

July 3, 2022

Follow Me, Week 6 - James... the passionate one!

Passion: any powerful or compelling emotion or feeling, as love or hate; a strong or extravagant fondness, enthusiasm, or desire for anything.

“I define passion as simply the work you love to do. You’re deeply committed to doing this work and doing it well. You’ll get a lot of joy out of it, but it will also come with a lot of struggle and effort—and you’ll know the whole time that it’s worth it.” Ken Coleman, Ramsey Solutions

What are you passionate about? If you don’t know, here are some questions for reflection...

- What kind of work excites me?
- What kind of work am I committed to?
- What does passion for God and being involved in His work look like in your life?

Acts 12:1-3... About that time King Herod laid hands on some from the church to harm them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, executed with a sword. 3 When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter too.

- James was killed/beheaded by Herod Agrippa 1; son of Herod Antipas who was in charge during the lifetime of Jesus. James was killed to punish and persecute the church.
- James was an older brother to John; sons of Zebedee; fishermen for their father’s business; wealthy, prominent business in Capernaum.
- Jesus gave James and John the nickname... “boanerges” (boh-uh-nur-jeez): a vociferous preacher or orator; sons of thunder! Does that tell you anything about their personality?
- James was... Hot-headed, fiery, loud, insistent, boisterous, ranting, shouting; someone who stirred up the pot!

James was privileged to witness...

- Jesus’ power in raising the dead. (Mark 5)
- Jesus’ glory in being transformed. (Mark 9)
- Jesus’ sovereignty over the future. (Mark 13)
- Jesus’ suffering in the preparation for the cross. (Matt. 26)

Luke 9... Rejection in Samaria

51 Now when the days drew near for him to be taken up, Jesus set out resolutely to go to Jerusalem. 52 He sent messengers on ahead of him. As they went along, they entered a Samaritan village to make things ready in advance for him, 53 but the villagers refused to welcome him, because he was determined to go to Jerusalem. 54 Now when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do you want us to call fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them, 56 and they went on to another village.

Fire from Heaven - Luke 9

- Bad blood between Jews and Samaritans. Either tried to avoid or punish them in some way.
- The disciples were defending Jesus’ honor? Showing signs of passionate outrage. Zealous, intensity, passionate! Had not yet fully embraced what Jesus was teaching.

James wanted fire for revenge; Jesus taught him about forgiveness and compassion.

Mark 10... The Request of James and John

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him and said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask." 36 He said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" 37 They said to him, "Permit one of us to sit at your right hand and the other at your left in your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I experience?" 39 They said to him, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink, and you will be baptized with the baptism I experience, 40 but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give. It is for those for whom it has been prepared."

41 Now when the other ten heard this, they became angry with James and John. 42 Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions use their authority over them. 43 But it is not this way among you. Instead whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

- Arrogant? Prideful? Maybe...
- Ambitious and overconfident.

James wanted honor; Jesus taught him about humility.

Matthew 26... 36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37 He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and became anguished and distressed. 38 Then he said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, even to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me."

James wanted to sleep! Jesus taught him about suffering through sacrifice.

Application...

What are you living for? Retirement? Career? Kids/grandkids?

It's time you found a passion worth living for before it's too late! A life filled with passion is a life well lived! Jesus can use passionate, ambitious, intense disciples.

Finding your Passion is the pathway to a life of purpose!

- What does passion for God and being involved in His work look like in your life?
- What kind of kingdom work excites me?
- What kind of kingdom work will I commit to do to grow God's Kingdom?

Passion for God grows in us when we...

- Experience the miraculous / mysterious glory of God.
- Make bold requests (through prayer) and God answers.
- Take risks in Jesus' name, and learn to "fail forward".
- Stay awake; stay alert; ready for action; make the first move.
- Endure suffering for Christ without bitterness.

Sticky Statement

Jesus needs passionate people to put into motion His plan for saving the people of this world.

July 10, 2022

Follow Me, Week 7 - John... the devoted one.

John, the devoted one! The one Jesus loved. Younger brother to James, son to Zebedee; fisherman; a “son of thunder” with a fiery temper and a passion for others to know Jesus.

- Was at the crucifixion and took Jesus’ mother into his home.
- Writer of the gospel of John, 1,2,3 John and received the Revelation from Jesus while on the island of Patmos.
- John’s gospel account... Jesus is the Son of God; writing to Christians around the world; the major theme is belief in Jesus is required for salvation and eternal life; John was a theologian and put emphasis on the principles of Jesus’ teachings.
- Theology... The word “theology” comes from two Greek words (Theo = God / and Logos = Word) that combined mean “the study of God.” Christian theology is simply an attempt to understand God as He is revealed in the Bible.
- I AM statements from Jesus... referencing God’s holy name and declaring Himself as God! The name I AM indicates personality. God has a name, even as He has given names to others. The name I AM stands for a free, purposeful, self-sufficient personality. God is not an ethereal force or a cosmic energy. He is the almighty, self-existing, self-determining Being with a mind and a will—the “personal” God who has revealed Himself to humanity through His Word, and through His Son, Jesus Christ.
- Wrote about the importance of LOVE. Stressed the Christian’s love for Christ, Christ’s love for His church, and the love for one another that is the foundation of our faith and mark of a true believer!
- Served and lead in the background of the early church (Ephesus) to the end of the first century; died of old age.

John had to learn to love as Jesus loved; this did not come naturally to him. He was intolerant of others, ambitious, zealous, hot-headed and impulsive; sectarian, narrow-minded, unbending. Jesus refined those character traits and virtues to transform John into someone with a deep abiding love for God and His truth with the passion to proclaim that truth to others. John was zealous for the truth! He was an eyewitness to the truth and love that was displayed in the life of Jesus!

John 21:24, 25... 24 This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. 25 And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if every one of them were written down, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written.

John 1:1-3... In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.

John 20:30, 31... 30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

1 John 4:9-11... 9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.

“Virtues” out of balance or misused will negatively impact your spiritual health as well as your spiritual witness for Jesus. John had to learn to balance truth and love!

Application...

“God must have your devotion if you are to receive His direction.” Dr. Tony Evans

Devotion to Jesus is built up in our lives when we...

1. Know Him... Abide with Jesus.
2. Imitate Him... Love Jesus and love like Jesus.
3. Serve Him... Trust and Obey Jesus; Follow!

Directions from Jesus to be lived out...

John 14:6, 7... 6 Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you know me, you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

- **I Am** = Greek: A-go I-mee... exist, happen, present!
 - **John 8:58...** Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.”
- **WAY** = Greek: ha-dos... a travelled way, road; a course of conduct; a way (i.e. manner) of thinking, feeling, deciding. **The way of Jesus is the way of LOVE.**
 - **John 15:4, 5...** 4 Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.
 - **John 13:34, 35...** 34 “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
- **TRUTH** = Greek: a-lay'-thay-ah... not concealing; objectively; what is true in any matter under consideration; truly, in truth, according to truth; of a truth, in reality, in fact, certainly. **The truth of Jesus is the WORD of Jesus.**
 - **John 17:17...** Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.
 - **John 20:31...** But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.
- **LIFE** = Greek: Zo-way... life; state of one who is possessed of vitality or is animate; every living soul; of the absolute fulness of life. The Life of Jesus is lived out through the **SPIRIT inside us.**
 - **John 11:25, 26...** 25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. 26 Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.
 - **John 14:26...** But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.

- **John 16:13, 14...** 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own, but he will speak whatever he hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. 14 He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.

Sticky Statement

Our devotion to Jesus will give us the direction we need to be disciples that balance truth and love in a world out of balance.

July 17, 2022

Follow Me, Week 8 - Philip... the practical one!

Our biases control the narrative. Another way to say it... Our preferences and beliefs write our story.
Definition of bias: prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. (Outlook, perspective, likes/dislikes, judgement)
Definition of prejudice: preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.
Discipleship... process of choosing to wear different glasses!

Let's review some scripture where Philip shows up in the narrative! (All scripture references are taken from the New English Translation unless otherwise noted.)

Luke 6:12-16... 12 Now it was during this time that Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and he spent all night in prayer to God. 13 When morning came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: 14 Simon (whom he named Peter), and his brother Andrew; and James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, 15 Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, 16 Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

- 5th name on ALL lists; maybe considered the leader of the next group of 4 (Philip, Nathaniel, Matthew and Thomas). Philip is a Greek name meaning, "lover of horses". He probably had a Jewish name but we do not know it.

John 1:43-46... 43 On the next day Jesus wanted to set out for Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." 44 (Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the town of Andrew and Peter.) 45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law, and the prophets also wrote about—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46 Nathanael replied, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip replied, "Come and see."

John 6:5-9... 5 Then Jesus, when he looked up and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, said to Philip, "Where can we buy bread so that these people may eat?" 6 (Now Jesus said this to test him, for he knew what he was going to do.) 7 Philip replied, "200 silver coins worth of bread would not be enough for them, for each one to get a little." 8 One of Jesus' disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9 "Here is a boy who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what good are these for so many people?"

- Philip had witnessed Jesus do miracles before this event. What prevented him from believing Jesus could do it again?
- Philip is singled out for a "test"! The test was for Philip, to get himself to become more aware of himself and his character; point out the weakness of his faith to build up his faith!

"Philip needed to set aside his materialistic, pragmatic, common-sense concerns and learn to lay hold of the supernatural potential of faith." John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*

John 14:8-14... Upper Room

8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be content." 9 Jesus replied, "Have I been with you for so long, and you have not known me, Philip? The person who has seen me has seen the Father! How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you, I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father residing in me performs his miraculous deeds. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me, but if you do not believe me, believe because of the miraculous deeds themselves. 12 I tell you the solemn truth, the person who believes in me will perform the miraculous deeds that I am doing, and will perform greater deeds than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

- Last night of Jesus' earthly ministry; the training is over! Philip is still struggling with faith. Philip utters a heartbreaking, ignorant statement... **"Lord, show us the Father, and we will be content."** Philip still can't see Jesus for who He really is; he is stuck in his earthbound thinking, materialism, skepticism; focused on the unnecessary details of the group. He was a man of weak faith, imperfect and limited understanding; unable to let go of his skeptical, pessimistic attitude.
- Philip went onward to serve Jesus and share the faith he had received from Jesus. He was martyred in 54AD in Hierapolis (modern day Turkey) when the proconsul's wife converted to Christianity because of Philip's preaching; preached from the tau cross until he took his last breath.

Application and questions for reflection...

- Can you name your biases?
- Are you rational, analytical, practical when it comes to your Christian walk?
- Is your practical approach to following Jesus robbing you of experiencing the rewards of a life lived in faith?

Luke 17:5, 6... 5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6 So the Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this black mulberry tree, 'Be pulled out by the roots and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

What increases your faith in Jesus?

- Obeying the words of Jesus.
- Facing the tests from Jesus.
- Leaning on the grace and power given freely by Jesus.
- Following Jesus instead of following the "rules"!

What risk do you need to take?

What sacrifice do you need to make?

Sticky Statement

What increases our faith in Jesus? Taking steps of faith with Jesus and for Jesus so that others can know Jesus!

Scripture references to help you “increase your faith” (New Living Translation)

Romans 10:17... So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.

John 17:3... And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.

1 Peter 2:2... Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation.

Matthew 7:7... Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.

Romans 12:2... Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

1 Peter 1:7... These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.

1 Corinthians 10:13... The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

“If our trust in God is going to grow, we have to learn to step out in faith, moving out of our comfort zone and taking chances. If we believe that God will sustain us for that day, we can be free to carry out His will, regardless of the consequences. Whenever we face temptations, God will always provide a way out so that we will not be overcome (1 Corinthians 10:13). We need to look for that way out, and praise God when we find it. First Peter 1:7 says He will use trials to test our faith and to make us stronger Christians; we will be given much honor if we can stand strong and not waver.

““Yet faith comes from listening to this message of good news – the Good News about Christ”

(Romans 10:17). - from the website, GotQuestions.org

July 24, 2022

Follow Me - Week 9: Nathanael/Bartholomew... the skeptical one!

“The worst thing that happens to you may be the best thing for you if you don't let it get the best of you.” Will Rogers

Can you think of a time when this quote was true for you? Something happened to you that you defined as the worst day ever. But instead of letting it defeat you, you found the courage to “fight back” and rise above the situation. Maybe it was your faith and trust in God that helped you. Now looking back several weeks or months later to your “worst day ever”, you realize the benefits and blessings of what God brought you through...

This was true for the disciple named Nathanael which means “God has given”; He was also known by his middle name, Bartholomew which means, “son of Tolmai”. Nathanael battled certain prejudices early on in his life, mostly centered around his view of people from the town of Nazareth.

Last week, we talked about how our biases control the story of our lives. A bias is a “prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.” This week, we are going to examine how our prejudices can keep us from growing in our faith if we don't learn to grow and change and push past our perspective. Prejudice is defined as a “preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.”

Our prejudices change the story of our lives, and usually not for the better. I believe fear fuels our prejudice!

Read John 1:43-51

Nathanael was from Cana in Galilee, near Nazareth, where Jesus changed water into wine as his first miracle. He was a good friend of Philip; both were students of the scriptures. Both spent time in the wilderness following John the Baptist because of his prophetic preaching.

When Philip told Nathanael that they had found the messiah, he responded with this question, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Judeans looked down on Galileans; Galileans looked down and those from Nazareth. Cana and Nazareth were neighboring towns. Both rough places to grow up; Nazareth was a crossroads town; Cana was off the beaten path. Nazareth... uncultured, unrefined, uneducated; evil, sinful.

Nathanael couldn't see in himself as someone who was from the same place! Maybe his prejudice was fueled by jealousy, upbringing, culture, or ignorance. He could not accept the fact that the messiah they were wait for could come from a place like Nazareth. Of course, Israel rejected Jesus as Messiah because of biases and prejudices!

Prejudices cut you off from the truth; prevents you from growing. Fortunately, Nathanael's prejudice DID NOT KEEP HIM FROM KNOWING AND FOLLOWING CHRIST!

“Sitting under the fig tree.”

Fig trees gave great shade to the house and wonderful fruit to the family; could have been a quiet place for study of scripture and to pray; Jesus “saw” Nathanael by knowing his heart! The fig tree was symbolic for messianic peace and plenty! (Micah 4:4) Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecies that Nathanael studied so intently and diligently. Nathanael was a true seeker of divine truth; his heart was open to the truth and hungry to know it!

Jesus gave Nathanael a compliment... “Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.” Nathanael had a pure heart; mind might have been tainted by prejudice but his heart was not destroyed by deceit, anger or bigotry. He was not a hypocrite; his love for God and desire to see Messiah was genuine. He had an authentic faith and was fully devoted to God. He had to overcome what he thought the Messiah would look and act like, and he did that rather quickly!

Jesus offers truth, peace and plenty of everything you need!

“Stairway between heaven and earth”

When Nathanael experienced proof of Jesus omniscience, he instantly recognized Him as promised Messiah, Son of God, King of Israel! He got it before Philip! Jesus promised greater things to come... which in turn would increase, enrich and enlarge Nathanael's faith! Jesus would declare Himself to be a “ladder” between heaven and earth. The bridge; the intersection; the road! (Refer to Genesis 28 for more on Jacob's dream which Jesus seemed to reference in his conversation with the disciples.)

Jesus transforms hearts and changes the way you see the world!

Historians believe Nathanael ministered in Persia and India; took the gospel to Armenia. No clear record of death; flayed or crucified! He is represented by the symbol of 3 knives.

Reflection Questions...

Can you name your prejudices?

Are you willing to confess your prejudices to Jesus?

Do bias and prejudice keep us from being transformed disciples of Jesus that transform others into being disciples with Jesus?

Biases and prejudices build up and create...

Walls around our heart and mind.

Distance between us and “them”.

Fear of the unknown which keeps us living in ignorance.

Prejudices can hinder and even halt our spiritual growth unless we learn to sit under the “fig tree” (the peace and prosperity of Jesus) with Jesus and let Him change us so we can see clearly what we need to do to bring Him honor and glory.

Review...

Prejudices cut you off from the truth; prevents you from growing.

Jesus offers truth, peace and plenty of everything you need!

Jesus transforms hearts and changes the way you see the world!

Remember...

Jesus is the ladder between heaven and earth.

Jesus is the bridge between love and hate.

Jesus is the road to truth and peace.

Sticky Statement

Jesus knows you by what He sees in your heart! He wants to change your heart. He is calling you to sit under the fig tree. Come and see for yourself...

Colossians 3:10-14... 10 Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. 11 In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. 12 Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13 Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.