story in the gospel of John and see Jesus’ response. In verse 50, He says, “You believed because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You believed because I told you that I saw the longing in your heart. I knew what was going on within you, but I am here to tell you, you will see even greater things than that,” essentially saying, “If you follow me, you will see greater things than that.” What are the greater things? “And he added, ‘Very truly, I tell you, will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’” Do you see the connection? He is calling back to the story where Jacob encountered the presence of God, and he realized that the distance between heaven and his circumstances was paper thin, but Jesus changes a detail in the story, because there is nothing special about that place, and yet God chose to reveal Himself through a ladder where heaven descended and ascended upon this place, but the detail Jesus changes in the story is that there is no ladder anymore. There is a person, and Jesus is saying, “If you follow me, what you will see is that in me, heaven is coming to Earth, and that distance between the longing and the ache in your heart, the place where you have felt distant and longing and waiting for God to show up, it is going to be found in me,” because you no longer need to find a specific place. You no longer need to encounter a specific area. It is not about getting to the right city or to the right place. It is all about a person. He changes that crucial detail, and He says that the place where heaven opens up is now in me.

Jesus is saying that Jesus is the place where heaven and Earth meet, and He is reframing everything about this story. He is saying that heaven is not opened by the heavens opening themselves or us finding a way to get to heaven, that it is actually opened by heaven coming down to us in the person of Christ, and that changes everything, because when we talk about this longing, when we talk about this desire we have to see God move in our lives, this hope, this waiting, this place where we feel like we are not quite sure if He is present, Jesus is saying, “I am more real to you than anything else in your life, even if it doesn’t feel like that’s true.”

In college, I had this professor. She was one of my favorite professors at John Brown University, where I went to school, and she was a spiritual director, and one of these classes we took with her is something like the spiritual journey and how to walk with Christ and become like Jesus, and one of the things she said that has stuck with me for my entire life is she would talk about, there are these places, and not talking geography, but just like places, moments in our lives, where it seems like the distance between heaven and our reality becomes much smaller, and she would call them thin places, and it was not an idea original to her.

That idea was actually rooted in Celtic tradition and faith around Christianity, but she would call these places thin places, the moments where, and we have all had them. It could be like you see a sunset, and suddenly you realize that there is a God in the universe who is painting these beautiful tapestries every time the sun sets. It could be the moment when you first hold a newborn in your hands. It is not really a moment of hype. It can happen in worship settings, absolutely, but it is not about a charismatic leader or preacher. It is just this moment when God comes near in a tangible way that changes everything about your story. They can happen in grief, or they can happen in beauty, but it is essentially that moment when heaven presses itself up against the surface of ordinary life, and you realize God is here, and He has been here all along. He has never left me. It is that moment Jacob says where surely the Lord was in this place, and I was not aware of it. It was Nathaniel sitting under the fig tree longing for the Messiah to show up in his life, assuming that Nazareth was too small, too ordinary, and too unimpressive for God to show up.

I think sometimes we fall under this idea that in order for God to show up in our lives, He has to show up in the impressive places. It is in the mountaintop experiences. God could never show up in my life when I am sitting in traffic or in the pickup line at my child's school. That is not where God shows up. He needs the impressive, the extraordinary, the extravagant, and what this story is saying, what Jesus is saying is, no. We think we have to find these places where the longing for our soul will be fixed or found in certain places or certain experiences, but He is saying it is found in a person. It is found only in Him. He is flipping all of our assumptions on their head and dismantling them, saying heaven does not open in impressive places. It opens in a person, and that person is Jesus, and so the question as we start on this series is, "What if the Lord is in this place? What if He is in your story? What if Jesus is in your doubt or in your kitchen or in your exhaustion, and maybe you, like Jacob, just have not been aware of it?"

That ache that I mentioned at the beginning of the story, the one that I hear in conversations across coffee tables or on the phone or in my office, is so real, and it is tangible. I have felt it myself. We want to know that heaven is not sealed off from us, that God is living and active in our lives. We want to experience Him, not just believe ideas about Him, so when we say that Jesus is the place where heaven opens up, it is to say that in Him, God has come all the way to us, not as an idea, not as a distant force in the universe, but in flesh and blood, in the living Son of God, in Christ, the eternal Son, who steps into the dust of our life and does not step back or recoil. He does not wait for us to climb high enough or clean ourselves up enough or pray eloquently enough. He draws near to us, and He descends. He bridges the chasm between us and heaven.

In Jesus, the holiness of God and the brokenness of humanity, they meet together, and instead of judgment consuming us, mercy embraces us. Jesus is not the person who merely points us the way to God. He says, "Follow me, and I will lead you to God, because it is opening up in me," and what we are going to see in the story is those encounters happen over dinner tables and by fires next to a beach. They happen on dusty roads next to a well. All of these encounters are Jesus stepping into the story of sinners and skeptics and strugglers and saints like you and me and saying, "I am real, and I am the living God." This is the gospel that Jesus came to proclaim, that God has drawn near to us. He has come all the way to us, and He bridges the gap between that ache that we could never fill ourselves and the longing that we have and who He is.

So, the invitation in this series is simply this: just come and see. As we walk through the gospel of John, just come and see who Jesus is, and allow Him to meet you in those places in your life where you feel like there is no hope left. Allow Him to meet you in the places where you feel like this longing will never be fixed. Allow Him to meet you in those places where you feel this distance, like, “Am I really even sure God is there?” and I think what you will see is that when you encounter the person of Jesus, when He steps into your story, He has the power and the ability to change everything, to change everything.

In a moment, we are going to watch some stories of baptism. here at Waterstone, it is a baptism Sunday, and there are some stories that I want you to hear about and encounter the way that God showed up in some of these people’s lives and changed everything about who they were, but here is the second invitation along with that. It is that some of you might be here today, and you are thinking, “I feel this gap. I feel this distance. Maybe I have been following Jesus for a while, but I do not really know what the next step is.” There are some of you who have maybe not made that choice or that decision to follow after Jesus. The invitation for you today is not to simply just watch someone be baptized, but it is to come yourself and be baptized yourself, to step forward toward the cross and to talk to me or one of our pastors and just tell us that you are ready to do what Jesus invited Philip and Nathaniel to do: “Come and follow me, and see what I can do.” So, let’s take a look at these screens and hear these stories of the way that Jesus has changed these people’s lives.

Video: “After having COVID in August 2020, I got so sick, literally January first of 2021, that I could hardly even watch TV. Like my mom had to carry me upstairs. I could not do it myself. I was lying on the couch all day constantly, and I got to a point where doctors were not helping, and if anything, they were making it worse. So, I had no hope in them or anything, and I did not know what else to do, so I just remember being like, ‘God, I need your help,’ and He showed up, and He was there, and that was when I truly built a relationship with Him.”

“I was born into a Catholic family. Then after I did that, I moved away from my mom and dad. I went to, then I moved over to the Christian religion. I was in and out of different religions, obviously. Then I came back around to where I wanted to be, meeting, trying to get back, connected with Him.”

“I decided to get baptized because in kindergarten we were in Mrs. Stimm’s class, and we were talking about the Bible, and she asked, ‘Who would want to accept Jesus into their heart?’ and some people raised their hands, and we went down into the hallway and prayed.”

“Giving my life to Jesus and following Him to me means like almost showing Him how much I appreciate everything He has done for me. He has given me new life, and so I am going to give Him my life. I also want to help. I want Him to be able to work through me, so I can help other people too.”

“Before I came to rely on Jesus, I was on drugs. I was drinking all the time. Ever since I met Jesus, I have stopped drinking, and I have gotten off of all the drugs.”

“I am growing in my relationship by coming to church regularly, doing Bible studies at home, spending quiet time by myself, just sitting with God and praying. I think those are the big things.”

“That is what it means to me, showing people that I would follow God for the rest of my life.”

“The first week after it is starting to get, like after the first week or two weeks, it is starting to get sober is what I felt in there. I felt like, it felt like there is somebody standing next to me or if I was going

through those really bad withdrawals from that. It felt like somebody was there with me, I mean, like either sitting underneath the bed or just sitting there, just making sure that it was okay, that I was okay.”

“I am choosing to be baptized now because I finally feel at home in church, and I feel like I just really need to show Jesus and show myself that this is the path I am meant to be on.”

“It means to me that I am showing everyone that I am going to follow Jesus for the rest of my life.”

“The decision to be baptized is because I want to connect with Jesus and lean on Him to get me through what I am going through now and rely on Jesus to help every day. Not just in need of you, but every day He is, and that is what it means, and to rely on Him, and to connect, to learn about what He is like, his word and how He helps people.”

38:42 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

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