

# How to Build a Bridge

FBCO Sunday Morning Sermon

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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**Preached On:** Sunday, February 26, 2017

**Crossroads Ministries**

301 S. 8th Street

Opelika, Alabama 36801

**Website:** [www.fbcopelika.com](http://www.fbcopelika.com)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers](http://www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers)

This morning as we've been singing as a congregation, we've used the personal pronoun quite a bit: Lord, I and my. Talking about the Lord being my God and my King and my Savior. But in just a few moments, we're going to be challenged by the word of God about those who can't make that claim, those who have not yet believed, those who often we work with, go to school with, maybe are neighbors with, and so I'm going to ask you to join me in a time of prayer not just as we're challenged about our own relationship with the Lord but challenged about those who need a relationship with the Lord.

Let's pray together.

*Lord, it has been so good to be in this place to declare words of truth that are very personal to us, to declare that mercy has been bestowed to our lives, that you're not just the King but you are our King. Lord, we also recognize that there are many in our lives who have yet to have that realization and who are questioning and doubting and bothered by what they see and observe. And Lord, I pray today somehow, some way supernaturally would you guide us through your word so that not only might we be better equipped but might we have a great passion to see others come to know you. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of John 1. Today we're going to be in the last part of the Gospel of John and we find ourselves in how the Gospel of John records the calling of the first apostles, the first disciples. In a moment we're going to meet a man by the name of Andrew. Andrew will call his brother, his probably more famous brother by the name of Simon Peter to come and meet Jesus. We're going to find a man by the name of Philip who will meet a probable co-worker by the name of Nathanael and invite him to come and meet Jesus. You see, today you find yourself in a very unique position for there are hundreds if not thousands of places that you could be right now and things that you could be doing but you've made a very conscious decision that out of your desire for, your love for, and your passion for Jesus Christ you've put all those other possibilities aside and you've shown up here. But every one of us knows somebody who does not have that faith in, that belief in, that passion for the things of God. Maybe you work with them. Maybe they're your neighbor. Maybe you go to school with them. Maybe it's a family member. Maybe it's a close friend who deep down inside you wish was sitting beside you. You wish you could dialog about your love

for the things of God with that person but they're still on the other side of the fence. Your friend is like Simon Peter. Your friend is like Nathanael and today you get to see what Andrew did, you get to see what Philip did and we get to understand how do we build a bridge. How do we build a bridge to those in our lives who do not believe, who have not embraced the truth of Jesus Christ. How do we do this?

Today as we pick up the story in John 1, beginning in verse 35, we have the tail end of the ministry of John the Baptist and we're going to discover how Andrew and Philip built a bridge into the lives of those who they cared about with the Gospel. It says,

35 Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; 36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he said, Behold the Lamb of God! 37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38 Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said unto them, What do you seek? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where do you dwell? 39 He said unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. 40 One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his own brother Simon, and said unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. 42 And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone. 43 The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and he found Philip, and said unto him, Follow me. 44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and said unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. 46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! 48 Nathanael said unto him, How do you know me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. 49 Nathanael answered and said unto him, Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel. 50 Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto you, I saw you under the fig tree, you believe? You're going to see greater things than these. 51 And he said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

This story, we have Jesus being revealed unto Simon Peter and unto Nathanael but not before first being introduced by way of Andrew and Philip. How did they build this bridge? What did they do? But more importantly, we begin today by asking the why question: why were they so successful? Why were they able to build this bridge? Why did Simon Peter listen? Why did Nathanael listen? Why did they say, "Sure, I'll go with

you. I'd like to meet this one." In fact, even Nathanael questioned and said, "Are you sure you've got the right guy?" And yet he was willing to go anyway.

I believe the first reason of the why is because obviously they had a close relationship with the other party. Now, we know that Andrew was Simon Peter's brother and having three young men in my home, I realize that brothers don't always get along. They have disagreements. They have discussions. They even have what we might call heated debates. But at the end of the day when one of them has something important to share with the others, they pay attention. Maybe you don't have a physical sibling or an actual brother but maybe you have a friend, maybe you have a co-worker, maybe you have somebody in your life that if they were to ask you to take this same journey, you would do so just because you trusted them. You've lived life with them, you've celebrated with them, you've cried with them. You trust them to the level that you'd be willing to go and meet somebody you've never met before just because they said you should.

Some years ago, I found myself in a position where I was traveling for a living. About 200 nights a year I was not only stateside but both international, sharing the biblical message, the Gospel of Jesus Christ and that sounds exciting and there is some part of that that just sounds enticing but to be quite honest with you, most of my days and most of my nights were spent in the middle of nowhere. Small communities, small churches, small groups of believers all over the world.

Such it was a few years ago I found myself in the deep deep parts of east Texas. Now, I joke about being from Texas. We only have two seasons in Texas: brown and light brown. And most of Texas is flat but when you get to east Texas, there is actually this thing called trees and they have foliage and they actually have what we know as the woods. And so therefore I was in this little community, a little church, but in a very different environment compared to the rest of the state as far as aesthetically.

Well, small church and we had services every night but every day we had a lunch Bible study. About 12 o'clock noon, we would gather and have a potluck meal and Bible study, then go back to various occupations and such. Small church, small area, about 10-12 people would show up. It wasn't large at all. It was very intimate. In fact, it was kind of nice. And to my surprise on that Monday morning, a friend of mine by the name of Ken showed up. Now, Ken lived about 30 or 45 minutes away. I had not told him I was coming to town. He knew I was coming to town but he had made it a point to cross my path. We ate lunch and he stayed for the Bible study. Afterwards I walked him to his truck and he said, "Hey Jeff," he said, "want to play golf this afternoon?" I said, "Ken, brother, I appreciate it but I've got a lot going on. Not only do I have to get ready for tonight but I was at that stage in life in the doctoral program, my dissertation stage," I said, "I've got so much things going on, I don't have time for it." He said, "That's okay. I understand." So he went his way and I went mine.

Tuesday, lunchtime comes around, guess who shows up? Ken. Eats lunch. Bible study. I walk him to his truck again and he said, "Hey, Jeff, how about that golf match? How about today?" I said, "I don't have time, brother. Don't you understand? I'm busy." He

said, "You have your golf clubs with you. I know you do." I said, "I may have them but I don't have time for this." I said, "Why are you so insistent?" And he said, "Well, I've got a good friend of mine that has a golf course in his back yard." Now, red flag right there. I may not be the world's greatest golfer but I'm not interested in what we call goat ranches and I'm thinking if a guy's got a golf course in his back yard, there's not way this can be good. I said, "Brother, you just sealed the deal. I'm gonna go write a paper. I'm done with this one." So he went his way and I went mine.

Wednesday came, guess who showed up again? Ken. Eats lunch. Bible study. I walk him to his truck and I say, "Ken, I've got news for you, I'm not going to play golf with you." He said, "I know. I know." He said, "But we haven't seen each other for a while." He said, "I'll tell you what, how about we just go get a coke together? Just spend a few moments, have you got time for that?" I said, "Do you know what? I do."

So I get in the truck, we take off and he locks the doors. Now, when a good friend of yours locks the doors on you, you know you're in for a ride different than you thought. I said, "Ken, what are we doing?" He said, "You're going to play golf." I said, "No, I'm not." He said, "I talked to the pastor. I've already got your clubs in the back. You're ready. You're going."

We sat there for about four or five miles as we drove down these back road, two lane highways in the middle of nowhere. I have been playing golf my whole life, played all over, I knew there wasn't a golf course around. I thought, "This is going to be awful." I knew it was going to be bad. When we exited and when we exited it was a dirt road. Now, golf courses and dirt roads should not be used in the same sentence, okay? I said, "This is not good." We show up to the gate, if you want to call it a gate, it was just a big steel bar and they had a cattle guard or a cattle gate. Now, if you're not familiar with what that is, they are designed to keep cows out or in. If you need a gate to keep cows in or out, this is not the kind of golf course you want to play, okay? And I'm thinking to myself, "What have I gotten into?"

We go through the gate, we probably drive through 200-300 yards of nothing but thick wooded foliage and then it opened up. The only way I can describe it is a modern day 21<sup>st</sup> century Jurassic Park. I had never seen anything like it. As we began to drive this estate, I found out later it had two miles of lakefront property. There was a complete baseball field, softball field, a 60 yard football field, a complete basketball court. That was just for his kids. You pull up to the house, listen to this, not including the garage or the bowling alley, it was a 30,000 square foot house that could sleep 82 people.

You know, every family has a pet, or at least most families do: dogs, cats, guinea pigs. They had a pet wallaby. Now, you know if you have a pet wallaby, I mean, you've made it in this world, so to speak. They were so remote they even had their own firehouse with fire engine. I mean, I had never seen anything like it. By the way, did I mention it had a golf course? This man who had built this estate was originally from Europe and he built his favorite nine holes from Europe and had them built right there in the middle of nowhere east Texas.

So myself and my friend Ken and the manager of the property and another individual, we teed off. We were going to play nine holes of golf. We began to play and as we got on about to hole two or three, I noticed that there was a group of guys following us everywhere we went. I asked the man who was the manager and he said, "That's the personal grounds crew." I said, "There is a grounds crew?" He said, "That's their only job is to take care of the golf course." I said, "How many times does this course get played?" He said, "Maybe once or twice a week. That's it." I said, "Who plays this course?" He said, "Well, either friends of the owner or PGA players who want to come down because they've heard about it." I said, "What?" I said, "I'm playing a course...?" He said, "You're playing a course that PGA players ask about."

One of the most incredible experiences of my life but it never would have occurred if I hadn't had a close friend who said, "I've got something that you're gonna enjoy. I've got something that you need to experience." Why is it that Simon Peter said, "Alright, Andrew, I'll pay attention"? Why is it that Nathanael said, "You know, Philip, I've got some questions"? They trusted. There was this close relationship and understand, all those individuals that we know and care and love that do not know Jesus and are not saved and not born again, you are that person in their life that they'll actually listen to. You're that person that they have a relationship with that they're willing to engage, they're willing to inquire about the journey.

There was a close relationship but even a step further, it was a connected relationship. They had something in common and that's obvious with Andrew and Simon Peter, they were brothers. They had their last name in common. But when you get to Philip and Nathanael, the Bible makes it very clear that they were of Bethsaida. Now, why is that important? Because Bethsaida was a fishing community. We know that Philip and Nathanael were not technically related but they had such a connection together that when Philip goes to Nathanael, he's willing to engage in a conversation that is somewhat combative. He says, "Oh, there's nothing good that can come out of there." In other words, you see them talking as if they've been friends for years. Maybe they were fishing partners. Maybe they had competed in fishing for their living. Maybe they had grown up playing ball. Maybe they had grown up neighbors. We don't have all the details but we know this: that they had such a connection with them, not only was Philip willing to talk with and Nathanael receive communication, but Nathanael felt comfortable enough to disagree. He felt comfortable enough to have a conversation and to be somewhat combative about the scenario.

This next story I'm going to share with you is one of my favorites in life and I've actually shared this on our Wednesday night Bible study so if you were there, I apologize for hearing this second time. But years ago when I was going through all of my doctoral programs, one of my assignments was that at the seminary I attended, those that were in the Masters level program, when they were taking evangelism and mission courses, one of the assignments or what we might call a lab or a laboratory was that they actually had to go out into the streets of the community and do what we call cold call evangelism. Now, if you've never done this, it will scare you to death because you walk up to

somebody's house who you do not know, you knock on the door and engage in a conversation with the purpose of sharing Jesus with them.

Well, I was going to be their tour guide that evening. I was going to be the one who was leading them through the community. So we set a place, we set a time and there was probably, I don't know, seven or eight students who were gathered that night. We had a plan, at least the one I set out that we would begin going down the streets. It was a large neighborhood and they would rotate one after the other, one would take the lead and the others would chime in if necessary but if nothing else, at least be the prayer support behind this. Well, you can only imagine how well this went. How do you like it when somebody knocks on your door you don't know, sharing with you information that you are not prepared to hear?

House after house, rejection after rejection. Some of the rejections were very colorful, if you know what I mean. Some of them included doors being slammed. Some of them were words being spoken to us as we were walking away, making it very clear we were not welcome to come back. It was not necessarily a positive experience. I could tell they were kind of getting down in the countenance, they were not much enjoying life, probably wondering why on earth would my professors have us do this?

Well, as we approached about the 45 minute to hour mark, I said, "Alright, guys, I can tell you're discouraged. Let me take the lead on this next house." I said, "Allow me to kind of...I've kind of done this a few more times than you have. Let me just kind of pave the road and let's see how it goes." Knocked on the door. About five minutes later we found ourselves, our entire team was actually in the foyer of this guy's house. He was dialoging with us. He even offered to get us something to drink. Completely different than every other house we had been to.

We finally got to the Gospel. I shared the message of Jesus Christ. He did not believe that day. He wasn't ugly, he just said, "I'm not interested." But he was cordial and he was nice. Twenty minutes later we walked out of his house, him saying, "You can stop by anytime," and a bunch of Masters level students absolutely amazed at what they observed.

We were done for the night, we made our way back to the parking lot where all the cars were and I asked them, I said, "Do y'all want to know how I did that?" "Oh yeah!" I said, "Are you curious on why everything you tried just bombed but the one house I went to, I mean it was just incredible success?" I said, "Do you want to know?" They said, "Please tell us! What did you do that we need to learn?" I got kind of puffed up, about 6'4". I said, "Alright, folks, I'm about to tell you the secret. I'm about to share with you how I did what I just did. Are y'all ready to listen to the master?" Well, some of them actually got out pens like they were going to take notes. I was milking this for all it is worth. I said, "Do you want to know the secret?" "Yeah, what is it?" I said, "That was my neighbor." They said, "What?" I said, "That was my neighbor." I said, "We've done yard work together, we've talked, we've argued about sports together." I said, "The reason he opened

the door is he knows who I am. He trusts me. At some level he's willing to entertain me, even about the subject matter of Jesus."

Folks, we see the same thing happening here in John 1. Why did it go so well? Why when Andrew came and said, "Hey, brother, I've got someone I want you to hear." Why when Philip went to Nathanael and said, "I found a guy that we've been looking for." Why did they agree to do it? Why were they willing to engage? Why were they willing to dialog? It's because they had a close relationship and they had a connected relationship.

The second question we have to ask is this: so how did they do it? I mean, how did they do this? I mean, they had these conversations and what we have recorded is so brief in quantity but you live life and I live life and so let's look at what's happening behind the scenes.

I think the first thing we can say on the how is this: they were enthusiastic. You say, "Well, how do you know they were enthusiastic?" Because there was a dialog. Because Simon Peter responded to Andrew and because Nathanael responded to Philip. They actually engaged in a conversation.

Allow me to demonstrate what I'm willing to say did not happen with Andrew and Peter. I cannot imagine that they had been fishing all day, mending their nets, they got back to the house and the conversation went something like this. "Uh, Peter." "Yeah." "I met this guy the other day. I think you might want to hear what he has to say. Do you want to go with me? If not, okay, no big deal. What do you think?" "Who wants to go to that? Who wants to be a part of that?"

In fact, allow me to share with you a story that happened about 24 hours ago. On a Saturday mid-morning, our family was busy doing the chores of life and getting some things done and we all were outside, all five of us were out there, and all of a sudden a car pulled up in the neighborhood. The car pulled over and a group of people got out and they had magazines and literature in their hands. Now, all of a sudden my family is like, "Dad, be nice to them." I'll be honest with you, I'm kind of licking my chops, if you know what I mean. I'm like, I live for this. I mean, the opportunity to dialog, the opportunity to discuss, the opportunity to debate. In fact, my wife said, "Honey, your kids are watching. Be nice." I said, "Okay," and, boy, I was excited.

So I find myself in a position at the bottom of our driveway when one of the representatives is approaching me. Literature in hand, conversation about to take place, and here's what he says. This is the exact conversation. "There is a question on here the Bible answers. I hope you look it up. Have a day." What? That's all you've got? A question that the Bible might answer? No enthusiasm. No smile. I mean, who wants any of that? You see, enthusiasm. If you're not excited about Jesus, nobody else is going to be. If Jesus isn't a passion of your life, why would he be a passion of somebody else's? I'll be honest with you, even if I had no spiritual inclination at all, yesterday's conversation would have turned me off of them because there was no enthusiasm.

Some years ago, one of the greatest compliments I ever got, a man who was in his early 60s, I had formed a relationship with him and I began to talk to him about Jesus and talked to him about his need for Jesus, his sinful condition, his need to be forgiven and saved. We probably had four or five very serious conversations to no result. He was not a believer. He was interested, he was curious but he just wasn't sold.

I remember one day we had a conversation and we got done and he said, "Jeff, can I make an observation?" I said, "Sure, what is it?" Listen, he goes, "You actually believe this stuff, don't you?" I said, "Well, yes." And as we began to talk, what he was sharing with me was that I was enthusiastic, I was excited. Well, absolutely. If we're not excited about Jesus, who is going to be? If we're not enthusiastic about our faith, nobody else is going to be.

So when Andrew comes to Peter and says, "I've found the guy," there had to be some level of excitement in him. When Philip comes to Nathanael and says, "Boy, I've found the Messiah, the one that Moses talked about, the one the prophets talk about. I've found him." Now, you don't have to break out a megaphone, you don't have to shoot off fireworks but at least have some enthusiasm in these relationships.

But then there's encouragement, particularly in the story of Philip and Nathanael. Notice what happens at the end of this chapter. When Philip comes to him and says, "We've found the Messiah, the one that Moses talked about, the one the prophets talked about," Nathanael has this great response, he says, "Nothing good can come out of Nazareth." Philip didn't stop. Philip didn't quit. Philip continued the conversation, he continued the dialog. What does he say? He says, "Just come and check out. Come and see and judge for yourself." When I speak of the fact that we ought to be encouraging, those that we've built bridges with, those that are close to us, those that are connected to us, those who are not yet believers, yes, we need to be enthusiastic but we need to be encouraging. Don't give up. Don't give in. Don't say, "Well, I guess it's just not going to be."

If I were to take you back in time about 25-30 years, I would tell you that the statistics said that for every person who came to know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, it took about eight witnessing encounters. What that means is the average person, now sometimes people get saved the first time they hear about Jesus, sometimes people don't get saved until they've heard of Jesus 100 times, but on average it took eight Gospel presentations before someone would receive and believe. That was 25-30 years ago. If I took you back about 10-12 years, that number is 1 in 15. Today according to the data that I'm privy to, we're saying 1 in 22. Do you know what that means? It means our culture has become more hardened to the message of Jesus Christ. Our culture has become more resistant to the truth of Christianity. And today according to those who keep this data, 22 times. In other words, when you share with somebody, when you invite with somebody, when you say, "Hey, come listen to somebody talk about Jesus with me," and they say no, you might be number three, you might be number 13, you might just be number 21 and it's the next person who will see the harvest and see the fruit.



Aren't you grateful that Philip didn't give up on Nathanael? Aren't you grateful that Philip didn't say, "Well, that's your opinion. So be it. I'm out of here. Sorry, buddy." But what do we do? We see encouragement that Andrew continued to speak with Peter, that Philip continued to speak with Nathanael.

So we see that they were encouraging. We see that they were enthusiastic. But lastly we've got to figure out: so what did they do? We know why they were successful. We know how they approached their friends and family. But what did they actually do? The first thing we see is they provided answers. Notice that when he says to Peter, "I found the Messiah," he was providing an answer. When Philip comes to Nathanael and says, "I found the Messiah who Moses talked about, the prophets talked about," they provided an answer.

Now, I want you to think about this: Peter and Nathanael both were skeptical. They both were on the outskirts. They both were the ones that were being shared with. And yet years later under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Lord gives us Scripture in Peter's name, 1 Peter and 2 Peter, and in 1 Peter 3:15, here is what the Lord gives us through the mouth of the one who said, "Okay, I guess I'll come and see." "Always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that is within us." Now, in formal terminology, we call it apologetics. That doesn't mean we apologize for our faith, it means we defend our faith. In other words, when people like Nathanael are skeptical and when people like Simon Peter maybe gives us this look like, "I don't know if I'm completely interested," it means that we engage, we dialog, we provide an answer.

Now, let me be honest with you: there is no way that you're able to have all the answers to everybody's problem. You cannot digest all the information and you cannot convince somebody otherwise but yet at the end of this service, as I do many times during our invitation time, when I give you or whomever the opportunity to respond to the message of Jesus Christ and there is a time where we pray, oftentimes I ask you if this is who you are and where you are, have this conversation with God, not necessarily out loud and not necessarily the same words but one of the statements that I make almost every single week in that prayer is, "I don't have all the answers to all the problems but I do know that Jesus is the answer to my sin problem." They provided the answer of Messiah. Messiah. The identity is the one who forgives our sins. The identity of the Messiah is the one who offers salvation. We don't know about the peripheral conversation nor the tangent discussion but we do know they provided an answer for those that were curious and even in the case of Nathanael, somewhat combative.

But there is one other item that I think we need to discuss today: they provided acceptance. Now, I want to draw a very clear line between acceptance and endorsement. In our world today, we have those who live a complete contrary life to the things of the Gospel, complete different lifestyles and ideologies and philosophies and perspectives. Do not think that when I say acceptance I mean endorsement. Nowhere in Scripture are we to ever promote or endorse a lifestyle contrary to what the Bible lays out. When I use the word "acceptance," they were willing to accept where they were and realize that Jesus was the answer to whatever they were dealing with, struggling with or doubting. In other

words, they knew that Jesus was the answer to whatever their problem was; that Jesus was the answer to whatever they were dealing with. And they knew – listen – that Jesus would accept whatever mess they had made of their life, whatever was happening in their life, and that only he alone could solve that problem. When I say that acceptance was provided, they were not endorsing or promoting the rebellion against Jesus at this time, but realizing they knew that whatever they were going through, doubting or questioning, Jesus was willing to engage, converse and, yes, hopefully even save and transform.

When we talk about acceptance, we need to realize the lost world acts like the lost world because it is lost and the behavior changes and the philosophies change and the ideologies change only when they've encountered Jesus. You see, we're not forgiven of our sins by a church building, we're forgiven by Jesus. We're not forgiven of our sins because of who our friend or family is, we're forgiven because of Jesus. And we need to understand that they realized that Jesus would accept where they were, not endorse it, but realize where they were and then immediately take them to the Gospel.

Our case in point is Nathanael. Notice what happens at the end. When Jesus comes to him, he says, "Nathanael, an Israelite in whom is no guile." Let me unpack that statement for just a moment. What he is saying is, "Nathanael, I know what people think about you but I see you on the inside. I know what the world's reputation is when it comes to you but I know deep down inside." In fact, that phrase "there is no guile" can mean one who is innocent. There is thought, there is ideology that potentially Nathanael had been falsely accused of something. Maybe had had a reputation in his community that was undue and unjust and not true at all.

I want you to notice what Jesus does in Nathanael's life. He reaches deep down inside of him and says, "It doesn't matter what the world says about you, it doesn't matter what you've done, where you've been or who you've been with, I've come to set you free. I've come to deliver you. You are one in whom is no guile." Look at Nathanael's response. He follows and says, "You're the guy. You've got to be him." Because what was Nathanael saying? "You know about me what others refuse to believe about me."

You know, some years ago, many of you, I'm sure, have joined this journey. I read a book outside of Scripture but it was a book entitled, "What's So Amazing About Grace?" And it's one of the introductory stories of this book that really grabs my attention. Even though the author was not the main primary source of the story, a friend of his in the Chicago area was. He told the story of someone that he had met while serving in the Detroit area. It was a young lady who the best can be described as a woman of the night, an individual who made her living and her trade by selling herself. Her life had become so desperate and destitute financially that she had passed the lifestyle onto her young, very young daughter, and now it wasn't just her engaged but it was her and her daughter and their life was sordid, it was messed up, in fact, every imagination you can have of how bad their life was, it was.

This individual made a relationship, a friendship with this young lady out on the outskirts of that major city. He began to dialog with her and eventually got to the point of sharing

the Gospel of Jesus and not even doing that, but said, "I would like to invite you to go to church with me." And I want you to hear this young lady's response. Yes, a life of sin. Yes, a life of rebellion. Yes, a life contrary to so many things in the word of God. She said, "Church? Why would I go to church? I already feel bad enough about myself. I don't want to feel worse." And therein lies the problem. The room you're sitting in was originally designed to be a hospital and not a country club. This was designed to be a place where hurting people, burned out people and even, yes, rebellious people can come and meet the same Jesus that we claim to believe in. And yet what often happens is we say, "Well, until you get cleaned up, we won't let you in." Last time I checked and I'm not an expert fisherman but last time I checked, you don't clean a fish until you've caught it first, right? And what Jesus displays for us in the life of Nathanael is those with reputations, those with even possibly false accusations, it doesn't matter what the outside looks like, it is the inside that he's interested in.

You know, that's fabulous news because that means it doesn't matter who we are, where we've been or what we've been involved in, every single one of us comes to Jesus the exact same way and maybe today you hear this story in John 1, maybe today you realize, "I'm actually Simon Peter." Or, "I'm Nathanael. I'm curious or maybe even combative but I still do not yet know this Jesus." Maybe today would be the day where you would let your guard down and say, "Do you know what, Jesus? Let me hear what you have to say."

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe you are that individual, maybe you're here today for the very first time, maybe you're in church for the thousandth time, it doesn't matter. But if you're that person today who realized how desperately you need Jesus, I've got great news for you. You don't have to go through some religious course, you don't have to jump through hoops or check off a bunch of boxes. You just need to have a real serious conversation with Jesus. You need to not say it out loud necessarily, you don't even have to say the exact same words I would say. But maybe that conversation, maybe that prayer would sound a little something like this. "God, I realize today that I've messed up. God, I've done things I know I shouldn't have done. I've said things I know I shouldn't have said. And God, you know I've thought some things that I had no business thinking. But I understand today that Jesus loves me so much that he actually came to this earth to live a life and to experience a death on my behalf. Lord, I believe that he rose from the dead so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to all the problems of this world but I do know that Jesus is the only answer to my sin problem and so I'm asking you to forgive me and I'm asking you to save me, not based on what I have done, what I haven't done, or what I hope to do but based on what Jesus Christ alone has done on my behalf. In the best way I know how right now, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe that's you today. I've got great news for you, we want to celebrate with you. This is not a place of condemnation, this is a place of celebration so in just a few moments after I pray over us, maybe you're that person who needs to come and have a conversation with us about Jesus and your need to make a decision for him. Or maybe you're that person like the 25 who tonight

will display their faith publicly in baptism. Maybe you're that person that needs to talk about following in baptism. Maybe you need to have a conversation about what it means to be a part of a local church and the significance thereof. Wherever you are, whatever you're dealing with, I promise you all we want to do is be that bridge. We want to celebrate with what God is doing in your life.

*Lord, as we come to this time of invitation, how grateful we are, how good it is to know that you're a God of second chances. God, I know today there are people in our midst who are struggling, who are doubting, who are hurting, who are bothered and the world has said one thing but you're saying another. The world is feeding them one line of information but you're sharing another. So Lord, I pray at this time as we have an opportunity to respond, God, I pray that the voices of others and the voices of this world would not be the voices we hear but it would be yours alone. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

I'm going to ask, if you will, stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, we'll be here at the front.