



On your marks

When it comes to telling a Bible story of the calling of the disciples, then we usually turn to the passages about Jesus and the fishermen (Peter, Andrew, James and John) - see Mark 1:16-20 for example. However, in John's Gospel we have a piece about how Nathanael became a follower and this story version imagines that he and Philip were the best of friends, although very different in character. The wonder is that Jesus called all his followers individually, needing their unique differences to come together in his discipleship team. God still works with us today like this and this story can help your group explore just that.

Get set

Another different story of being called to follow Jesus is that of Levi (Matthew) in Mark 2:13-17 and this stories could be part of series on those Jesus called, including Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9).

Everyone is different and is loved and used by God. This is the theme too of the Barnabas idea: [What a load of difference.](#)

Ways into and on from the story:

Props and aids to help tell this story could include: some fig leaves; a ladder; and plenty of acting out of Philip's enthusiasm and Nathanael's initial grumpy response! A starting point could be to talk about best friends: what are the qualities of friendship and why do we choose the friends we have? You might end the story wondering about how these two got on as disciples. We read of Philip talking with Jesus during the last supper (John 14:8), but what would have been Nathanael's reactions to what happened at the cross? Would he remember the story of the Jacob's ladder to heaven (Genesis 28)? He is mentioned as one of the seven in the boat when Jesus appeared on the shore after the resurrection (John 21) and here we learn he was from Cana. Maybe he was at the wedding when the water was turned to wine (John 2)?

Go!

The best of friends

Nathanael and Philip were the best of friends - but they were very different.

That's sometimes the way with best friends. It is sometimes even what makes people best friends. Nathanael - Nat - had strengths and sides to him that were different from Philip; and Philip - Phil - had strengths and sides to him quite different from Nathanael. Perhaps that's what drew them together?

Philip was always on the go: an action-packed sort of man, not one for sitting around. He had things



to do, people to meet, practical problems to solve. Nathanael, in contrast, was a quieter sort and more thoughtful. He was much more likely to be sitting around and thinking. He paused before he spoke and spoke before he acted. Nat took things slowly. I wonder, are you like more like a Philip or more like a Nathanael?

Yes, Nathanael and Philip were different but they were the best of friends and that meant sharing everything: sharing their jokes, sharing their secrets, sharing their worries and sharing their friends. So it was no surprise that when Philip met Jesus, he wanted to share Jesus with Nathanael.

Jesus was amazing. Philip found him so approachable, so kind and so special. He said such amazing things and did such wonderful things that Philip couldn't help but follow Jesus, and of course he wanted Nathanael to follow him too.

'Come and meet Jesus,' said Philip. 'I've never met anyone like him before.'

Nat was sitting peacefully under a fig tree at the time, when Philip came rushing up. 'What's all the rush and hurry for, Philip? What's so urgent? What's all this about Jesus?'

Philip was still out of breath because he'd been hurrying and he panted out, 'Jesus; Jesus from Nazareth. He's special. I think he's the one we've been waiting for. God's special rescuer - you know. Come and meet him, Nat.'

Nathanael shrugged his shoulders. He wasn't going to be rushed into anything by Philip in one of his enthusiastic moods, however much they were best friends.

'From Nazareth? Do you mean that poky little village up in the hills? How can anyone special come from there?'

Philip was so enthusiastic that he blurted out, 'Oh don't be such a wet blanket, Nat. He's special. Come and see for yourself.'

'But I was just having a quiet pray under this fig tree...' began Nathanael.

'Stop making excuses. Come *now!*' interrupted Phil.

Reluctantly Nathanael shuffled off after Philip, who was already racing ahead. As they came close to Jesus, Nathanael had the surprise of his life. Even before Philip could introduce him, Jesus turned and spoke to Nathanael, as if he'd known he was coming.

'Finished sitting and thinking then, Nathanael?', remarked Jesus. 'You're a very good Jew. I can see that. Taking time to pray during the day... well done.'

'How did you know I was praying?', wondered Nathanael.

'I knew what you were doing even before Philip found you under that tree. You were thinking about



angels and heaven and that story about Jacob.'

Nathanael's mouth dropped open in surprise. It was exactly what he had been thinking about. It had been the scripture reading at the synagogue two days ago and he'd been wondering what it was all about. 'That's amazing, Jesus. How did you know what I was thinking about?'

'You'll hear and see even more amazing things than this, if you follow me,' replied Jesus.' You will even discover how that story about earth and heaven is going to come true because of God's special rescuer. Come along, Nathanael, follow me.'

Well, that's the way that Nathanael and Philip became two of the twelve disciples, who followed Jesus. They were still best friends, of course, but now they'd also both found another special friend.

They were quite different people but Jesus seemed to know all about that, and they were both equally important to him. In fact all the twelve who followed Jesus turned out to be very different sorts but he treated each of them the same. The Nathanaels and the Philips of this world - they are each different but each is special and important to God. And these two now knew it, because the best of friends had met the best of friends!