

Vision Sunday – Curious to Commissioned (John 1:35-51, 20:19-23) Sonrise Church • Jan 7, 2024 • www.isonrise.com

In this life, Jesus wants to take us on a journey of faith. Here at Sonrise, we have referred to this journey as our “discipleship pathway.” Under James’ leadership this pathway had four major steps: connect, grow, serve, and lead. This clearly laid out pathway gave everyone a step to take wherever they found themselves on their spiritual journey. Knowing the start and finish of the journey helped to keep people on track and moving forward. About 20 months ago, I became the lead pastor and began a slow process of learning the history and spiritual health of this church. Many of you participated in our spiritual health survey, which gave me and the staff a tremendous amount of information about your perspective on the spiritual health of our church and your own faith. Through much prayer and discussion, we, as a staff, believed that God was calling us to a new vision that was built on the old vision. The new vision wasn’t meant to be a replacement as much as it was an update. We believed we needed to amplify some of the core values of the old vision. We also needed to add some new things that would allow us to reach our ever-changing community and meet the spiritual needs of our present members. This means that this present season for us looks old and new at the same time.

Two of the main core values that we wanted to keep and even amplify in our new vision were found at the beginning and the end of the discipleship pathway. When I say “end” I don’t mean a state of perfection, but rather a state of maturity. We will see today, from the gospel of John, the beginning and end of the discipleship pathway Jesus led his first followers on. In this, we will see how Jesus sets the stage in the beginning and where Jesus wants us all to get to. He doesn’t want us to stop at the halfway point. Jesus doesn’t want us to finish at a false summit. Sadly, many followers of Jesus finish at a false summit. If we stop halfway, we will hurt our spiritual health and weaken the church.

Big Idea: Community is a false summit. Community is great. It is a part of the old and new discipleship pathway. False summits are a part of any hiking journey, but they are not the destination. Both James and I want you to find community, we just don’t want your spiritual journey to end there. Jesus wants you to move to the final stage of spiritual maturity, which is to be commissioned, being sent out into the world to lead others into a relationship with him. Let’s look at the beginning and end of Jesus’ journey with his disciples to see the journey he wants to take us all on and two of the core values of our old and new vision.

John 1:35-42, “³⁵ The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’” ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, ‘What are you seeking?’ And they said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ ³⁹ He said to them, ‘Come and you will see.’ So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas’ (which means Peter).

In this passage, we see Jesus calling several of his first followers. Jesus showed hospitality to the curiosity of two of the disciples of John the Baptist. John saw himself as the forerunner of Jesus. He was focused on preparing people for the Messiah. John told those who gathered to hear him teach

that Jesus was God's promised messiah. It is no surprise that Andrew and another unnamed disciple of John sought out Jesus after John said that he was the "Lamb of God." Not all of John's followers left him for Jesus, but at this moment at least two were intrigued enough by his statement about Jesus to check this new teacher out.

Jesus noticed their curiosity and welcomed it. He asked the two men what they were seeking. They showed that they wanted to follow Jesus by calling him "teacher." Jesus welcomed their curiosity and invited them to where he was staying. These two former disciples of John and Jesus hung out for hours. The "tenth hour" was a phrase that meant ten hours after sunrise, which was about 4:00 pm, which would give them several hours before the day ended. We don't know what these men discussed with Jesus, but whatever they talked about it greatly impacted Andrew. He became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah.

Andrew had to tell his brother Peter about Jesus. Andrew followed the simple strategy of bringing his brother to Jesus. He believed that the conversational hospitality of Jesus would convince his brother just like it did for him. Andrew had experienced Jesus welcome and satisfy his curiosity and he believed Peter would have a similar experience. In the next section, we will see how someone can express curiosity and skepticism at the same time. This mixed response also finds hospitality.

John 1:43-51, "43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.'" 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'" 46 Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.'" 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!' 48 Nathanael said to him, 'How do you know me?' Jesus answered him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.'" 49 Nathanael answered him, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' 50 Jesus answered him, 'Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.'" 51 And he said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.'

Here Jesus took the initiative to recruit a new follower. Like Jesus' conversation with Andrew, we don't know what Jesus said to Philip, but we know that whatever he shared also had a significant impact on him. Philip used different language than Andrew did to describe who he believed Jesus to be. Both of their descriptions were rooted in Old Testament prophecy. Philip believed that Jesus was the fulfillment of Moses' prophecy in Deuteronomy 18, where he spoke of a future prophet of his caliber ministering to God's people. Philip shared his appraisal of Jesus with his friend Nathanael. Nathanael was skeptical about what Philip said. His hesitation was most likely based on his knowledge of the Old Testament. No prophecy spoke of the messiah coming from Nazareth. According to the prophet Micah, the messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, which Jesus was, but it appears that neither Philip nor Nathanael knew this fact. Nathanael's skepticism didn't keep him from accepting Philip's invitation to "come and see." This phrase, "come and see," was similar to what Jesus said to Andrew and the other disciple of John. Philip wasn't offended or impatient with Nathanael's hesitations. He was hospitable to them and he knew that Jesus would welcome them as well. After his encounter with Jesus, Nathanael was convinced that he was worth following.

As a church, we have attempted to show hospitality to the curious and are committed to continuing this practice. Our new discipleship pathway has several simple and relational steps for those who are curious about our church and Jesus. We are not offended by hesitations, questions, and apprehensions. If you are spiritually curious and not yet ready to commit to Jesus, this is a safe place for you. Hospitality to curiosity was a hallmark of Jesus' ministry and is a core value of our church. Jesus wants us all to follow him. He will not force us to follow. He invites us into a relationship and is patient with us as we take steps toward him.

Jesus graciously invited his first followers to live in community with him. They experienced several highs and lows while journeying with Jesus throughout first-century Palestine. They witnessed miracles, heard profound teachings, and participated with Jesus in ministry. They also failed to understand some of Jesus' harder sayings, hurt each other's feelings, and abandoned Jesus when he was arrested. After Jesus was resurrected, he came to his disciples and revealed to them the final step in their maturity.

John 20:19-23, "19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

Jesus' statement of peace showed that he didn't hold their previous failures against them. He was not going to abandon them even though they had abandoned him. He enlisted them to imitate him. He gave them a calling similar to the one God the Father gave him. This is outstanding and overwhelming. God the Father sent the Son to take on human flesh, minister by the power of the Holy Spirit, and proclaim forgiveness through his death and resurrection. This work was now passed to them. They too needed to "take on flesh" by empathizing with others and communicating in ways that were understandable to them. Jesus gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit to ensure that they would have all the power they needed to live out this monumental mission. This statement on forgiveness is not teaching that individual believers have the authority to forgive the sins of others in themselves. We must read this in the context of the entire bible. The forgiveness of sins is always related to believing in Jesus. The disciples would pronounce forgiveness on people who believed the gospel and would warn that forgiveness was withheld from those who rejected it.

This "sending out" is what we call commissioning. We are convinced that this is not an advanced stage for a select few. This stage of maturity may look different for everyone, but it is where Jesus wants everyone to get to. Jesus calls us into community and sends us out into our communities. This is why as a church we are more concerned with the sending capacity of our church than the seating capacity of our auditorium. We believe that healthy things not only grow, but they multiply. This is why we are committed to planting churches. This is why we are committed to helping you discover the unique calling that God has placed on your life. The journey that God has you on ends with commissioning and not community.

Community is a false summit. Community is an essential step in the discipleship journey. We talk about the importance of finding healthy spiritual community often. If you have been here for more than a few weeks you have probably heard us talk about how vital small groups are to your spiritual walk. Community is essential to the process of growth, but it is not the end of the process. The same words that Jesus said to his first followers, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you,” he says to every follower in this church.

Will you see that you are sent? You are sent to your family, your job, your neighborhood. There are so many spiritual orphans around you that God has sent you out to love and serve. Your address is not an accident and your career is not a matter of chance. The sovereign creator of humanity has sent you as an ambassador of his love to his spiritual orphans. You are already “sent,” will you see it? Imagine for a moment if you did. Imagine if from the moment you stepped out of this building you saw yourself as sent. Imagine if you saw the sovereign hand of God intentionally placing you in every space you found yourself in. You would view every conversation and interaction as holy and sacred. That does not mean you would say “Amen” after every sentence, but it does mean you would look for opportunities to bring those around you just one step closer to Jesus.

Life Level Application

- 1) **Head:** Read Philippians 1:12-18. Explain Paul’s perspective on the hardship he was facing. What made Paul “rejoice?” Are there any past hardships in your life you can see like Paul did?

- 2) **Heart:** Read Luke 19:1-10. Describe the degree of Zacchaeus’ curiosity. How did the crowd view him? How did Jesus treat him? How do you think you would have reacted in this story?

- 3) **Hands:** Read Colossians 4:3-4. How can praying a prayer like this in the morning change your perspective during the rest of the day?

- 4) **Habits:** Where are you on the discipleship journey? What is your next step on the journey?