

## Session 6 — What Does It Really Mean to Follow Jesus?

### John 1:35–51 — “Come, and You Will See”

**Main question:** *With so many voices telling me what to believe and how to live, how do I begin following Jesus for myself?*

**Big idea:** Following Jesus begins by hearing truthful testimony about Him, turning toward Him, spending time with Him, and learning who He really is. As the first disciples discover, Jesus knows us before we know Him, calls ordinary people personally, and invites us into something far greater than we initially understand.

**Memory verse:** John 1:46 — “Come and see.”

**Main passage:** John 1:35–51

#### Key parallel passages:

- Genesis 28:10–22
- Deuteronomy 18:15–19
- Psalm 2:1–12
- Isaiah 9:6–7
- Daniel 7:9–14
- Matthew 4:18–22
- Luke 5:1–11

Read John 1:35–51 in **NASB95, NIV and KJV**, noting especially the titles given to Jesus: **Lamb of God, Rabbi, Messiah/Christ, the One Moses and the Prophets wrote about, Son of God, King of Israel, and Son of Man.**

### Session goals

By the end of the session, we should understand that:

- Discipleship begins with Jesus Himself, not merely a religious system.
- John the Baptist succeeds by directing his own disciples away from himself and toward Jesus.
- Jesus’ first recorded question in John—“**What do you seek?**”—goes beneath behavior to desire and motivation.
- Following Jesus involves staying with Him and learning from Him.
- People who encounter Jesus naturally begin telling others about Him.
- The disciples initially understand Jesus only partially; discipleship involves growing into a fuller understanding.
- “Messiah,” “Son of God,” “King of Israel” and “Son of Man” have deep Old Testament backgrounds.
- Jesus’ reference to angels ascending and descending identifies Him with the meeting place between heaven and earth in Jacob’s dream.
- Jesus knows Nathanael before Nathanael recognizes Jesus.
- New believers do not need to understand everything before beginning to follow.

### Very brief recap: Sessions 1–5

#### Session 1 — John 3:16–17: Can God really love me?

God loved the world and gave His Son to rescue it. Biblical “belief”—πιστεύω (*pisteuō*)—means **trusting and relying upon Jesus**, not merely acknowledging facts.

**Key truth:** God loves, God gives, and we respond by trusting.

#### Session 2 — John 1:1–5: Who is Jesus?

Jesus is the eternal λόγος (*logos*, “Word”). John echoes Genesis 1: beginning, creation, Word, life, light and darkness.

**Key truth:** Jesus existed before creation and is the One through whom creation came.

#### Session 3 — John 1:6–13: Can I belong to God’s family?

John the Baptist witnesses to the Light. Those who receive Jesus and trust His name receive the right to become God’s children.

**Key truth:** Our deepest identity is received from God rather than achieved.

#### Session 4 — John 1:14–18: What is God really like?

The Word became flesh and “**tabernacled**” among us. Jesus embodies the grace, truth and glory revealed to Moses in Exodus 33–34.

**Key truth:** Jesus makes the unseen God known.

#### Session 5 — John 1:19–34: What can Jesus do about my sin?

John identifies Jesus as “**the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**” Passover emphasizes rescue from judgment and slavery, while Yom Kippur vividly portrays cleansing and the removal of sins, transgressions and iniquities.

**Key truth:** God provides the Lamb who cleanses, bears away sin and gives the Holy Spirit.

### Historical and textual context

John 1:19–34 focused on **John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus.**

John 1:35–51 now shows what happens when people act on that testimony.

There is an important progression:

**John points → disciples hear → disciples follow → they encounter Jesus → they tell others → others encounter Jesus.**

John the Baptist does not try to keep followers for himself. His ministry succeeds when people leave him to follow Messiah.

The passage also begins a sequence of days in John 1–2. John repeatedly says “the next day” (Jn 1:29, 35, 43), leading toward the wedding at Cana in John 2.

### **John 1:35–37 — “Behold, the Lamb of God!”**

John is standing with two of his disciples when Jesus passes.

He repeats: “Behold, the Lamb of God!” —John 1:36, NASB95

The two disciples hear him and follow Jesus.

Notice what John does **not** say: “Stay with me.”

Instead, he directs them toward Someone greater.

This prepares for John 3:30: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” —NASB95

**Simple point:** Good spiritual leadership makes Jesus more important, not the leader.

### **John 1:38 — Jesus’ first question**

Jesus turns and asks: “What do you seek?” —NASB95

This is significant because these are the first words Jesus speaks in John's Gospel.

He does not initially ask:

- What do you know?
- What denomination are you?
- How religious are you?
- What have you accomplished?

He asks: “**What do you seek?**”

Greek: **τί ζητεῖτε**; (*tī zēteite*?) “What are you seeking?” The verb **ζητέω** (*zēteō*) means “seek,” “look for” or “desire.”

This question will echo throughout John because different people seek Jesus for different reasons. Some want:

- truth,
- healing,
- bread,
- miracles,
- political deliverance,
- an argument,
- or an opportunity to kill Him.

**Simple point:** Jesus is concerned not only with whether we follow Him, but also with **why**.

**Everyday connection: What am I really looking for?**

People may approach Jesus because they want:

- relief from a crisis,
- a better marriage,
- freedom from guilt,
- protection,
- answers,
- belonging,
- purpose,
- or eternal life.

Those desires can bring us toward Him.

But discipleship eventually asks a deeper question: **Do I want what Jesus can give me, or do I want Jesus Himself?**

### **John 1:38–39 — “Rabbi, where are You staying?”**

The disciples answer Jesus with a question: “Rabbi...where are You staying?”

John translates **Rabbi** for readers unfamiliar with Hebrew/Aramaic Jewish terminology: “which translated means Teacher.” That little explanation gives us another clue about John's audience: at least some readers were not expected to understand Jewish terms automatically.

The disciples are not merely asking for Jesus’ address. They want time with Him.

### **“Come, and you will see”**

Jesus answers: “Come, and you will see.” —John 1:39, NASB95

This becomes almost a summary of discipleship.

**Come.** Respond to Jesus’ invitation.

**See.** Discover who He really is through encounter, observation and trust. They go. They see. Then they **remain** with Him.

The same important Johannine verb appears: **μένω** (*menō*) — “remain,” “stay,” “abide.”

Later Jesus will say: “Abide in Me.” —John 15:4, NASB95

Discipleship begins here with simply **staying with Jesus**.

**Simple point:** Christianity is not merely learning information about Jesus. It is learning to remain with Him.

### **John 1:40–42 — Andrew finds Peter**

One disciple is Andrew. What does Andrew do after spending time with Jesus? He finds his brother Simon.

His announcement is simple: “We have found the Messiah.” —John 1:41, NASB95

John again translates for his audience: **Messiah = Christ**.

Hebrew: **מָשִׁיחַ** *mashiah* — “anointed one.”

Greek: **Χριστός** *Christos* — “anointed one.” “Christ” is therefore not Jesus’ last name. It is a title: **Jesus the Messiah**.

## Old Testament background — What is a Messiah?

In the Hebrew Scriptures, people were anointed with oil when set apart for particular service, especially:

- priests,
- kings,
- and occasionally prophets.

Israel increasingly looked forward to the promised Davidic ruler who would establish God's kingdom faithfully.

Important passages include:

- 2Samuel 7:12–16
- Isaiah 9:6–7
- Psalm 2
- Isaiah 11:1–10

**Simple point:** Calling Jesus “Messiah” means claiming that He is God's promised, anointed King.

## Andrew's simple evangelism

Andrew does not give Peter a theology lecture.

He says: “**We have found the Messiah.**” Then: “He brought him to Jesus.” —John 1:42, NASB95

That pattern matters. Andrew does not have to answer every possible question. He brings Peter to Jesus.

**Simple point:** You do not need to know everything about the Bible before telling someone what you have discovered about Jesus.

## John 1:42 — Jesus gives Simon a new name

Jesus looks at Simon and says: “You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas.”

John again translates: **Cephas = Peter.**

Aramaic: כֶּפָּא *Kepha* — “rock”

Greek: Πέτρος *Petros* — “Peter/rock.”

At this point Simon hardly looks like the stable “rock” he will eventually become.

He will:

- misunderstand Jesus,
- boast,
- speak impulsively,
- and deny Jesus.

Yet Jesus sees what Simon will become.

**Simple point:** Jesus sees more than who you are now. He knows what His work can make of you.

## Everyday connection — My past defines me

Many new believers think: “**You don't know what I've done.**”

Or: “**I'm just this kind of person. I'll never change.**”

Peter's story challenges that assumption. Jesus knows Simon completely before Simon understands Jesus completely. And Jesus begins transforming him.

**Simple point:** Following Jesus means allowing Him—not your past—to define who you are becoming.

## John 1:43 — “Follow Me”

The next day Jesus finds Philip. Notice the change. Andrew found Peter. But here: **Jesus finds Philip.**

Then Jesus says: “Follow Me.” —John 1:43, NASB95

Greek: ἀκολουθεῖ μοι *akolouthei moi* — “Follow Me.”

In the ancient world, following a teacher meant far more than attending occasional lectures. A disciple learned:

- the teacher's instruction,
- priorities,
- and conduct.
- way of life,
- interpretation of Scripture,

**Simple point:** Following Jesus means learning to live as His disciple, not merely agreeing with His claims.

## Parallel passage — Matthew 4:18–22

Jesus calls fishermen: “Follow Me.” They leave their nets. The call changes:

- priorities,
- relationships,
- vocation,
- and future direction.

This does not mean every believer must leave a career. It means Jesus receives authority over every part of life.

**Simple point:** Jesus does not ask to become one small compartment of our lives. He becomes our Teacher and Lord.

## John 1:44–45 — Philip finds Nathanael

Philip immediately repeats Andrew's pattern. Jesus finds Philip. Philip finds Nathanael.

Notice the chain: **John → Andrew → Peter** and **Jesus → Philip → Nathanael**

The Gospel spreads through relationships.

## “Him of whom Moses...and the Prophets wrote”

Philip tells Nathanael: “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law, and also the Prophets, wrote.” —Jn 1:45, NASB95

This is crucial for understanding John's Gospel. Jesus does not suddenly appear disconnected from the Old Testament.

Philip understands Him as the culmination of a story already being told.

## Old Testament background — Moses wrote about Him

One especially important passage is Deuteronomy 18:15: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you.”

Israel was told to listen to this coming prophet. This “Prophet like Moses” expectation already appeared in John 1:21.

As John continues, Jesus will repeatedly resemble and surpass Moses.

Moses:

- mediated God's word,
- gave bread in the wilderness,
- led Israel, and mediated covenant.

Jesus will:

- embody God's Word,
- lead God's people,
- and bring the promised new-covenant life.

**Simple point:** Jesus fulfills patterns established long before His birth.

## John 1:46 — “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”

Nathanael is skeptical. Nazareth was an insignificant Galilean village. It had no obvious biblical prestige. Philip could have started an argument.

Instead he says: “Come and see.” Notice the echo of Jesus’ own words in verse 39.

Jesus: “**Come, and you will see.**”

Philip: “**Come and see.**” Philip has already begun speaking like his Teacher.

**Simple point:** Sometimes the best answer to skepticism is an invitation to investigate Jesus honestly.

## Everyday connection — What about doubts?

Nathanael's skepticism does not disqualify him.

Jesus does not say: “**How dare you question Me?**”

Nathanael comes and investigates.

There is an important difference between **honest questions** and **determined refusal to consider evidence**.

**Simple point:** Jesus can handle sincere questions.

## John 1:47 — “An Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit”

Jesus sees Nathanael approaching and says: “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!”

This language probably prepares for the Genesis imagery at the end of the passage.

The word translated “deceit” is **δόλος** *dolos* — “deceit,” “guile.”

Jacob, Israel's patriarch, had famously been associated with deception. Yet through his encounter with God, Jacob was transformed and received the name **Israel**. Now Jesus describes Nathanael as “**an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit.**” Then, only a few verses later, Jesus refers directly to Jacob's dream. That combination is unlikely to be accidental.

## John 1:48 — “Before Philip called you, I saw you”

Nathanael asks: “How do You know me?”

Jesus answers: “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

The Bible never says what Nathanael was doing under the fig tree. Popular suggestions include:

- Studying Torah or praying.** Rabbinic literature sometimes associates sitting beneath a fig tree with Torah study. Thus Nathanael may have been privately studying or praying.
- Meditating on Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28).** This is especially intriguing because Jesus immediately speaks about angels “ascending and descending” (John 1:51), explicitly recalling Jacob's vision. Nathanael may have been contemplating that passage.
- Praying for or thinking about Messiah.** His rapid confession — “You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel” (Jn 1:49) — has led some interpreters to suggest his private thoughts concerned Israel's Messianic hope.
- Simply resting privately beneath a fig tree.** Fig trees provided valuable shade. Jesus' supernatural knowledge of an otherwise unremarkable private moment may itself be the point.
- A symbolic picture of Israelite peace and Messianic expectation.** Sitting “under his vine and under his fig tree” symbolizes security and covenant blessing in 1 Kings 4:25, Micah 4:4 and Zechariah 3:10. John may therefore evoke the hope of Israel's restoration.
- An otherwise unknown private event.** Perhaps something significant happened beneath that particular tree which only Nathanael knew. This would readily explain his astonishment at Jesus' statement.

Of these, the **Jacob hypothesis has particularly strong literary appeal** because John 1:47–51 clusters “Israelite,” absence of “deceit” (recalling Jacob's earlier character), and then Jacob's vision of ascending and descending angels. But the text does **not** say Nathanael was reading Genesis 28, so it is best taught as an intriguing possibility rather than a fact. The important point is clear: **Jesus knew something Nathanael did not expect Him to know.**

Nathanael realizes he is standing before Someone extraordinary.

**Simple point:** Jesus knows us before we come to Him.

### Everyday connection — Does anyone really know me?

People often carefully manage what others see. We hide:

- fears,
- shame,
- desires,
- failures,
- doubts,
- and private struggles.

Jesus already knows. Yet His response to Nathanael is an invitation, not rejection.

**Simple point:** Being fully known by Jesus does not prevent us from being called by Jesus.

### John 1:49 — Three enormous titles

Nathanael responds: “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.” Within only a few verses Jesus has been called:

- Lamb of God
- the One Moses and the
- King of Israel
- Rabbi
- Prophets wrote about
- Messiah
- Son of God

John is rapidly building Jesus' identity.

### Old Testament background — Psalm 2

Psalm 2 brings **Messiah, Son and King** together. The nations oppose the LORD and His **Anointed** (*Mashiah/Christos*).

God establishes His King and declares: “You are My Son.”

Thus Nathanael's titles — **Son of God + King of Israel** — fit naturally within Israel's royal Messianic expectations.

But John's Gospel will progressively reveal that Jesus' divine Sonship goes far beyond merely being a Davidic king.

### John 1:50 — “You will see greater things”

Nathanael is impressed because Jesus knew about the fig tree. Jesus essentially says, **You haven't seen anything yet.**

This is important for new believers. The disciples already possess genuine faith. But their understanding is incomplete.

Throughout John they will repeatedly discover that Jesus is greater than they thought.

**Simple point:** Beginning to trust Jesus does not mean we already understand everything about Him.

Discipleship is continual discovery.

### John 1:51 — Heaven opened

Jesus concludes: “You will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

This directly invokes **Genesis 28**. To understand Jesus' statement, we need Jacob's story.

### Old Testament background — Genesis 28:10–22

Jacob is fleeing from home. He sleeps outdoors. In a dream he sees:

- earth below,
- a stairway or ramp
- and God's angels
- heaven above,
- connecting them,
- ascending and descending.

The LORD stands above or beside it and repeats the covenant promises made to Abraham.

When Jacob awakens, he says: “Surely the LORD is in this place.”

He calls it **בֵּית־אֵל** *Beit-El* (Bethel, “House of God”) and “the gate of heaven.”

### Jesus changes Jacob's picture

In Genesis: **The stairway connects heaven and earth.**

In John: **The angels ascend and descend upon the Son of Man.** Jesus places **Himself** where Jacob saw the connection between heaven and earth. The implication is enormous.

Jesus is the meeting place between:

- God and humanity
- heaven and earth
- Creator and creation.

This also continues Session 4's Tabernacle theme. The Tabernacle represented God's dwelling among humanity. Now

Jesus Himself becomes the place where humanity encounters God.

**Simple point:** We do not climb our way up to God. God has come down to us in Jesus.

### “Son of Man”

This becomes Jesus' favorite title for Himself in the Gospels. On one level it simply sounds like “human being” (see the Book of Ezekiel). But it carries deeper Old Testament significance.

### Old Testament background — Daniel 7:9–14

Daniel sees “One like a Son of Man” coming with the clouds of heaven. He approaches the Ancient of Days and receives:

- dominion,
- service from all peoples
- and an everlasting
- glory,
- and nations,
- kingdom.
- a kingdom,

Jesus' title therefore holds together two truths: **He genuinely shares our humanity** and **He is the glorious ruler to whom God gives everlasting dominion.** Writings between the Old Testament and New Testament point to this passage as key indicator who the Messiah would be.

Later in John, the Son of Man will also:

- be lifted up,
- give life,
- exercise judgment,
- and be glorified.

**A remarkable progression of titles.** Have the group trace what John has called Jesus from 1:1 through 1:51:

**The Word**

↓  
**God**

↓  
**Creator**

↓  
**Life**

↓  
**Light**

↓  
**Only/unique Son**

↓  
**Lamb of God**

↓  
**Messiah**

↓  
**The One Moses and the  
Prophets wrote about**

↓  
**Son of God**

↓  
**King of Israel**

↓  
**Son of Man**

John has barely finished chapter 1. Yet he has already given readers an extraordinary portrait of Jesus.

### Parallel passage — Deuteronomy 18:15–19

Moses promises a coming prophet whom Israel must hear.

#### Simple points:

- God will raise Him up.
- He will speak God's words.
- God's people must listen to Him.
- Jesus fulfills and surpasses the Moses pattern.

**Application:** Following Jesus means allowing His words to overrule competing voices.

### Parallel passage — Psalm 2

The nations resist God's Anointed King. Yet God establishes Him.

#### Simple points:

- Messiah means “Anointed One.”
- Messiah is God's King.
- The King is called God's Son.
- Humanity is called to take refuge in Him.

**Everyday application:** Jesus is not merely an adviser whose suggestions we consider. He is King.

### Parallel passage — Daniel 7:9–14

The Son of Man receives everlasting dominion.

#### Simple points:

- Human kingdoms rise and fall.
- God's kingdom endures.
- The Son of Man receives authority over all nations.
- His kingdom will not pass away.

**Application:** Political, economic and social instability do not determine the ultimate future. Jesus' kingdom does.

### Parallel passage — Matthew 4:18–22

Jesus calls fishermen: “Follow Me.” They respond.

**Simple point:** Discipleship requires movement. Trust eventually changes what we do.

#### Main truths

- **Following Jesus begins with Jesus.** Christianity is fundamentally about trusting, knowing and following a Person.
- **Jesus asks what we really seek.** Our motives matter. He can transform shallow reasons for approaching Him into genuine discipleship.
- **Discipleship means staying with Jesus.** “Come and see” develops into **abiding** with Him.
- **We can bring people to Jesus before knowing every answer.** Andrew brings Peter. Philip invites Nathanael. Neither possesses mature theology yet.
- **Honest skepticism is not the enemy of faith.** Nathanael questions. Philip invites him to investigate. Jesus meets him.
- **Jesus knows us completely.** He knew Nathanael before Nathanael recognized Him.
- **Jesus gives identity.** Simon arrives with one name and receives another. Jesus sees what His disciples can become.
- **Jesus fulfills Israel's Scriptures.** Moses, the Prophets, Psalms, Jacob's ladder and Daniel's Son of Man all contribute to John's portrait.
- **Jesus connects heaven and earth.** Jacob saw a place where heaven and earth met. Jesus says that place is now **Himself**.

## Everyday life connections

- **“I don't know enough to follow Jesus.”** Neither did Andrew, Peter, Philip or Nathanael. They began by coming to Jesus.
- **“I have doubts.”** Nathanael did too. His doubts became the beginning of investigation rather than an excuse to remain distant.
- **“I don't know how to tell someone about Jesus.”** Try Andrew's approach: Tell what you have discovered and bring the person toward Jesus. Or Philip's: “Come and see.”
- **“My past defines who I am.”** Jesus saw Peter's future before Peter became that person. Your past is real, but it does not have final authority over who Messiah can make you.
- **“Nobody really knows me.”** Jesus does. Nathanael discovered that before he even understood who Jesus was.
- **“Everything around me feels unstable.”** Daniel 7 reminds us that human powers change. The kingdom of the Son of Man does not.

## Discussion questions

### Observation

1. What happens immediately after John calls Jesus the Lamb of God?
2. What is Jesus' first question?
3. What do Andrew and Philip do after encountering Jesus?
4. How many different titles for Jesus appear?
5. What does Jesus know about Nathanael?
6. What does Jesus promise Nathanael will eventually see?

### Understanding

1. Why does John the Baptist allow his disciples to leave him?
2. Why might “What do you seek?” be such an important first question?
3. What does “Messiah” mean?
4. What does Philip mean when he says Moses and the Prophets wrote about Jesus?
5. How do Psalm 2's “Messiah,” “Son” and “King” illuminate Nathanael's confession?
6. Why does Jesus mention Jacob's vision immediately after calling Nathanael a true Israelite without deceit?
7. What replaces Jacob's stairway in Jesus' statement?
8. How does Daniel 7 deepen the meaning of “Son of Man”?

### Application

1. What are you seeking from Jesus right now?
2. If Jesus solved your immediate problems but asked you to change your priorities, would you still follow Him?
3. Are you primarily learning information about Jesus, or learning to remain with Him?
4. What question or doubt have you been afraid to bring to God?
5. Who played an Andrew or Philip role in bringing you toward Jesus?
6. Who could you simply invite to “come and see”?
7. What part of your identity do you still allow your past to define?
8. What might Jesus see in you that you cannot yet see?
9. Which voice currently competes most strongly with Jesus for authority over your decisions?
10. If Jesus really connects heaven and earth, how should that change where you look for security, meaning and access to God?

## Exercises

**“Who do you say He is?”** Write all the titles for Jesus from John 1: Word — God — Creator — Life — Light — Son — Lamb of God — Rabbi — Messiah — Promised One — Son of God — King of Israel — Son of Man

Ask: Which title do you understand best?

Ask: Which title do you understand least?

Ask: Which one matters most to something you're facing right now?

This helps us see that knowing Jesus is a process. The first disciples knew something true about Him, but they still had much more to discover.

**“What do you seek?”** Each morning, read that question from Jesus, then write a one-sentence answer. At the end of the week, look over the answers and ask: **What do my answers reveal about what I actually want from Jesus?** Then choose one person and follow the pattern of Andrew or Philip. You do not need to answer every theological question. Simply share one thing you are discovering about Jesus and invite that person to investigate Him.

## Memory verses

“Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’” —John 1:46, NASB95

“And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’” —John 1:43, NASB95

### Prayer focus

- Ask Jesus to expose what we are really seeking.
- Thank Him that He knows us completely and still calls us.
- Ask for courage to bring honest questions to Him.
- Ask Him to reshape identities damaged by failure or other people's judgments.
- Pray for someone whom we can invite to “come and see.”
- Ask for willingness to follow when Jesus challenges our priorities.
- Thank God that Jesus has opened the way between heaven and humanity.

### Looking ahead — Session 7: John 2:1–12

#### “Can Jesus transform what I cannot fix?”

Jesus' first sign takes place not in the Temple or a royal palace but at an ordinary **wedding in Cana**, where a family faces a potentially humiliating shortage.

Yet the sign reaches much deeper than solving a social embarrassment. Against the Old Testament imagery of **wedding celebration, abundant wine, purification and the promised Messianic age**, Jesus transforms water set aside for purification into extraordinary wine.

John tells us why the sign matters: “and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.” —John 2:11, NASB95  
The disciples have already begun trusting Jesus in John 1. Now their trust grows as they **see more of who He really is**.