

The Gospel of John, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: The Testimony of John and the First Disciples

John 1:19–51

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

John 1:19–51 moves from the witness of John the Baptist to the gathering of the first disciples, and it is doing two things at once. Doctrinally, it is building a powerful case for the identity of Jesus through a cascade of titles: the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the one Moses and the prophets wrote about, the Son of God, the King of Israel, and the Son of Man on whom heaven opens. The teacher should help students see that John is stacking these titles deliberately, showing that Jesus is the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament hope. The phrase “Lamb of God” in particular connects Jesus to the whole sacrificial system and points straight to the cross.

At the same time, this passage is a quiet masterclass in how faith spreads and how disciples are made. John points, Andrew brings his brother, Philip invites his friend with a simple “come and see.” None of it is impressive by worldly standards, but it is exactly how the kingdom grows. The teacher should let this shape the students’ sense of their own calling. Most of us will not preach to crowds at the Jordan, but all of us can do what Andrew and Philip did.

So aim at both. Help students see Jesus more clearly through the titles He is given here, and help them see themselves as witnesses who point others to Him. The disciple we are forming knows who Jesus is and cannot help introducing Him to someone else.

Question 1

Student Question:

When the priests and Levites questioned him, John the Baptist insisted, “I am not the Christ” (v. 20), and described himself only as “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness” (v. 23). What does John’s understanding of his own role teach us about the purpose and limits of every human ministry?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John the Baptist is under real pressure here. An official delegation has come from Jerusalem, and the crowd is hungry for a messiah. In that moment John could have grasped at significance, but instead he defines himself almost entirely by what he is not. “I am not the Christ.” Not Elijah in the sense they meant. Not the Prophet. He is content to be “the voice,” borrowing Isaiah 40:3.

Draw out the principle: every human ministry exists to point beyond itself to Christ. John knows his role has limits, and he is at peace with those limits. He is the friend of the bridegroom, not

the bridegroom. He is the voice, not the Word. This is the healthiest possible self-understanding for anyone who serves God, whether a preacher, an elder, a teacher, a parent, or a friend.

Note how John's humility is rooted in his sense of Jesus' greatness. "I am not worthy to untie" His sandal, a task so lowly that rabbis said a disciple should not be asked to do it. John's low view of himself is not self-hatred; it is the natural result of a high view of Christ. The closer we get to Jesus, the smaller our need to be impressive becomes.

Apply this to the church. Much conflict and burnout in ministry comes from people forgetting that they are voices, not the Word. When we remember our role and its limits, we are freed from the crushing need to be the savior of every situation. We point, and we let Christ be Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The purpose of all faithful ministry: to point beyond ourselves to Christ (John 3:30).
- Humility rooted in a high view of Jesus rather than a low view of self.
- The limits of human ministry and the freedom those limits bring.
- John the Baptist as the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3, the voice preparing the way.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it healthy to know the limits of your own role in God's work?
- Where are you tempted to be "the Word" instead of "a voice"?
- How does a high view of Christ shrink our need to be impressive?

Question 2

Student Question:

John the Baptist said of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" is the spirit of his whole witness here. In what specific area of your life is Jesus calling you to step back so that He can be seen more clearly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question draws on the spirit that runs through John's whole testimony and is summed up later in 3:30: "He must increase, but I must decrease." The goal is to help students locate a specific area where their own visibility, control, or credit is crowding out Christ.

Help students move from the general to the particular. It is easy to agree in principle that Jesus should increase. It is harder to name the specific place where we are still increasing ourselves, perhaps in how we talk about our accomplishments, how we need to be right in conflict, how we measure our worth by recognition, or how we resist letting someone else lead.

Reassure students that decreasing is not the same as disappearing or thinking poorly of ourselves. John remained a powerful, fruitful man even as he pointed away from himself. To

decrease is simply to let Christ have His rightful place, to want Him seen more than we want to be seen.

Press toward one concrete step. Ask each student to name a single relationship or situation this week where they will deliberately let Jesus increase, by deferring, by pointing to Him, by serving without recognition, or by surrendering a desire to control.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “He must increase, but I must decrease” as the posture of discipleship (John 3:30).
- The difference between healthy decreasing and unhealthy self-contempt.
- Credit, control, and recognition as common rivals to Christ’s increase.
- Concrete obedience as the test of genuine surrender.

Discussion Prompts

- In what specific area do you sense yourself increasing rather than Christ?
- What is the difference between decreasing and simply thinking poorly of yourself?
- What is one place this week where you will let Jesus increase?

Question 3

Student Question:

John points to Jesus and says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (v. 29). What does this title tell us about why Jesus came, and how does it connect Him to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” is one of the most loaded sentences in the Gospel. With it, John the Baptist tells us why Jesus came, before Jesus has performed a single miracle. He came to be a sacrifice.

Trace the background for students. The lamb evoked the Passover lamb, whose blood spared Israel from death in Egypt (Exodus 12), and the daily sacrifices of the temple, and the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 who was led like a lamb to the slaughter. The whole sacrificial system had been pointing forward, year after year, to a sacrifice that could actually take sin away rather than merely cover it.

Stress the word “takes away.” The animal sacrifices reminded people of sin but could never remove it (Hebrews 10:4). Jesus, the Lamb of God, does what they could not: He carries sin away entirely. And the scope is staggering, “the sin of the world,” not one nation only but all who come to Him.

Help students feel the personal weight. This is not abstract theology; it is the answer to the deepest human problem. Our guilt is real, and we cannot remove it ourselves. The Lamb of God came to take it away. Every time we approach the Lord's table, we remember this Lamb and the blood that was poured out for us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the Lamb of God, the true and final sacrifice for sin (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18–19).
- The Old Testament sacrificial system as a shadow pointing to Christ (Hebrews 10:1–10).
- The difference between covering sin and taking it away (Hebrews 10:4).
- The universal scope of the offer: the sin of the world.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the title “Lamb of God” connect Jesus to the whole Old Testament?
- Why could the animal sacrifices never finally take away sin?
- How does remembering Christ as the Lamb shape the way you come to the Lord's table?

Question 4

Student Question:

Andrew's first act after meeting Jesus was to find his brother Simon and bring him to Jesus (vv. 41–42). Who first brought you toward Christ, and who in your life might God be calling you to bring to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Andrew is one of the quiet heroes of the New Testament. The first thing he does after spending a day with Jesus is to go find his brother Simon and bring him to Jesus. Andrew never preaches a recorded sermon, but he brings Peter, and through Peter thousands will come to Christ.

Use this to honor the ministry of ordinary connection. Most people come to Christ not through a famous preacher but through someone who simply brought them, a brother, a friend, a coworker, a neighbor. Andrew's example dignifies the small, faithful act of introduction.

Invite students to remember their own story. Who first brought them toward Christ? A parent, a friend, a teacher, a stranger? Naming that person often rekindles gratitude and a sense of how the chain of faith actually works, one person at a time.

Then turn it forward. Ask students to name a specific person God may be calling them to bring, and to consider what a first step might look like, an invitation, a conversation, a meal, a prayer. The point is to move Andrew's example from admiration to imitation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The ministry of ordinary connection and personal invitation.
- Every believer as a potential link in someone else's chain of faith.
- Gratitude for those who brought us toward Christ.
- Evangelism as relational and personal, not only public.

Discussion Prompts

- Who first brought you toward Christ, and how did they do it?
- Who in your life might God be calling you to bring to Jesus?
- What would a first, concrete step toward inviting that person look like?

Question 5

Student Question:

When Andrew told Simon, "We have found the Messiah" (v. 41), and Philip told Nathanael about "him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote" (v. 45), what were they claiming about Jesus, and why does it matter that the whole Old Testament was pointing to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question gathers the chain of titles in this passage: Messiah (v. 41), "him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote" (v. 45). Andrew and Philip are making enormous claims. They are saying that the long story of Israel, the law and the prophets, has been leading to this man from Nazareth.

Help students grasp what "Messiah" meant. It is the Anointed One, the promised king from David's line, the deliverer Israel had waited for through centuries of exile and oppression. To call Jesus the Messiah was to say that the long wait was over and God's promises were coming true.

Stress the unity of Scripture. Philip says Moses and the prophets wrote about Jesus. This is the consistent New Testament claim: the whole Old Testament, its sacrifices, its prophecies, its longing, points to Christ (Luke 24:27). The Bible is one story with one center.

Apply this to how students read their Bibles. Many treat the Old Testament as disconnected from Jesus. This passage invites them to read all of Scripture as pointing to Him, which deepens both their understanding of the Old Testament and their wonder at how carefully God prepared the way.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the promised Messiah, the anointed King from David's line.
- The unity of Scripture: the whole Old Testament points to Christ (Luke 24:27).
- The fulfillment of God's long-standing promises in Jesus.
- The authority and reliability of Scripture as one unfolding story.

Discussion Prompts

- What did it mean for Andrew and Philip to call Jesus the Messiah?
- How does it change your reading to see the whole Old Testament pointing to Christ?
- Where have you seen a promise of God fulfilled in your own life?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus looked at Simon and said, "You shall be called Cephas" (Peter), giving him a new name and a new future (v. 42). What does it mean to you that Jesus sees not only who you are but who He intends to make you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When Jesus looks at Simon and renames him Cephas (Peter, the Rock), He is doing something tender and powerful. He sees not only the impulsive fisherman in front of Him but the steady leader Simon will become. Jesus names him for his future, not his past.

Help students feel the grace in this. Peter will stumble badly, even denying Jesus, and yet the name holds. Jesus' vision of who we will become is not naive optimism; it is the confident purpose of the One who is committed to finishing what He starts in us (Philippians 1:6).

Apply this personally. Many people are defined, in their own minds, by their failures, their labels, or the worst things others have said about them. Jesus sees differently. He sees who He intends to make us, and He calls us toward that, patiently, over a lifetime.

Be careful not to turn this into mere self-esteem language. The point is not that we are wonderful as we are, but that Jesus is committed to transforming us. The new name is a promise of grace and a call to grow into it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus' transforming vision of who He intends to make us.
- God's commitment to complete the work He begins (Philippians 1:6).
- Identity grounded in Christ's call rather than past failures or labels.
- Grace that persists through our stumbling.

Discussion Prompts

- What labels or failures tend to define how you see yourself?
- What does it mean that Jesus sees who He intends to make you?
- How does Christ's patience with Peter encourage you in your own growth?

Question 7

Student Question:

Nathanael began as a skeptic ("Can anything good come out of Nazareth?") but came to confess, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (vv. 46–49). What moved him from doubt to confession, and what does this teach us about how honest questions can lead to real faith?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Nathanael's journey from skepticism to confession is one of the warmest little stories in the Gospel. He begins with a sneer, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?", and ends on his knees in worship, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Notice what moved him. Jesus told Nathanael He had seen him "under the fig tree" before Philip called him, a private moment Jesus could not have known by natural means. That flash of being fully known undid Nathanael's defenses. He realized he was in the presence of Someone who saw straight through him and welcomed him anyway.

Use this to honor honest doubt. Nathanael's skepticism was not punished; it was met. Jesus did not scold him for his question; He gave him enough to believe. This is deeply reassuring for students who carry honest questions, and for those trying to reach skeptical friends. Doubt that is willing to "come and see" often becomes the doorway to real faith.

Mark the height of Nathanael's confession. "Son of God" and "King of Israel" are messianic and divine titles, and Jesus accepts them. The skeptic ends up making one of the clearest confessions in the chapter, a reminder that God can bring strong faith out of honest questions.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest doubt as a possible doorway to genuine faith.
- Jesus' supernatural knowledge as evidence of His identity.
- The titles Son of God and King of Israel as confessions of His messianic and divine identity.
- Being fully known by Christ and still welcomed.

Discussion Prompts

- What moved Nathanael from doubt to confession?
- How should we treat honest questions, our own and others', about Jesus?
- What does it mean to you to be fully known by Christ and still loved?

Question 8**Student Question:**

Philip's invitation to the skeptical Nathanael was simply, "Come and see" (v. 46). Who in your life is full of honest questions about Jesus, and how might a humble "come and see" be more powerful than trying to win an argument?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Philip's strategy with the skeptical Nathanael is worth pausing over. He does not launch into a debate or marshal arguments. He simply says, "Come and see." He is confident enough in Jesus to let Nathanael encounter Him directly.

Help students see the wisdom here. Many of us, when faced with a friend's objections to Christ, feel we must win the argument. But arguments rarely convert; encounters do. "Come and see" trusts that Jesus Himself is the most compelling case for Jesus.

Invite students to identify the honest questioners in their own lives, the friend, the relative, the coworker who has real doubts. The pressure to have all the answers can keep us silent. "Come and see" lowers the bar: we do not have to be experts, only to invite people into proximity with Christ, His word, His people, His table.

Encourage a concrete application. "Come and see" can mean inviting someone to read a Gospel together, to come to a study or service, or simply to watch how Christ shapes our lives up close. The aim is a humble, confident invitation rather than a victory in debate.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- "Come and see" as a model of humble, confident evangelism.
- Encounter with Christ as more persuasive than argument alone.
- Freedom from the pressure to have every answer.
- The church and its life as a place to invite seekers.

Discussion Prompts

- Who in your life has honest questions about Jesus right now?
- Why is "come and see" often more powerful than winning an argument?
- What is one way you could invite a questioner closer to Christ this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

When Nathanael confessed Jesus as the Son of God and King of Israel, Jesus accepted the titles and promised he would see "the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (v. 51), echoing Jacob's ladder. What is Jesus claiming about Himself as the meeting point between heaven and earth, and how does this passage build the case for His divine identity?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question, and it lands on Jesus' own startling words in verse 51: "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." Jesus is reaching back to Genesis 28 and Jacob's dream of a ladder joining heaven and earth, with angels going up and down upon it.

Make the claim explicit. In Jacob's dream, the ladder was the connection between heaven and earth, the place where God met humanity. Jesus says the angels will ascend and descend "on the Son of Man," that is, on Himself. He is claiming to be the ladder, the true and living meeting point between God and humanity. There is no access to heaven that does not run through Him.

Connect this to the cascade of titles in the chapter. Nathanael has just confessed Jesus as Son of God and King of Israel, and Jesus accepts these and adds Son of Man, a title from Daniel 7 of one who comes with the clouds and is given everlasting dominion. Together these titles affirm both His messianic kingship and His unique, heaven-joining identity. The chapter is building, title by title, toward the full truth of who Jesus is.

Bring it to the heart. If Jesus is the ladder between heaven and earth, then our hope of access to God does not rest on our climbing but on His descending and our coming to Him. He is the one mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5). To be joined to Christ is to have heaven opened.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the true ladder joining heaven and earth (John 1:51; Genesis 28:12).
- Christ as the one mediator and only access to the Father (John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5).
- The title Son of Man and its roots in Daniel 7.
- The cumulative case of John 1 for Jesus' divine and messianic identity.

Discussion Prompts

- What is Jesus claiming about Himself by echoing Jacob's ladder?
- Why does it matter that access to God runs only through Christ?
- How do the titles in John 1 together reveal who Jesus is?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over this passage. From John's pointing, to Andrew's inviting, to Philip's "come and see," ordinary people kept leading others to Jesus. As you finish this lesson, what is one specific way Jesus is forming you into someone who points others to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question asks students to take in the whole pattern of the passage. From John the Baptist's pointing, to Andrew's bringing, to Philip's inviting, the kingdom spreads through

ordinary people who lead others to Jesus. This is the engine of the chapter and, in a sense, the engine of the whole church.

Help students see themselves in the chain. They are here because someone pointed. The natural and joyful response is to point in turn. The question is not whether they have a platform but whether they will do what Andrew and Philip did with the people already in their lives.

Press for specificity, which is the heart of transformation. Ask each student to name one concrete way Jesus is forming them into someone who points others to Him, whether that is a renewed boldness, a specific person to invite, a habit of speaking naturally about Christ, or a willingness to simply say “come and see.”

Close by linking witness to worship. We point others to Jesus not out of duty but out of the overflow of having found Him ourselves. The more clearly we see who He is, through this very chapter, the more we cannot help introducing Him to someone else.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The spread of the kingdom through ordinary personal witness.
- Every believer as a link in the chain of faith.
- Witness flowing from worship and genuine encounter with Christ.
- Spiritual formation expressed in concrete, named action.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you see yourself in the chain of people who led others to Jesus?
- What is one specific way Jesus is forming you into a witness?
- Who is the one person you most want to point toward Christ this season?