WITHIN REACH · WEEK 4

Come and See

September 6, 2026 · John 1:35–51 · Pastor Bart Denny

THE BIG IDEA

Those who meet Jesus bring others to Him, and then trust Him with the rest.

This guide works two ways. On your own, take one section a day through the week, or use the daily readings near the end. In a group, plan on about an hour: read the passage aloud, talk through the background, then choose the questions that fit your group. Nobody has to answer every one.

Read **John 1:35–51** at least twice, once quietly and once aloud. If you have time, start at John 1:1. This is the fourth week of Within Reach. We've named our ONE (the person within our reach who, as far as we know, doesn't yet know Jesus), we've committed to pray for them, and last week, in Luke 15, we saw a God who goes after the one who is missing. This week asks the next question: will I ever actually invite this person to come closer?

Where this passage sits

John's Gospel opens with some of the biggest theology anywhere in Scripture: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1). Before John tells us much about what Jesus does, he wants us to know who Jesus is: God in the flesh, come to live among us (1:14).

Then, starting in verse 19, that enormous truth begins touching ordinary lives. John the Baptist has drawn crowds to the Jordan, and religious leaders from Jerusalem want to know who he is. He tells them plainly that he is not the Messiah. He is a voice preparing the way for someone greater (1:19–27). The next day he sees Jesus and says, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29).

Our passage covers the next two days. One witness leads to another: John points to Jesus, two disciples follow, Andrew finds his brother, Jesus finds Philip, and Philip finds Nathanael. By the end of the chapter, Jesus has been called Lamb of God, Rabbi, Messiah, the one Moses and the prophets wrote about, Son of God, King of Israel and Son of Man. John wants us to see who Jesus is through the eyes of the first people who met Him.

A few words worth a closer look

"The Lamb of God" (1:29, 36)

Every Jewish listener would have thought of sacrifice: the Passover lamb (Exodus 12) and the servant "led like a lamb to the slaughter" who bears the sins of many (Isaiah 53:7, 12). John isn't pointing his disciples toward another interesting teacher. He's pointing them to the One God has sent to deal with our deepest problem.

"What do you want?" (1:38)

These are the first words Jesus speaks in John's Gospel. They can also be translated "What are you looking for?" It's a question worth hearing for ourselves.

"Come, and you will see" (1:39)

Before Philip ever says "Come and see," Jesus says it first. Our invitations echo His.

"Messiah" (1:41)

A Hebrew word meaning "anointed one." John translates it for his readers: *Christ* is the Greek word with the same meaning.

"Cephas" (1:42)

Aramaic for *rock*; *Peter* is the Greek form. Jesus names Simon for who he will become, long before he looks anything like a rock.

"Under the fig tree" (1:48)

In the Old Testament, sitting under your own fig tree is a picture of peace and safety (Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10), and later Jewish writings picture teachers studying the Law in a fig tree's shade. Whatever Nathanael was doing there, he thought he was alone, and Jesus saw him.

"Son of Man" (1:51)

Jesus' favorite way of speaking about Himself. It reaches back to Daniel 7:13–14, where "one like a son of man" receives everlasting authority from God.

---

1 Those who meet Jesus bring others

READ John 1:35–45 and John 3:27–30

Notice what John the Baptist is willing to do. These are his own disciples. They've been learning from him and following his ministry. When Jesus walks by, John points them away from himself. Later, when some of his followers worry that people are leaving him for Jesus, he answers, "He must become greater; I must become less" (3:30). That's healthy Christian witness. The goal isn't to gather people around us. It's to say, "Look at Jesus."

The two disciples spend the day with Jesus, and one of them is Andrew. Verse 41 says, "The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon." Pastor Bart pointed out how little Andrew knows at this point. He hasn't seen Jesus feed five thousand people or call Lazarus out of a tomb. He hasn't stood beneath the cross or seen the risen Christ. He has spent part of one day with Jesus, and he already knows that Simon needs to meet Him. Then comes one of the simplest descriptions of evangelism in the Bible: "And he brought him to Jesus" (1:42).

Andrew had no idea what Jesus would do with his brother. He couldn't have known that this impulsive fisherman would preach at Pentecost and become a leader of the early church. He didn't need to know. He started with someone he already knew and loved, someone whose strengths and faults he knew well.

Then the pattern repeats, but look at the order in verse 43. Before Philip finds anybody, Jesus finds Philip. We are not people who figured God out and decided to recruit others. Jesus came looking for us. Wesleyans call this *prevenient grace*: God is at work in a person's life long before they turn toward Him. The gospel then moves through

relationships. That doesn't make Christians salespeople. It means that when Jesus becomes good news to us, we start thinking about people we love.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What's something you've recommended to a friend recently without a second thought, a restaurant, a book, a tool? Why is inviting someone to church harder?

2. John the Baptist pointed his own followers to Jesus. Where might you be tempted to point people to yourself, your church or your opinions instead of to Jesus?

3. Jesus' first question in John is "What do you want?" How would you have answered it when you first started following Him? How would you answer today?

4. Andrew had spent one day with Jesus and he still brought his brother. What does that say to someone who feels they don't know enough yet?

5. Who brought you toward Jesus? What did they actually do?

6. Jesus found Philip before Philip found anyone. How does it change your view of your ONE to know that God is already at work in their life?

2 Invitation doesn't require all the answers

READ John 1:45–46, John 7:40–43 and 1 Peter 3:15–16

Philip makes an astonishing claim: the One Moses and the prophets wrote about has come, and He's Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. Nathanael's answer is quick: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"

Part of that may be the kind of joke every region makes about the next town over. Nazareth was small and unimpressive, and Nathanael came from Cana, just a few miles away (21:2). Pastor Bart was born in Ionia and grew up in Saranac, so he's not naming any towns. But Nathanael may also have had a real biblical concern. Micah said Israel's ruler would come from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), and people raised that exact objection later (John 7:41–42). We know what Nathanael didn't: Jesus was born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth.

When we invite people toward Jesus, we'll meet real questions too. Some are theological: How can Jesus be the only way? Why does God allow suffering? Can I trust the Bible? Others are deeply personal: Why didn't God answer my prayer? Why did Christians treat me that way? Christian faith isn't afraid of honest questions. Peter tells us to be ready to give a reason for our hope, and to do it "with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15–16). We should study, think and answer when we can.

But there's a big difference between "questions deserve answers" and "I have to know every answer before I can point anyone to Jesus." Philip doesn't bluff, and he doesn't launch into an argument. He says, "Come and see." Sometimes the most honest thing a Christian can say is "I don't know. That's a good question. Let's see if we can find an answer." Most people can tell when someone is bluffing anyway.

Pastor Bart compared it to describing a piece of music to someone who's never heard it. You can explain the instruments, the rhythm, even the chords. Eventually you say, "Listen to it." The explanation matters, but the explanation isn't the music. Nathanael comes with his skepticism still in hand. The Nazareth problem isn't solved, and Philip hasn't won an argument. That's enough.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What objection or question do you most fear hearing if you invite someone to church?

2. Have you ever had a question about faith that someone answered well? What made their answer helpful, or their honesty when they didn't know?

3. Why might "I don't know, but let's find out" build more trust than a quick answer?

4. What's the difference between being ready to give a reason for your hope and feeling you must win every argument?

5. Peter says to answer "with gentleness and respect." What does a disrespectful answer look like, even when it's correct?

6. Is there a question about the faith you'd like to study more so you're better prepared? Who could help you with it?

3 Bring people to Jesus and trust Him with the rest

READ John 1:47–51, Genesis 28:10–17 and 1 Corinthians 3:5–9

As soon as Nathanael arrives, Jesus speaks directly to him: "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." Nathanael asks, "How do you know me?" Jesus answers, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." Moments earlier Nathanael had scoffed at Nazareth. Now he says, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

What did Philip do to cause that? Nothing. Philip didn't know what had happened beneath that fig tree, and he couldn't reach into Nathanael's heart. Jesus could. Philip did what Philip could do, and then he was almost out of the picture, which is exactly where he needed to be.

There's a lot we can do for our ONE. We can pray, love and listen. We can tell honestly what Jesus has done in our lives, answer the questions we know how to answer, invite them, and sit beside them if they come. But we can't make someone believe or manufacture conviction. When we forget that, evangelism turns manipulative, as if enough pressure, the perfect argument or the right emotional moment could produce faith. Paul put it simply: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Jesus knew Nathanael before Nathanael knew Him. That's true of your ONE too. Jesus knows the questions they've never said out loud, the wounds they don't talk about and the disappointments that hardened them. That doesn't guarantee everyone will respond like Nathanael. People can resist God's grace. But when we bring someone toward Jesus, we aren't handing them to a stranger.

Then Jesus points Nathanael to "greater things." His words about angels "ascending and descending" come from Jacob's dream in Genesis 28. Jacob, running away after deceiving his father and brother, saw a stairway between earth and heaven and woke up saying, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." God later renamed Jacob "Israel." Now Jesus calls Nathanael an Israelite with no deceit, and He places Himself at the center of Jacob's vision. Pastor Bart wondered whether Genesis 28 was the very passage Nathanael had been reading under that fig tree. John doesn't say. What he makes clear is that Jesus Himself is where heaven and earth meet. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (1:14).

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Nathanael went from "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" to "You are the Son of God" in a few moments. What changed him?

2. Which parts of reaching your ONE are yours to do, and which belong only to God? Where do you tend to blur the line?

3. Why does pressure or manipulation work against real faith? Have you ever felt pressured spiritually? What did it do?

4. How does it help you to know that Jesus already sees and knows the person you're praying for?

5. Read Genesis 28:16. Have you ever realized afterward that God was present in a place or season when you didn't notice Him?

6. Paul planted, Apollos watered, God gave the growth. Who has watered seeds in your life? Whose life might you be watering now?

Come with me

READ Romans 15:7 and John 1:42

If we're going to invite people to "come and see," we ought to be ready when they come. Someone may walk in nervous, uncertain and wondering if they belong. Their first real encounter may not be with the pastor. It may be with you. "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7). If they come with questions, that's okay; Nathanael did. If they've been hurt by a church, we can listen instead of getting defensive. They don't have to clean up their lives before they come through the door.

Then the sermon got personal: **Invite your ONE this week.** It can be as simple as "Would you come to church with me?" It doesn't need to be clever, and it shouldn't be pushy. It needs to be sincere. If they say yes, make it easy: meet them outside, offer a ride, tell them what to expect and sit with them. Andrew didn't just tell Simon where Jesus was. "He brought him to Jesus."

Don't decide for them that they'll say no. And if they do say no, you haven't failed, and your prayers weren't wasted. Keep loving them. Your ONE matters because they matter to God, not because they might improve our attendance. Give them the dignity of making their own decision, and trust Jesus with the rest.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What would make it easier for a nervous first-time guest to feel welcome at Pathway? What could you personally do?

2. What simple, sincere words could you use to invite your ONE? Try saying them out loud to the group.

3. If your ONE says no, what will it look like to keep loving them without pressure?

Through the week

☐	**Monday**	John 1:1–18. What does John want you to know about Jesus before you read about anything He did?
☐	**Tuesday**	John 1:35–42. Andrew brought his brother. Pray by name for the person God has put within your reach.
☐	**Wednesday**	John 1:43–46 and 1 Peter 3:15–16. Write down one question your ONE might ask, and one honest way you could respond.
☐	**Thursday**	John 1:47–51 and Genesis 28:10–17. Thank God that He knew you before you knew Him.
☐	**Friday**	1 Corinthians 3:5–9 and Romans 15:7. Ask God to make you ready to welcome whoever comes, and to show you your part.

Try this

Before Sunday, invite your ONE. Make the call, send the text or have the conversation, and use the words “Come with me.” If they say yes, plan how you’ll make it easy for them. If they say no, keep loving them, and keep praying.

Close in prayer

Father, thank You for finding us, calling us and bringing us to Jesus. Give us courage to love the people You have placed within our reach. Give us wisdom to know when to speak, humility to admit when we don’t have an answer, and faith to trust You with what only You can do. Prepare the way for the ONE You have put on our hearts. If they say yes, help us receive them well. If they say no, help us keep loving them faithfully. And may the people we love come to know Jesus Himself, the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the King who has come near. In His name, amen.

Notes

Watch the sermon online

Scan the code or visit **pathwaywes.com/sermons/come-and-see** for the video, this guide and Pastor Bart's blog post on this week's message.

Pathway, A Wesleyan Church · 4960 Portland Rd, Saranac, MI · Sundays at 10 AM · pathwaywes.com