

Imagine you live in a dilapidated house in Bay City, Michigan. Your house needs a new roof, the windows are leaking and need of being replaced, and the siding looks like its home to cock roaches and termites. You've just been laid off from GM, and it looks like your world is caving in around you. Then you get this phone call out of the blue. The caller identifies himself as from the TV show Extreme Makeover. They give some proof to you that this is not a prank call. They tell you that your home has been selected for an Extreme Makeover, that will be featured on ABC. You will be given a check for \$50,000 and a 2 week trip to Cancun while the makeover takes place. When you return you will return to a brand new house with state of the art appliances and technology, and it will all be yours. A call like that would be total shock and a life-changing surprise.

Today's lesson speaks about a call that you and I have received, that is even more fantastic than the one from ABC. You might say this is the ultimate "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." The Extreme Makeover is the house of our body. It's me, it's you! However, before we learn about our Extreme Makeover, let's take a look at the extreme makeovers men named Philip and Nathaniel.

There doesn't seem to be anything dramatic about the call of Philip from Jesus. Jesus didn't drive up in a limo in front of Philip's house. He didn't say, here is a check for \$100,000 if you go to work for me. It was just a simple call. Jesus said to Philip, "Follow me."

What I find interesting is what happens after Philip's call. **"The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, 'Follow me.' Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked. 'Come and see,' said Philip."**

Since Philip was from the same town as Andrew and Peter, and since Andrew had been listening to John the Baptist, I assume that they knew one another and that Philip had some knowledge about Jesus before Jesus called him to be his disciple. You can also sense Philip's acquaintance with Jesus when he comes to his brother. He is convinced that Jesus is the Messiah that had been predicted to come to the Jews throughout the Old Testament Scriptures.

When Nathaniel heard his brother tell him that the long-awaited Messiah had come from Nazareth, his thinking was like you and I might have if someone said, that a famous person came out of Saginaw. Saginaw, you've got to be kidding. Nothing good comes out of Saginaw. Saginaw is the number 2 murder city in the United States behind St. Louis, Missouri. Now, I don't think Nathaniel necessarily meant to say anything bad about Nazareth, but he could hardly imagine anything or anyone special coming from an average town like that. His brother told him to at least check it out, which he did, but at this point the idea of the Messiah coming from Nazareth seemed an impossibility.

There was nothing earth-shattering about Philip's call. Jesus said, **"Follow me,"** and Philip did. There seemed to be nothing noteworthy about Jesus from all outward appearances. What's the big deal about a carpenter's kid from a regular city? But despite Nathaniel's skepticism, Jesus' call was a big deal. God incarnate called Philip, and later called skeptical Nathaniel, not just to discipleship but to apostleship. And when God calls you to faith and service, that's always a big deal whether it seems like it or not.

There was nothing earth-shattering about your call to faith, either. For many of you, the pastor merely said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," splashed some water on your infant scalp, and that was that. For others, you first heard

Jesus' call as adults through simple words printed on a page or spoken by a person. This is not the kind of stuff that stops the presses or that makes the evening news.

That's why Jesus' call is so surprising. His call looks so simple. But behind the simple appearance is a tremendous miracle. For when Jesus called you to faith, he did not call a mild skeptic like Nathaniel. He called an outright enemy. We opposed him by nature, even before we took our first breath. And it wouldn't take long for us to look back at the past week and find words from our lips or actions from our lives or thoughts from our minds that prove our sinful condition's lust to do the exact opposite of God's will.

And so what does God do? So simply, and yet so surprisingly, he connects the righteousness of Jesus to the waters of the font, and declares us his holy children. So simply, and yet so surprisingly, his Spirit calls us to faith as we hear an old message from an old book that tells us about the Christ whose innocent death brings forgiveness and life. The whole thing seems so simple that some Christians unfortunately turn baptism into our commitment and not God's promise, or they turn faith into our decision and not the Spirit's work in our hearts. But don't let the simplicity of it fool you. Jesus' call surprises us in its simplicity, but even in simplicity, Christ calls you out of the darkness of sin and unbelief and into the light of faith and righteousness.

I'll give Nathaniel a little credit — humanly speaking. He listened to his brother's advice and actually checked out this Jesus fellow that Philip had told him about. And Jesus surprised Nathaniel even before he met him face-to-face. Nathaniel hadn't even said hello, and Jesus already had him pegged as a devout, religious Jew. **“When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, ‘Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.’”** If someone you had never met started talking to others about what a great person you were, you'd probably be as curious as Nathaniel. **“How do you know me?”** There are two different Greek words that both mean “to know;” one refers to general knowledge and the other refers to stronger, experiential knowledge. The second word is used here. Nathaniel wanted to know how Jesus could know him so well having never met him before.

In a day before surveillance cameras and satellite images, Jesus' answer had to surprise him! **“I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”** It was not an uncommon practice in that culture for a devout Jew to sit at the base of a tree and turn that into a place of meditation and prayer. But when Jesus knew that Nathaniel was seated under a tree at the very time Philip had called him to come and meet Jesus, Nathaniel knew that he was dealing with someone whose knowledge was profound and divine. **“Nathaniel declared, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.’”** Jesus hadn't even formally called Nathaniel to be his disciple, but he now knew there was more to Jesus than meets the eye. But Jesus was just getting started! He called Nathaniel to faith in him, but now he was calling him to something far more profound. **“Jesus said, ‘You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.’”** And in the next verse, Jesus shifts his words so that they are not addressed only to Nathaniel, but to all those gathered around him. **“He then added, ‘I tell you the truth, you (plural) shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’”**

It seems pretty reasonable that Jesus is referring to an incident in [Genesis 28](#) from the life of Jacob, and ancestor of the nation of Israel. In that excerpt, Jacob was on the run from his brother Esau. He had fled from his home and was sleeping outside with a stone for his pillow. And in that context, God comforted Jacob in a dream that included a staircase from earth to heaven, and angels going up and down the staircase. Jesus' words to Nathaniel seem to refer to

that dream, and seem to indicate that Jesus is the staircase. Jesus says that the angels will ascend and descend on the “Son of Man” — his favorite term for himself. Jesus is the one through whom we have access to heaven! His life has bridged the gap between God and human beings because his life met the standards of God’s law that our lives never meet. His cross has bridged the gap between God and human beings because his death has removed the sin-barrier that stood between us and God. How profound! How amazing! No wonder Nathaniel was taken by surprise when he met Jesus. Not only did Jesus demonstrate how well he knew Nathaniel, but he demonstrated that he was the long-awaited Messiah who would finally bridge the gap between us and God!

Jesus’ call to faith brings you profound blessings. It brings you forgiveness from the cross, victory over death from his empty Easter tomb, and the assurance of God’s grace and love from his Word. Jesus surprises us with blessings we certainly do not deserve and hardly would expect! But that’s the problem. We don’t expect such profound blessings from God, or we fail to see that forgiveness and eternal life are profound blessings. Isn’t it true, that we tend to rate being blessed as living in a big house, driving a luxury car, taking great vacations, or having millions in the bank.

My friends, don’t sell short how fantastic it is to be called to faith in Christ. Don’t turn Jesus merely into your life coach who gives you good advice for day-to-day living. His Word does direct our lives, but if that’s all you are looking for, you will miss the profound miracle accomplished at the cross. Don’t turn Jesus into your psychologist who helps you cope with life’s challenges. Jesus does help you cope, but if that’s the extent of your Jesus, then you will miss the profound miracle of his resurrection that won eternal life for you. Don’t turn Jesus into your buddy who pats your back and makes you feel good when you’re feeling down. Jesus certainly has comfort for hurting souls, but the profound comfort he has to give comes in the font’s forgiveness, in the Supper’s pardon, and in the Word’s promises. And Jesus’ profound blessings don’t expire in this life. His profound blessings of peace and forgiveness now will deliver you from this world and into paradise for all eternity!

Several years ago, a U.S. Airways plane made an emergency landing in the Hudson River, guided to a safe landing by Commander Chesley Sullenberger. Commander Sullenberger managed to keep all 155 passengers alive against the odds. If that fills us with joy, and it should, how much more should Jesus’ call, which saved us from something far worse than a bird attack on airplane engines. Don’t let the simplicity of Jesus’ call or the familiarity of faith lead you into complacency! Marvel at Jesus’ profound call to faith, and rejoice that his call has placed you into his eternal family! Thanks Jesus for calling me and letting me experience the ultimate Extreme Makeover. ME! Amen.