

When God Calls Us

Series: Conversations with Jesus
Brad Bailey – February 11, 2018

Intro

Conversations. Some are just polite exchanges. Some are practical exchanges. [1]

But there are **some that can be life altering**. They can **change our understanding of life...and ourselves**. Some have an expansive effect.

No conversations have changed more people than those with Jesus.

So today we are beginning a series in which we are **engaging conversations with Jesus...** what are living and life-changing conversations with Jesus.

The first conversation is truly the first known. In John's Gospel account... he begins capturing the profound nature of the One who has come...

John 1:4 (NIV)

In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

John 1: 18 (NIV)

No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

Now he tells how it began...he introduces how, just as **prophesied in the Old Testament...** **first one came who was to prepare the way for this coming Messiah.** That figure was **John the Baptist...** who had come declaring that the time had come... **God was providing a way...** and it was time to turn and repent.

Now the John who was there and wrote this testimony... describes what unfolded...**John 1:35-51.**

It's a long text but easy on the imagination.

John 1:35-51 (TLB)

The following day as John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ Jesus walked by. John looked at him intently and then declared, "See! There is the Lamb of God!"

³⁷ Then John's two disciples turned and followed Jesus.

³⁸ Jesus looked around and saw them following. "What do you want?" he asked them.

"Sir," they replied, "where do you live?"

³⁹ "Come and see," he said. So they went with him to the place where he was staying and were with him from about four o'clock that afternoon until the evening. ⁴⁰ (One of these men was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.)

⁴¹ Andrew then went to find his brother Peter and told him, "We have found the Messiah!" ⁴² And he brought Peter to meet Jesus.

Jesus looked intently at Peter for a moment and then said, “You are Simon, John’s son—but you shall be called Peter, the rock!”

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and told him, “Come with me.” ⁴⁴ (Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter’s hometown.)

⁴⁵ Philip now went off to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the Messiah!—the very person Moses and the prophets told about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth!”

⁴⁶ “Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from there?”

“Just come and see for yourself,” Philip declared.

⁴⁷ As they approached, Jesus said, “Here comes an honest man—a true son of Israel.”

⁴⁸ “How do you know what I am like?” Nathanael demanded.

And Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.”

⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, “Sir, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!”

⁵⁰ Jesus asked him, “Do you believe all this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater proofs than this. ⁵¹ You will even see heaven open and the angels of God coming back and forth to me, the Messiah.”

Here is where the ministry of Jesus began.

One has been raised to prepare the way. And now that preparation leads to actually introducing some to Jesus himself.

These **disciples have become so identified** as being among the **infamous 12** disciples of Jesus... that we **forget they each were just ordinary lives before they were called.**

Each was called by Christ... just as each of us are.

One of the interesting things that most of them share in common... is that they were **introduced to Jesus by someone else.**

Even in this very first set of exchanges... we see that some like the first two... were pointed to Jesus **by a public figure (John the Baptist)...** someone who **carried clout.**

And another was introduced by a family member ...and another a **friend...** someone who there was **reason to trust.**

Most of us could identify someone who said...”come and see”...

It’s not a matter of proving...but pointing...sharing what they believe they have found....

In this series of exchanges... we engage the nature of God’s calling...a calling that I believe God has for each of us. That the calling is alive...and it will bear what we find lies here. **Let’s consider the nature of God’s calling. [3]**

1. God’s calling begins with awareness of our need.

What we hear is affected by what we are tuned to hear.

That's why we speak of **selective hearing**. **Dogs** hear a certain frequency...humans do.

Parents hear the cry of their own child... or not.

We respond to what we are tuned into. If you are hungry for food... you have a heightened sense for anything that speaks to where there may be food.

In a similar way, Andrew and John...these first two lives have developed an awareness of their need to be made right with God.

John declared, "See! There is the Lamb of God!" Then John's two disciples turned and followed Jesus.

John had come to prepare people to receive the Lamb of God...one who would become a sacrifice on their behalf. Now he says..."See"...or "behold"... he is here...there he is. [4]

Andrew and John were **already disciples of John the Baptist**, who was preaching a message of repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3). Although they had grown up in **good Jewish homes** and had practiced all of the **prescribed rituals and sacrifices**, these two young men **came under the conviction** of the Holy Spirit that **they were sinners**. They knew that their religious activities and heritage could not atone for their sins.

The truth is that the calling of God is that which seek depth... in which "deep calls to deep" (Psalm 42:7)...and the truth is that if our sense of need is shallow... we will only hear what is shallow.

So the first step is that he turns to them and asks a question he might ask each of us:

When he saw them following him he turned and asked them,

"What do you want?"

Or "What do you seek?"

Those are the **first words of Jesus in the Gospel of John** and they are very remarkable. They are also the very **first words Jesus uttered in his public ministry**; and they come in the form of a question. **These words go right to the heart of life**. In them Jesus asks the most profound question in anyone's life: What do you want? "What are you really looking for?"

It wasn't so important that Jesus knows what they wanted...but that they consider why.

That question will define their lives. Jesus saw how lives came with different levels of awareness...some just to contend....some just curious...some just consumers...some just in crisis...some deeply contrite with need.

- Some might engage Jesus out of a need to **contend for control** the potential force he bears. Like the religious leaders that first engaged him...they want to defend their prestige and power.
- Others come because they are **curious**... some perhaps consumers... seeing what they might be able to get.
- Many come because they are in the midst of some level of personal **crisis**... and often will be short term response.

Many of us could consider **what we may have initially wanted** when we first stopped to consider Jesus. Perhaps to **feel loved... comforted... get out of a bind** we were in. He could have told us to get lost...come back when we realize our deeper need...but he didn't. **He graciously engages our infantile stage of faith** and begins to work us.

But if we allow ourselves to realize our deeper need... we will hear the call of God on the deepest level. Jesus doesn't reject us...but he does recognize the that **shallow sense of need** will only allow a **shallow depth of connection**.

Their response was to **ask where he was staying**...suggested that they **wanted to really know more**... not just a few facts about him... but to know him... to spend time with Him, to talk with Him about their lives, to learn from Him all that God had for their lives. They wanted more than just a little religion in their lives, they **wanted a relationship with Jesus**. [5]

A second truth we discover is this...

2. God's calling will often challenge our understanding and expectations.

This becomes most striking when Philip runs to get his friend...likely his best friend... to tell him. And he explains...this is the one we expected... "the very person Moses and the prophets told about!"...in other words... it fits out expectations...aligns with what God has pointed to... BUT THEN HE ADDS...

"His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth!"

That last element stopped him...

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

One thing Nathanael heard seems to bother him a great deal. It is not that Jesus is referred to as "the son of Joseph" but that He is "Jesus of Nazareth." The truth is that he doesn't like the association.

We know that in Jesus own time as well as ours, that there is **prejudice towards certain places and people groups**.

Nazareth was territory that was at the **border of the Gentiles**...and so it was considered **unclean**. [6]

Nazareth was far from the places in which Jews found pride and power. It was like hearing that God had finally come... the Messiah has arisen... and then hearing that he was from **some backwoods place** ...the kind we joke about. Galilee seems to have been the “Ozarks” of Jesus’ day. When I was a **local beach kid**...it would be like someone telling me **God showed up...in the Valley**.

God’s calling will often challenge our expectations ...shaped by our personal preferences and prejudice.

There is a skeptical response because something doesn’t fit his expectations.

As one describes so well...

“At the deepest level our Nazareths are about our understanding of God. We just can’t see how anything good can come out of Nazareth.”

We think that God should only use people and places that are respectable... likable ...less weird... more deserving... more spiritually disciplined.

The Nathanael in us has a particular set of conditions or prerequisites that must be met before God will appear and act. **That says more about us than it does about God.** God does not allow himself to be limited by our assumptions.” [7]

Nothing new... God’s calling has always **transcended human understanding**... from Abraham...to Moses...to every disciple...to the Apostle Paul...and to everyone since.

Many of us will have to confront our “Nazareth”...our desire for God to only work within what we deem respectful. We may **want to be PR consultants** for God. We think God needs our help. But God may not be so enamored with soliciting human endorsements.

But how can we hear God’s call when we question whether it fits?

Philip responded to Nathaniel...**“Come and See.” It’s not about the people and places associated with him...it’s about HIM.**

Philip didn’t understand why God would use a place like Nazareth either...but he was willing to trust what he didn’t understand by what he was encountering. Phillip did not stand around to debate with his good friend Nathanael concerning the pros and cons of Nazareth—he simply said, “Come and see”.

This becomes another truth about God’s calling.

3. God’s calling is to “come and see.”

At the center of these conversations lies the call to “come and see.”

What did Jesus say to John and Andrew uncertainty? Come and see.

What does Philip say to Nathaniel question? “Come and See.”

God’s calling is a call to “come and see” which is a call to **genuinely explore**.

It is not asking to ignore one’s understanding...questions... but rather to engage what might challenge and lead beyond them. It’s an invitation to genuine inquiry...to truth.

It’s not that God owes us complete understanding. We are finite beings who must never forget that we cannot understand the infinite. Rather it’s a matter of the heart. If we truly encounter God’s nature in Jesus... our hearts will face their true response.

So “come and see” is also a challenge... for it calls us beyond the ideas that others have had...and even the one’s we create.

Do we see Jesus as he is or merely as we would like to see him? That same question goes for religious people and skeptics alike. For skeptics and seekers “come and see” means to come, think, and examine the evidence. For Christians “come and see” means to come and be a disciple of Jesus. We may think we are following him when in reality we are just following our own hearts. **Coming to Jesus with a heart that seeks to see him as he wants to be seen opens the way to a life-changing encounter.** Come and see.

The Lord’s gracious invitation still stands. We each do well to consider what we are doing right now with that call to come and see...to genuinely come close to who he is.

4. God’s calling is that which knows who we are and were meant to be more than we ever could.

Central in these exchanges is **how Jesus speaks of what he sees** in those he is in the process of calling.

Jesus’ opening words to Peter must have been a bit jarring (1:42), **“You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter).”**

Jesus is not telling Simon to change his name. He is telling him that he knows who he is...and who he can be. His identity is going to transform and he will be known as a stable, solid, foundational person. It will be changed. He will be known as Cephas (in Aramaic) or Peter (in Greek): The Rock.

How would you feel if the first words out of the mouth of someone you just met were to change your name? Peter may have thought, “I need to run for cover!” It is one thing to change your own name, but for someone else to speak about your identity is intense. But there was **something so captivating** about Jesus. The truth is that we really never know who we are...and Jesus bears the divine insight...vision... authority that we both fear and long for.

When God begins to call us... it often **exposing**...and exciting. I never felt so **vulnerable** ...but also never so **valued**.

In my youth... I was just trying to find my identity...and One begins to speak as One who knows me...knows all my masks... but offers a call to become who I was always meant to be.

Jesus sees your whole person too. He knows you inside and out. He sees you for who you are and who you wish you were.

God's calling is that which knows us more than we know ourselves.

And what about Nathaniel?

Nathaniel wondered if “any good thing can come out of Nazareth?”

Jesus instantly let Nathanael know that He knew him inside and out. He knew that Nathanael was a man without guile or deceit (1:47). [8]

Rabbi's frequently used the phrase “being under your fig tree” like we might use the idea of “being in your prayer closet” or being “in your quiet time” to refer figuratively to prayer. Jesus is saying to Nathanael, “My Father has shown me what only God sees.

It was so profoundly personal... God sees me...knows me. He experiences being known. God knows him to the bottom...and he praises him to the skies. This is the friend we have always been looking for.

“Nathanael answered and said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” [9]

Nathanael is the first man in John's gospel who is said to believe in Jesus and he is the first to receive a promise from Christ.

> Jesus says you will see more than you can imagine. **He says Nathaniel...you have no idea all that is at hand.**

Jesus speaks of how the angelic flow between heaven and earth has come in me... all connection between heaven and earth flows through me.

He is saying I am the story on which all the other stories culminate.

If you every read a story and you wanted to enter it...Jesus says you can come and enter my story and it's the story that all other stories culminate it.

Closing

These lives responded...and they entered a story bigger than anything they could have imagined.

That is the **call God brings to each of us.**

God is having a personal form of this conversation with each of us.

He says... "Do you know what do you really want...really need.?"

Are you able to get beyond your expectation?

Are you ready to come and follow me?

He is calling us to be his **disciples... his followers in every aspect of life...always learning...always changing.**

Some here have said "yes"...but maybe we have **lost the full force of that calling.** Maybe we have allowed ourselves to simply identify with some past decision... to have "become a Christian" ...and allowed a label to replace a calling.

Today...back to students every day.

For others here... someone has pointed to Him...you've followed at a distance...and Jesus is turning to you and asking: *What do you want?*

Jesus knows more about you than you know yourself, and He holds out His hand.

Resources: Drew elements of thought from Timothy Keller - Come and See Sermon (Nov. 15, 1998); Steven J. Cole (Lesson 9: Meeting Jesus <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-9-meeting-jesus-john-135-51>)

Notes:

1. Some definition and origin of the word "conversation"

conversation (n.)

mid-14c., "living together, having dealings with others," also "manner of conducting oneself in the world;" from Old French conversation, from Latin conversationem (nominative conversatio) "act of living with," noun of action from past participle stem of conversari "to live with, keep company with," literally "turn about with," from Latin com "with, together" (see com-) + versare, frequentative of vertere "to turn," from PIE root *wer- (2) "to turn, bend."

From: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/conversation>

MERRIAM-WEBSTER - "exchange of sentiments, observations, opinions, or ideas"

2. Jesus' life before is not entirely missing. The other Gospel writers cover his birth and some reference to early years. His life began with the unfolding of signs... threat of powers ... refugee...was raised in Jewish community (despite what some want to re-frame)...and "grew in wisdom and stature." (Luke 2:52)

3. The nature of these accounts are clearly sharing what is presented as real...not myth...but an introduction to one that can be met. The firsthand nature of John's account is seen in his mention of the successive days of these events (1:29, 35, 43, 2:1) and the time of day when he met Jesus (1:39, "the tenth hour," probably about 4 p.m.). All of these men met Jesus personally and began to follow Him. Eventually He called them to be His apostles. But here, they meet Him and He invites them to follow Him as disciples (or learners).

Tim Keller expounds on the significance of the nature of these accounts...and how they reflect the "come and see" nature. As John does he, they note... what day...what hour..

Reynolds Price...whose every book reviewed in NY Times...teaches at Duke... wrote book called "The Three Gospels"... and he clarifies the nature of ancient literature. One thing you will have to remember is that ancient fiction never uses details. The Odyssey...is only interested in larger mythological archetypes...not details...only historical accounts would bother themselves with that.

So here we have eye witness accounts that are telling us this is what he said and did...and you can examine...you can "come and see."

You will know that you have done that because you will have been pushed to the very edges of credulity. Tim Keller... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qAxkOb02aA>

Reynolds Price quotes C.S. Lewis:

"I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this. Of this text there are only two possible views. Either this is reportage... Or else, some unknown writer in the 2nd century, without known predecessors, or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern, novelistic, realistic narrative. If it is untrue, it must be narrative of that kind. The reader who doesn't see this has simply not learned to read." -C.S. Lewis

4. Steven J. Cole (Lesson 9: Meeting Jesus <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-9-meeting-jesus-john-135-51>) expounds on the significance of Lamb of God" -

We begin with Jesus by trusting Him as the Lamb of God who takes away our sin (Andrew and John; 1:35-40).

'Behold the Lamb of God!' It is a simple enough statement but I would suggest that it is one of the most important principles in the life of any Christian. The Greek word translated 'behold' in this passage carries a few different ideas with it. It means 'to perceive, or take notice', 'to turn the eyes, the mind, the attention to something', 'to inspect, examine, gain knowledge of', and 'to have regard for and cherish'. John is saying to his two disciples 'turn your eyes upon the Lamb of God! Perceive and understand that He is our Passover Lamb! Regard and cherish greatly this one that God has sent to die for your behalf! Behold Him!

Andrew and John were already disciples of John the Baptist, who was preaching a message of repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3). Although they had grown up in

good Jewish homes and had practiced all of the prescribed rituals and sacrifices, these two young men came under the conviction of the Holy Spirit that they were sinners. They knew that their religious activities and heritage could not atone for their sins. And so they were baptized by John.

But John kept speaking of the One who was coming after him, the thong of whose sandals he was not worthy to untie (1:27). John denied being the Messiah, but said that he was merely a voice crying in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord” (1:23). When John saw Jesus and proclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God” (1:29, 36), that was all that Andrew and John needed to say, “We’re going to follow the Lamb! We need Him to be our Lamb, to take away our sins!”

To become a Christian you must become aware that you are a sinner in the sight of holy God and that all of your good works can never atone for your sins. You can never work your way to heaven by your good deeds. You need a Savior and Jesus is that Savior, the Lamb of God, whose death on the cross was the culmination of the entire Jewish sacrificial system. God didn’t sacrifice His own dear Son as an example so that basically good people could learn how to be even better. God gave His Son to save sinners who cannot in any way save themselves. Just as the Jews in the Old Testament looked in faith to their sacrifices as God’s ordained means of forgiveness in that era, so we must look in faith to Jesus as the Lamb of God who died to pay for our sins.

5. Steven J. Cole (Lesson 9: Meeting Jesus <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-9-meeting-jesus-john-135-51>) expounds on the significance seeking to be with Jesus -

Andrew and John answer (1:38), “Rabbi, where are You staying?” It seems like an odd reply to Jesus’ question. Probably they wanted more time with Him than a roadside talk would provide (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* [Eerdmans], p. 156). John Calvin (Calvin’s Commentaries [Baker], p. 71) saw in their reply the lesson that “we ought not to be satisfied with a mere passing look, but that we ought to seek his dwelling, that he may receive us as guests.” He explains, “For there are very many who smell the gospel at a distance only, and thus allow Christ suddenly to disappear, and all that they have learned concerning him to pass away.” The point is, if you have met Christ as your Savior, then you’ll want to spend more time with Him to learn more about Him. It was only after Andrew and John spent that evening with the Lord that they became witnesses to the others.

6. As one noted: The Jews despised Nazareth because it was on the border of a Gentile country, Nazareth was sometimes called “Galilee of the Gentiles”, and the Jews were so deeply prejudiced against the Gentiles that they considered anyone or anything touched by a Gentile to be unclean in the sight of God. Thus, the Jews despised Nazareth because it was on the border of a Gentile country and so the Gentiles geographically touched it, which caused Nazareth to somehow be considered unclean as well. (Source lost)

7. This challenge is beautifully expounded upon by Father Michael Marsh..

At the deepest level our Nazareths are about our understanding of God. We just can't see how anything good can come out of Nazareth. We cannot believe that God could be present, active, and revealed in Nazareth whether it be another person, a relationship or situation, or our own life. It's so hard to see life in the midst of death, hope in places of despair, and the good and beautiful in what looks like the bad and ugly. It's sometimes easier to assume. For us Nazareth is a blind spot. For God, however, Nazareth is the place of God's manifestation and self-revelation. It just seems so unGod-like to show up in Nazareth. Whether it is the town, a person, or a situation, Nazareth is too common and ordinary, even mundane. Shouldn't the person or place of God's coming be more deserving, special, acceptable, holy, better behaved, likable, more regular at church, someone who prays more, better dressed? The Nathanael in us has a particular set of conditions or prerequisites that must be met before God will appear and act. That says more about us than it does about God.

God does not allow himself to be limited by our assumptions. For every Nazareth there is an invitation to "come and see." For every assumption we make there is a deeper truth to be discovered, a new relationship to be experienced, and a new life to be lived. Our Nazareths become the place of God's epiphany. (From: Father Michael K. Marsh, *Jesus of Nazareth Meets Nathanael of the Fig Tree – A Sermon on John 1:43-51*)

8. "Jesus' words to Nathanael are a play on Jacob's name and character. Jacob was a deceiver, whose name was changed to Israel. Here, it's as if Jesus is saying of Nathanael, "Look, Israel without a trace of Jacob left in him!" (L. Trudinger, cited by Andreas Kostenberger, *John [Baker]*, p. 82.) Jesus apparently knew that Nathanael had been sitting under a fig tree, meditating on Jacob's dream of the ladder coming down out of heaven (1:51). (Source lost)

9. From John Hamby (*A Personal Encounter With Jesus*) - Rabbi's frequently used the phrase "being under your fig tree" like we might use the idea of "being in your prayer closet" or being "in your quiet time" to refer figuratively to prayer. Jesus is saying to Nathanael, "I saw you praying. I heard what you asked." What I think is important here is that Nathanael had a religious experience that no one but Jesus knew about. The point is, Nathanael had a spiritual experience in his private prayer time and Jesus was saying, "I know all about that experience you had that you shared only with God!"

As the Psalmist says in (Psalm 139:1-4), "O Lord, you have searched me and known me. (2) You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. (3) You comprehend my path and my laying down, And you are acquainted with all my ways. (4) For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether."

Good or bad, nothing is hidden from God!

•Nathanael's Response (v. 49)

"Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Jesus' response to Nathanael clearly blew him away, he clearly had not expected anything like Jesus' answer and it had a profound effect on him. First note that he respectfully addresses Jesus as "Rabbi" or "Teacher." He definitely has had a change of attitude about whether something good can come out of Nazareth. He then proceeds to affirm that Jesus is indeed "The Son of God." Nathanael is not saying that Jesus is merely "a" son of God but rather that He is "the" only unique Son of God the rightful King of Israel.

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Series: Conversations with Jesus
Brad Bailey – February 11, 2018

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³⁷ Then John’s two disciples turned and followed Jesus.

³⁸ Jesus looked around and saw them following. “What do you want?” he asked them.

“Sir,” they replied, “where do you live?”

³⁹ “Come and see,” he said. So they went with him to the place where he was staying and were with him from about four o’clock that afternoon until the evening. ⁴⁰ (One of these men was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.)

⁴¹ Andrew then went to find his brother Peter and told him, “We have found the Messiah!” ⁴² And he brought Peter to meet Jesus.

Jesus looked intently at Peter for a moment and then said, “You are Simon, John’s son—but you shall be called Peter, the rock!”

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and told him, “Come with me.” ⁴⁴ (Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter’s hometown.)

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⁴⁶ “Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from there?”

“Just come and see for yourself,” Philip declared.

⁴⁷ As they approached, Jesus said, “Here comes an honest man—a true son of Israel.”

⁴⁸ “How do you know what I am like?” Nathanael demanded.

And Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.”

⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, “Sir, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!”

⁵⁰ Jesus asked him, “Do you believe all this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater proofs than this. ⁵¹ You will even see heaven open and the angels of God coming back and forth to me, the Messiah.”^[a]

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2. God’s calling will often _____ our understanding and expectations.

3. God’s calling is to “_____.”

4. God’s calling is that which knows _____ and were _____ more than we ever could.