

FOUNDATIONS FOR  
LAITY RENEWAL

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*Transforming Daily Life*

719 Earl Garrett Street  
Kerrville, TX 78028

Three Sermon Outlines on

*Work and Faith*

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***Need Series Title***

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SERMON NOTES

*The  
High Calling  
of Our  
Daily Work*

*Making a real living connects you to a bigger picture,  
a grand design, an abundant life.*

*Each of us has only a small part to play, but what a part!  
It's the high calling of our daily work.*

– Howard Butt, Jr., of Laity Lodge  
TheHighCalling.org

## Sermon 2: “Come and See”

### John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

**Theological Point:** Philip’s words to Nathanael, “Come and see,” are a wonderful model for us in learning how to share our Christian faith with others and invite them into the experience of faith. Talking about our faith is often difficult. But there are many ways to say to others, “Come and see.” Anyone can do it. God does the rest.

### Introduction: Bearing Witness to Our Faith

#### A. Why Is It So Hard?

#### B. “Come and See”

#### C. God Does the Rest

### Conclusion: You Can Say It

**Introduction: Bearing Witness to Our Faith.** The passage in John 1:43-51 is rich in a number of themes one may develop in a sermon. I want to suggest working with Philip’s three little words “Come and see” to encourage people in the pew to bear witness to their faith and invite others into the experience of faith.

There are a number of ways one might begin such a sermon. One way is to retell in your own words the story of Jesus’ call of Philip and Nathanael. As preachers we can no longer assume our listeners are familiar with this story. Levels of biblical literacy in our culture and churches do not encourage that assumption. Consider retelling the story vividly, using your own imagination of the characters and the sights, sounds, and smells of first-century Palestine.

Another opening for this sermon could be to ask some questions. For example: What does it mean to “bear witness” to our faith? How does one do that? Have you ever had the experience of someone “witnessing” to you in a way that became a negative experience? Do you find it difficult to talk with others about your faith? If so, why? What does the word “evangelism” mean to you?

The sermon introduction could also offer a story or example of *how not to* bear witness to one’s faith. Many of us have had unpleasant experiences of people “witnessing to us” in ways that were self-righteous, aggressive, or arrogant. I have found that such negative experiences often discourage Christians from talking about their faith at all. “Evangelism” becomes a troubling and scary word for many Christians.

I’ll never forget the time I was tent camping in a state park and was “witnessed to” one morning in a bathhouse while I was shaving. As soon as the man confronted me with his beliefs, I knew this would not be a true conversation or dialogue about faith. I was being tested. Only the right language and the right answers would be satisfactory to pass the test. Ever since that experience I have often thought about what a different model of witness Philip gives us in his words to Nathanael, “Come and see.”

Think also about *positive experiences* you or someone you know have had in bearing witness to faith. Which of these would make a good opening or illustration for a sermon?

**A. Why Is It So Hard?** Jesus found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Philip found his friend Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathanael said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to Nathanael, “Come and see” (vv. 43-46).

After laying out the heart of the story of Philip and Nathanael, you might turn to the question of why many people find it difficult to talk about their faith. The issues here will differ depending on the context in which we do ministry. Many churches place more emphasis on evangelism and sharing one's faith than others do. I do ministry in a predominantly mainline context where encouraging people to talk about their faith is a challenge. Whatever your ministry context—more evangelical or mainline—this is an important topic to address. But you might do it differently depending on your setting and audience.

1. Why do many of us find it difficult to talk about faith? Maybe we have been strong-armed by well-intentioned people, and we want nothing to do with it for fear of appearing self-righteous. Maybe it's those experiences of people on the street corner carrying signs that say "Repent." Maybe it's because of people who come to our door with their Bibles and tracts. Maybe it's our fear of being associated with them that makes us reluctant to say anything at all about faith. Maybe we fear being seen as pious, dogmatic, narrow-minded, less than sophisticated.

John Vannorsdall, former chaplain at Yale and president of The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, speaks to these concerns in a story of being visited by door-to-door evangelists. He captures what is for many people the negative experience of bearing witness to one's faith. He says of those who come to his door:

*"They come with a gift, a personal and important gift. I understand that....[But] they aren't just visitors. They come to tell us what to believe and how to live, and there is a violence in that against which we'd prefer to close and lock the door...."*

*"It makes me want to run, or at least to pretend that I'm not at home. I cherish the gifts of God's grace. I fear people who would take away, by the violence of their unwavering demands, the more graceful kingdom that God has so quietly given."* (John W. Vannorsdall, *Dimly Burning Wicks: Reflections on the Gospel After a Time Away*, Fortress Press 1982, pp. 29-33).

2. Our culture doesn't encourage talk about faith, does it? Faith and religion are not commonly accepted topics of conversation in social settings. Many of us spend much of our time in the workplace or other environments that are secular, intellectual, and pluralistic. Talk of religion is uncommon or discouraged. "To each his own" people say of religion and politics. There are plenty of people around us who are skeptical, cynical, or downright hostile to religion, especially organized religion—the church. It's okay to be "spiritual but not religious," people say, often meaning, "Don't talk to me about organized religion."

3. Some people in our churches are uncomfortable talking about faith because it's too personal. They wouldn't know what to say or how to talk about things that are so deep and private. So it's easier just to go to church and try to live a good life and do it quietly. But the question remains: What does it mean for us to bear witness to our faith and share the gospel with others? How do we do that in words and actions?

**B. "Come and See."** After meeting Jesus, Philip was excited and found his friend Nathanael to tell him about Jesus. But Nathanael's response was skeptical. "Can anything good ever come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth was a nowhere place, an insignificant village never mentioned anywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures and certainly not associated with messianic expectations. Nathanael's response likely carried with it some longstanding prejudice.

1. Philip responded to Nathanael, not by arguing with Nathanael, or trying to convince him otherwise about Jesus or Nazareth. Philip responded with just three words, "Come and see" (v. 46). "Come and see for yourself, Nathanael. Come check it out. Don't take my word for it. I'm not here to strong-arm you or convince you, or cram my truth or belief down your throat. Just come, see for yourself, make up your own mind."

In a world where it's so hard to talk about faith, Philip is a simple example of what it means to bear witness to our faith. Philip simply invites others to "come and see." To see and experience for themselves what has been meaningful and life-changing for him. Philip's example suggests that ours is not to cajole or convert, but simply to invite others to experience God's love. If they're not interested, or they dismiss our invitation, that's okay. We'll invite them again sometime. Our job is to invite. The rest is up to God.

2. This would be a good time in the sermon to ask people how they can invite other people to experience Christ. The questions might be: Who around you is hurting and needs your love, along with a word about what your faith has meant to you? When recently have you invited a friend or family member to come to church with you or to attend a concert, dinner, or Bible study? Who around you might be open to reading and studying the Bible with you one-on-one in a coffeehouse or other setting? How can you invite someone to "come and see" who Jesus is and what the Bible and the Christian faith are really about?

3. An important aspect of bearing witness to our faith is by living the good news of the gospel in daily life. In this sermon outline I'm placing primary emphasis on the idea of the spoken invitation to others. The way we live our lives is an integral element in that process. It would be good to include in your sermon some thoughts on the power of living the good news of Jesus as a witness to others. By doing this we often have opportunity to invite others to experience the good news that has transformed how we live our daily lives.

The most powerful witness we can bear to the gospel is when others see us "doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8). You might spend some time on the relationship between living our faith and talking about our faith.

Henry French says, "True evangelism is simply sharing in one way or another what's real for you. Evangelism is *speaking and living* the good news of God's love, God's justice, God's forgiveness, God's compassion, and God's salvation. Usually living the good news will come before speaking the good news" (*Book of Faith Lenten Journey: 40 Days with the Lord's Prayer*, Augsburg 2009, p. 61).

**C. God Does the Rest.** Once Philip invites Nathanael to come and see Jesus, Philip disappears from the story. He has completed his task. When Jesus sees Nathanael coming toward him, he says of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asks Jesus, "How did you know this about me?" Jesus answers, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replies, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!" Jesus answers, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these" (vv. 47-50).

The encounter between Nathanael and Jesus is cryptic, but rich in meaning and symbolism. There is plenty here for another sermon on another day. But the bottom line is this: Because of his direct encounter with Jesus, Nathanael moves from skepticism and doubt to an affirmation of faith. What changes Nathanael's life isn't Philip's persuasiveness, but Nathanael's own encounter with Jesus. Nathanael's own experience leads him to declare, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

1. Philip's example reminds us that the willingness of others to embrace the gospel doesn't finally rest on our powers of persuasion. The ability to see Jesus comes as a gift from God through the graceful and mysterious movements of the Holy Spirit. Ours is to take others by the hand and invite them to get a glimpse of what we've seen.

2. The culture around us is often indifferent and skeptical, if not hostile, to the church and to talk of faith. In our secular, post-Christian, pluralistic world all "truth" is often seen as relative and a matter of one's opinion. But "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it" (John 1:5). As people of God we're called to bear witness to that light.

**Conclusion: You Can Say It.** "Come and see." Simple, open, inviting words. As the sermon moves toward its conclusion, ask your listeners, "When's the last time you said to someone, 'Come and see'?" There are many different ways to say the words. Offer your listeners some examples to help them connect this message to their daily lives.

For example, maybe it's as simple as saying to someone what your church means to you, or how it's been helpful in your life. Maybe it's inviting someone to come to church because they're going through a tough time with business or family troubles. Maybe they've had a divorce, they've lost a spouse, or they're lonely. Maybe they have a kid who might enjoy the friendship of the youth group. Maybe inviting others is being willing to talk about how you feel God's been at work in your life.

This is not about forcing Jesus, your faith, or your church, on anyone. It's about being willing to say to someone in some small way, "This is what gives me life and hope, and keeps me going." "This is what God's love means to me." "This is what my faith has meant to me."

The sermon closes by asking for a response from hearers: "Come and see" are words anyone can learn to say. You can say them. I can say them. Don't worry. You can do it. Try it. You'll find a way. Just three little words, "Come and see." God does the rest.

**Connection to Daily Life and Work:** Think about your relationships with family members and friends who are not people of faith. Think about people you know well who believe in God but who have left the church or are indifferent to the church. Think about the people you know casually—that barista at the coffee shop, that neighbor on your block, your hair stylist, a colleague at work, or the clerk in the grocery store. They are all people whom God created and loves. When's the last time you invited someone to "Come and see"? How can you do it?