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JOHN 1:35-43

The Invitation to Come and See

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John 1:35-43: The Invitation to Come and See

I. Introduction: A New Kind of Calling

The opening verses of John's Gospel present a theological masterpiece, carefully designed to introduce Jesus not merely as a historical figure, but as the divine Word made flesh. The narrative of the first disciples, found in John 1:35-43, marks a pivotal moment in this unfolding revelation. It stands in distinct contrast to the calling narratives found in the Synoptic Gospels. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke portray Jesus walking beside the Sea of Galilee and issuing a direct, almost commanding invitation to fishermen to "follow me," John's account is fundamentally different. It is less a forceful "calling" and more an organic "gathering," initiated through the personal witness of one person to another. The central, gracious invitation of this passage is a simple yet profound one: "Come and see." This invitation establishes a new paradigm for discipleship, one rooted in personal encounter, spiritual perception, and an enduring, intimate relationship with Jesus.

II. The Witness of the Forerunner (vv. 35-37)

The scene is set on the "next day" after John the Baptist's testimony, establishing a clear narrative progression. John stands with two of his own disciples, and as Jesus passes by, he points to him and proclaims, "Look, the Lamb of God!" This act is the fulfillment of John's ministry; he is a forerunner whose purpose is to "bear witness" and reveal Jesus' true identity to Israel. The title, "Lamb of God," is the first of many titles for Jesus in this passage and carries immense theological weight. It recalls the sacrificial lambs of the Old Testament and points to Jesus' ultimate purpose as the one who will "take away the sin of the world".

This is a profound moment of transition. The disciples, who were followers of John, hear their master's testimony and immediately respond by leaving him and following Jesus. The Greek verb for "followed" is *akoloutheō*, which in this context means more than simply walking physically behind Jesus. It carries the deeper sense of committing oneself to him as a disciple. The disciples' action demonstrates a fundamental principle of discipleship: it is often initiated not by a direct summons from Jesus, but by the credible, trustworthy witness of a faithful follower. John's testimony acts as the catalyst, and the disciples' movement is a direct cause and effect of his proclamation. The process of coming to faith begins with the *martyria* (witness) of a person who has already encountered the Lord.

III. The Invitation to Abide (vv. 38-39)

Seeing the two men following him, Jesus turns and asks a pivotal question: "What are you seeking?" The Greek word used here is *zeteō*, which signifies more than mere curiosity. It denotes a deep, spiritual yearning—a search for purpose, meaning, and satisfaction in life. It is an existential question that Jesus poses not just to these two men but to every human heart. This penetrating question cuts to the core of their motivation and reveals Jesus' divine insight into their deepest longings.

The disciples' response is not a direct answer to his question, but a different question altogether: "Rabbi, where are you staying?" This reply, while seemingly evasive, is rich with

significance. The title *Rabbi* (which John translates as “teacher”) literally means “my great one” in Hebrew. It was a term of profound respect for a master teacher and demonstrates their immediate recognition of Jesus' authority. Their question about where he was “staying” suggests that a conversation by the wayside would be insufficient for their quest. They wanted to spend more time with him.

Jesus' response to their question is the heart of the passage: “Come and you will see.” This is an open, gracious, and unforced invitation. The two men go with him and *menō* (abide) with him that day. The word *menō* is a key term in John's Gospel that undergoes a powerful theological development. On a literal level, it means to “stay,” “lodge,” or “dwell” in a place. In this context, it describes the simple physical act of spending the day with Jesus. However, this literal experience is a signpost for a deeper, spiritual reality. In his later teaching, Jesus will use this same word to describe a permanent, intimate, and mutual relationship between himself and his disciples—a mutual indwelling where they abide in him, and he in them. The initial, physical experience of being “at-home” with Jesus for a day is the first step toward the spiritual reality of a vital and enduring communion with him.

The invitation to “come and see” also holds deep meaning. The Greek word for “see” is *horaō*, which extends beyond simple physical perception. It signifies perceiving, knowing, and experiencing something with spiritual eyes—a moment of profound clarity that goes beyond the physical realm. The narrative thus presents a clear progression: the human search for meaning (*zeteō*) is met not with a philosophical answer, but with a relational invitation to personal presence (*menō*), which ultimately leads to a new spiritual perception (*horaō*). True knowledge is found in intimate relationship.

IV. The Chain of Witnessing (vv. 40-42)

The narrative continues to unfold, showing the power of personal witness. The unnamed disciple and Andrew, one of the two who had spent the day with Jesus, are now transformed. Andrew's first act after abiding with Jesus is to find his brother, Simon, and proclaim, “We have found the Messiah!”. This is a significant moment of spiritual growth for Andrew. The disciples began their encounter with Jesus calling him “*Rabbi*” (teacher), but after spending time with him, Andrew's understanding has deepened to recognize him as the promised Messiah. This demonstrates that discipleship is a process of progressive revelation where understanding and conviction are clarified and strengthened through personal communion with Christ.

Andrew's role is that of the quintessential witness, a model for all who follow Jesus. He is not presented as a future leader, but as the one who brings others to Jesus. He finds his brother and brings him to Jesus. When Simon is brought to Jesus, a remarkable event occurs. Jesus, upon seeing him, immediately renames him “*Cephas*” (Aramaic for “rock”) which is translated into Greek as “*Peter*”. In the Old Testament, a change of name often signifies a change of nature or a new relationship with God. By renaming Simon, Jesus demonstrates his divine foresight and authority. He sees not just who Simon is in that moment, but his future potential as a leader in the church, a “rock for the faith of others”.

This is a powerful message: Jesus' knowledge of us is not limited to who we are, but includes who we can become through his transformative power. The entire narrative, from John the Baptist's testimony to Andrew's witness, serves to lead Simon to this pivotal, life-changing encounter with Jesus.

The progression of Jesus' identity throughout the narrative is carefully layered, building from a pre-encounter title given by John the Baptist, to a series of titles confessed by the new disciples, culminating in Jesus' own self-identification. This journey reveals the disciples' increasing understanding of who Jesus truly is. The following table illustrates this progression:

Title of Jesus	Source	Significance
Lamb of God	John the Baptist (v. 36)	Refers to Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world.
Rabbi (Teacher)	The two disciples (v. 38)	A title of respect, signifying Jesus as a master they wish to learn from.
Messiah	Andrew (v. 41)	Identifies Jesus as the promised, anointed King of Israel.
The one about whom Moses and the prophets wrote	Philip (v. 45)	Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
Son of God	Nathanael (v. 49)	Acknowledges Jesus' divine nature and origin. ²
King of Israel	Nathanael (v. 49)	Confesses Jesus' messianic, political role.

V. The Expansion of the Call (v. 43)

The narrative of the first disciples is not limited to Andrew and Peter. On "the next day," the scene shifts as Jesus decides to go to Galilee and "finds" Philip. This encounter marks a deliberate contrast to the earlier events. While Andrew and the unnamed disciple were "gathered" through the witness of John the Baptist, Philip is called directly by Jesus with the same words used in the Synoptic Gospels: "Follow me!".

This contrast highlights a crucial point about the nature of God's grace and calling. The call to discipleship is rooted in God's initiative, which can be expressed in different ways. Some are brought to Jesus through the relational chain of a human witness, while others receive a direct, personal call from the Lord himself. Regardless of the method, the process begins "first and foremost with God drawing such persons to himself through the work of the Holy Spirit".

VI. Conclusion & Application for Today

The profound narrative of John 1:35-43 offers a timeless blueprint for discipleship, one that remains deeply relevant for the contemporary believer. It teaches that discipleship is a dynamic process characterized by four essential elements:

1. **It is Relational:** The narrative demonstrates that a true encounter with Jesus is a transformative experience that naturally overflows into witness. Discipleship is not meant to be a private affair, but a communal journey spread through the simple, personal act of bringing others to Jesus, as Andrew brought Peter and Philip later brought Nathanael.
2. **It is an Encounter:** The core of the passage is the invitation to "come and see." Discipleship moves beyond merely hearing about Jesus to a personal, transformative encounter. The physical act of *menō* (abiding) with Jesus serves as the foundation for the spiritual reality of an intimate, mutual relationship with him.
3. **It is a Process of Revelation:** The journey of the first disciples shows a progressive understanding of Jesus, moving from respecting him as a Rabbi to confessing him as the Messiah and Son of God. Discipleship is a lifelong journey of growing in our knowledge of who he is.
4. **It is Rooted in God's Initiative:** Ultimately, the calling of the first disciples shows that whether through the witness of another or a direct summons, it is God who initiates the process and sees our true potential before we ever see it ourselves.

For us today, this passage serves as both a penetrating question and a gracious invitation. We are confronted with the same question Jesus asked his first followers: "What are you seeking?" In a world filled with fleeting pursuits, what are our deepest longings? The answer, as it was for them, is not a set of rules or a philosophical system, but a person.

The call to *menō*—to abide—is a call to make our spiritual home in Jesus. It is a call to a consistent, intimate fellowship with him through prayer, scripture, and community. The fruit of this abiding relationship is a life of witness, one that embodies the simple, powerful invitation to "come and see." The most effective form of evangelism is not a set of manipulative tactics, but the genuine invitation of a disciple who can say, "I have seen the Lord, and he is good. Come and see for yourself". The modern disciple's role is to share their transformed life and invite others to experience the same. The rest is left to God, who continues to draw people to himself.

Greek Word	Transliteration	Literal Meaning	Theological Connotation in John's Gospel
ἀκολουθέω	akoloutheō	to follow, to accompany	To follow as a disciple, to symbolically commit oneself to Jesus.
ζητέω	zeteō	to seek, to search for	To seek with a deep, spiritual yearning for truth and meaning.
μένω	menō	to remain, to stay, to lodge	The physical act of staying with Jesus, which becomes a key theological concept for a permanent, mutual, and intimate relationship (abiding) with him.
ὁράω	horaō	to see, to behold	To see or perceive with spiritual eyes, to experience a moment of spiritual clarity and profound knowledge.