

**“People Helping People to Follow Jesus”** (series #4)

By Pastor Rand Lankheet for New Horizon URC. First service, March 12, 2017

Bible text: John 1: 35-51

**Introduction:** Those who study logic (逻辑), or philosophy (哲学), will study certain events, or a sequence of events. They will speak about “instrumental causes” (方法之因) of a certain event. “Instrumental” or “secondary” causes. And they will distinguish those causes from “primary” (主要的) causes. Also referred to as “ultimate causes.” (终极原因)

Think, for example, of what influenced you, personally, to be interested in Jesus. How was it that you ended up trusting in Jesus as your Saviour? Well, in your life journey, there were probably a series of instrumental causes, that worked upon you, to follow Jesus. For example, most of us had parents, who brought us to church. Likewise, many of us had faithful pastors, along with elders, and Sunday school and catechism (教理问答) teachers.

From this last part of John chapter 1, we learn how *certain people helped other people to follow Jesus*. They were “instrumental causes.” But, as we also know, behind these causes, is God Himself. He’s the ultimate cause of our salvation.

**1. First, we consider some human, instrumental causes....**

**1.A.** There is, first of all, the **PREVIOUS WORK and WITNESS** (见证) of John---John the Baptizer.

We learned about him last time. John lived out in the desert wilderness, east of the Jordan R.

-We read in the other three gospels (福音书) that large crowds started following John. And, John gathered around himself certain special disciples (门徒). Now, that word, “disciple,” refers to someone who is a student and a follower...someone who is following after a teacher, learning from that teacher. [Read vs. 35.

When Jesus appeared in that wilderness, John testified about Jesus. He said: “Look, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” He likewise told his disciples that Jesus was so much greater than he was.

-And we find John again testifying about Jesus as the Lamb of God. The first time he does this is in vs. 29. Then a day later, John does it again. Vs. 36---“The Lamb of God.” At that, two of John’s disciples, leave John and they start to follow after Jesus. So John helped those two men follow after Jesus. He was an “instrumental cause” in their coming to faith in Jesus.

-Now, in today’s context, this is similar to how preachers, pastors, preach and teach about Jesus. It is their calling, in particular, to lead people to Jesus. To also show people their need for Jesus...a need to have sins atoned for (被代赎). That we then would trust in Jesus to be fully forgiven of all our sin. Preachers, pastors, are used by God, as instrumental causes, helping people today to follow Jesus.

**1.B. Another** instrument cause, are **PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS** within one’s own family.

We read in vs. 40 that of those first two disciples of John, now following Jesus, one of them was named “Andrew.” And what does Andrew do, after he starts following Jesus?

The language of vs. 41 ought to grip us: “The *first thing* Andrew did was *to find* his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah.’” Vs. 42: “He, Andrew, *brought him*, Simon, to Jesus.”

There have been many studies done in churches, investigating how people became followers of Jesus. How they became Christians. The results have been very surprising. We might think that many people start to follow Jesus by attending an evangelistic crusade (福音布道会), or by

hearing a preacher on television. Or maybe, someone knocks on their door, one day, witnessing to them about Jesus. Oh, some have, indeed, been influenced in that way. But out of the total membership of most churches, it's only 3, 4, 5% who came to Jesus through direct evangelism, or an evangelistic crusade, or door knocking. How did the majority come to Jesus? Some surveys show that a full 90% of people are in church

*because of the influence or example of a family member or a close friend.*

We who are of Reformed (改革宗), and Presbyterian (长老会) background, we know this, don't we? It's mostly our

Christian parents who first bring us to church. This is an outgrowth of the "covenant concept" (圣约的概念) found in the Bible. That God has always worked, especially, through believing parents, who raise their children in the ways of the Lord.

Now, do our parents convert us? Do they change our hearts? No. Only God does that.

He is the "*ultimate cause*" of our following Jesus, and trusting in Jesus. But God uses Christian parents and Christian grandparents, and brothers and sisters. All as "instrumental causes" to help bring us to Jesus.

*So Andrew brought his brother, Simon.* We know Simon by his other name, given by Jesus...his name "Peter." Peter became the leader of the Twelve Disciples.

-Who in your family, among your relatives, could you be in a position to influence for Jesus?

Obviously parents, you are in the best position to do that, impacting your children's lives, for Jesus. But, maybe there are others, especially later in life. Nephews, nieces, cousins, grandchildren.... Maybe your brother or sister has been straying from Jesus. You can help any family member. You can influence them, positively, to become followers of Jesus today.

**3.C. There's** at least one other instrumental cause, found in this section in John chapter 1.

The first two of the eventual Twelve Disciples, were Andrew. Many Bible scholars think that the other one is John himself. The man inspired to write this book of the Bible.

In vs. 43, Jesus calls the man named Philip to also become his disciple. Jesus directly calls him. But now look what Philip does! [Read vs. 44-45. Philip goes to the man Nathaniel. They evidently are friends. Nathaniel might have been a neighbor or he worked with Philip. They are friend of some kind.

And here we see another instrumental cause, the Lord will use, to bring people to himself. *The influence of Christian friends.* What an impact we can have upon our friends. Especially on those who might not know Jesus...or might only have superficial (肤浅的) knowledge of Jesus.

-Notice the wording. Philip goes out and "*finds*" Nathaniel. That verb is interesting. The first meaning of that verb, in the original Greek, is to find someone or something after searching. To actively search for someone, to then find them.

After he is called by Jesus, Philip doesn't just think, "Well, maybe God will put someone in my pathway today, to talk about Jesus. I will wait until God does that." No. Philip is pro-active (积极主动的). He goes out looking, until he finds Nathaniel.

And Nathaniel evidently knew the books of Moses, the first five books of what we call today the "Old Testament." Almost every Jew in those days were familiar with these books. Philip tells his friend: "We have found the one Moses was writing about."

Notice Nathaniel's response. He seems a bit suspicious (怀疑的), perhaps even a bit of a cynic (愤世嫉俗的). When

Philip says that Jesus is from the town of Nazareth, Nathaniel snorts, "Nazareth! Huh? Can anything good come from there?" Nazareth was a small, out of the way town, with no reputation of any kind. Unlike, say, the big city of Jerusalem.

But Nathaniel's cynicism does not discourage Philip. He simply says to his friend: "Come and

see. Come with me, and let's go together. And you can see for yourself."  
I'm calling this the "**PERSISTENT**坚持不懈的 **INVITATION**" of a friend. We who know Jesus have to be

persistent in inviting our friends, acquaintances (熟人), neighbours...to see for themselves. Usually our unbelieving friends won't come to church at our first invitation. Maybe not the second. But, keep inviting. Gently...but persistently. And don't get into arguments. I think that is one of the problems with our theology. I love our Reformed theology. But one danger is that we can start to enjoy debating and arguing too much. So that if someone resists Jesus, or raise objections to him, we want to get into a debate with them. Often we then do more damage than good. We must learn from Philip, who responded wisely: "Just, come and see for yourself." Let us invite people to learn about Jesus, for themselves. We should welcome people to come to Jesus with their doubts, their questions, their objections. Remember, God can handle their doubts and questions! Can't he? We just do the inviting, to our friends. And be persistent. Keep on inviting people...//

So these are **THREE INSTRUMENTAL CAUSES**, by which some of the earliest followers were brought to Jesus. There's a) the **PREVIOUS WITNESS** of John--John the Baptist; b) the **PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP** in families; c) and the **PERSISTENT INVITATION** of friends.//

**2. But, briefly**, let's consider **ULTIMATE CAUSES**. Especially how Jesus was at work.

**2.A. Look at vs. 39.** As Andrew and John are pointed to Jesus, they ask, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" And Jesus says, "Come. Come and you will see."

"Come." Grammatically (语法上来说) that is a **COMMAND**. Remember Jesus was and is the Son of God.

John chapter 1 tells us that he was with God the Father from the beginning, as the creator. Though He became flesh, Jesus still has divine authority. So we read he gave the command to the two men: "Come." And they obeyed.

-Later, when Simon is brought to Jesus, Jesus also shows his authority of command.

Look at vs. 42, Jesus says, "I know your name is Simon, son of John, But now you will be called Cephas." Cephas, or Peter--see footnote...the name means "rock," "the rock."

With full authority, Jesus changes Peter's name. Throughout the Bible, whenever someone changes someone else's name, it is a sign of authority. Jesus comes with full authority, over Simon Peter.

-Nathaniel, likewise, is overwhelmed by Jesus' power, a bit later. Jesus tells Nathaniel,

"I saw you while you were still under the fig tree, even before Philip called you."

That implies a "miraculous" seeing, not merely that Jesus noticed him when he passed by earlier. Jesus is saying he knew Nathaniel by name, already under that tree. And that he knew what was in Nathaniel's heart.

Think of it, Jesus sees us, long before we see him. Jesus knows us, long before we come to know him. And Jesus knows what is in our heart...not only our faults and failures, but He also knows what we are looking for. Jesus comes with that power, that authority, that command. As the true Son of God. The promised Messiah. //

**2.B.** And, of course, everyone who comes to faith, *ultimately, comes by way of CONVERSION* (改变, 信仰皈依) .

And, remember, conversion, turning our hearts, is only by the power of God.

-Let me remind you of [1:13--read. / Let me remind you of [3:5-6—read.

God the Father causes people to be born again, that we become born of God.

God the Father, and God the Son, Jesus, has a role in that; and of course, God the Holy Spirit.

-This section ends with Jesus telling Nathaniel something important. [Read vs. 51.

Jesus says, “Someday, Nathaniel, someday you will see something spectacular (惊人的, 状况的) . Something greater than any other miracle. Someday, you will see the heaven open up. And you will see the angels of God. They will be going up and coming down.”

Now, this teaching from Jesus probably is connected to an OT story about the man, Jacob.

Remember how Jacob slept with his head on that rock, using it for a pillow? That night Jacob dreamed about a ladder, reaching from earth to heaven. And angels were going up and going down that ladder.

Jesus is telling Nathaniel that He, Jesus, is that ladder. Jesus is the connection between earth and heaven. Jesus connects us, as humans, to God above. Jesus provides us the way back to God. Back to our Creator God. / Someday, through Jesus, we will be brought into the very presence of God. In heaven, someday.

Today, already, we are connected to God, as we put our trust in Jesus. And then someday, when Jesus comes in glory, we will be fully connected to God. On that day when Jesus comes down out of heaven. On that final day, heaven come down to earth. It will become a new earth.

Jesus is our link, our ladder, our connection, with heaven above. Jesus is telling Nathaniel that this will be the greatest thing in his life, in Nathaniel’s life. To someday experience, the glory of heaven, brought down to the earth. A new earth.

-Brothers and sisters...that’s ultimately what we must share with those who don’t know.

That there is a bright future awaiting us. And awaiting all the children of God. This life, in many ways, is a mess. We, in many ways, are a mess. Because of our human faults, failures, and sins. But Jesus is our way, up to heaven, to the presence of God. And someday, Jesus will bring heaven to earth. /

***We, as God’s people today, must help other people***, to see this. To be an impact upon their lives. To help lead them to Jesus. / And, God must do his work, converting people, changing them. As God, by His grace, has also changed us. **LET US PRAY.**