**Thesis:** If you have ever played hide-and-seek as a kid, you know the sense of anticipation as you wait in hiding and the exhilaration of being found. As we grow, not only physically but mentally and emotionally, the idea of hiding may not come with the same sense of excitement. In fact, maybe we’re afraid we’ll always be left hidden, never to be found by others. Jesus says in *Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”* While feeling hidden may come with pain and loneliness, there’s still an excitement to feeling found! Praise God that Jesus sees you and wants to know you.

**Introduction:** This is the Jesus Podcast. I’m Zak from Pray.com. Thanks for joining me today as we dive into another outcast encounter. Today’s story is about feeling seen - known - and understood.

**Context:** Moments ago we were introduced to Nathanael, also known as Batholomew. He was born in the city of Cana, the same city where Jesus performed His first miracle of turning water into wine. He was your ordinary member of society in the town of Bethsaida, a small fishing community on the Sea of Galilee. Yet despite its size, a good and upright citizen like Nathanael was left feeling marginalized, always just a stranger. In his unmet desire to be acknowledged, he sequestered himself to self-appointed solitude. Loneliness often compounds. When we feel unwanted and unloved, we tend to hide away from others, making us feel even more unwanted and unloved.

Little does Nathanael know that in a cosmic game of hide-and-seek, his years of waiting to be noticed were about to change. At first, we’ll see that Nathanael was opposed to the idea of meeting Jesus, feeling that it would just be another instance of putting on a facade for others. As we dive into our story, think about places in your life where you feel unseen, unnoticed, and unheard, and allow yourself to relate to Nathanael as an outcast ready to be found.

**Message:** Life is full of tension and competing desires. As we navigate each day, we face conflicting emotions, thoughts, and feelings.

One of these internal conflicts is our hope to be seen and our desire to feel safe. To be known often means to be vulnerable. We want to feel connected to others, but we also have a physiological need to feel safe. Sometimes, those feelings are at odds with one another.

Being seen also means being exposed. It means allowing others to see what’s happening under the surface — to know the depths of our hearts, the intricacies of our minds, our troubles, our worries, and our fears. This tension creates an unhealthy dichotomy of what we’re feeling inside and what we allow other people to see on the surface. Left unaddressed, these types of tensions will pull us apart until we’re at the end of ourselves. This is the very issue that torments Nathanael before he meets Jesus.

Jesus’ ministry was marked by a recurring theme of finding people and allowing these two sides of themselves to be integrated into one. As He traveled from city to city, He would take the time to not just be *around* people but to be *with* people. Jesus sat and talked with sincere interest. He listened and gleaned with undisrupted attentiveness. Jesus didn’t come to earth for fame and man’s accolades. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He came to see us, know us, relate to us, and bless us.

Maybe you’ve been feeling like Nathanael, doing everything you can to live a good life, but are left feeling like you’re standing in the dark corner of a room: Out of sight and out of mind. **But Jesus sees you, all of you.** And on top of that, He loves you, with every ounce of love that He has to give.

Here’s a profound truth for you. Cling to this reality with dear life, because it’s the essence of life and growth in Christ. YOU ARE PROFOUNDLY & UNCONDITIONALLY LOVED, AND YOU’RE NOT ALL THAT YOU CAN BE — THERE’S UNTAPPED POTENTIAL IN YOU.

Jesus sees everything. All your flaws and sins. The darkest parts of you. You’re loved despite your flaws and shortcomings, but Jesus isn’t just going to give you good feelings and allow you to stay there. He’s going to help you realize your potential.

Perhaps that’s a new thought for some of us, that we can be fully known and fully loved. If that’s you, I want to encourage you to reframe your associations with what it means to be seen. Where once we may have equated it with the possibilities of judgment, rejection, or weakness, in Jesus we can feel justified, accepted, and strengthened when we open up to him and give him our entire lives.

When the prophet and judge, Samuel, is sent to find a young shepherd named David to anoint him as the next king of Israel, the Lord reminds him of what he’s looking for in *1 Samuel 16:7 But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”*

The fear of being seen is only present when we’re unsure of the thoughts others have towards us. But the Bible is filled with an array of God’s wonderful thoughts towards us! He calls us His beloved, His children, and His friends, among many other beautiful identities. God isn’t impressed with our success or popularity. He doesn’t turn his attention towards us because we’ve drawn His gaze by making much of ourselves. He finds us because He cares for us and wants to be with us. Though we were lost to sin, we have been found in Him. We are His creation made in His image, and that’s more than enough for Him. We have to allow God to renew our minds as we receive these types of affirmations through His word and in prayer. Don’t be discouraged if this takes time; we have to allow new neurological networks to form in our brain as the Spirit performs a new work in our hearts.

In our story, even Nathanael has to break through these very same walls and patterns of thinking. All he wanted was to be noticed, and here was a chance to meet a man that was supposed to fill him with his heart’s greatest desire. Yet, his mind opposed the opportunity as a means to guard himself more disappointment. What if he put his best foot forward and it still wasn’t enough to feel seen? But Philip wouldn’t take no for an answer. That’s because he had experienced the joy of being seen and known by Jesus and wanted the same for Nathanael. Philip wasn’t pushing Nathanael simply because he thought he was right, he was pulling Nathanael to come alongside him because what he found in Jesus was so amazing. Once we’ve felt the freedom of being fully known and loved by God, we’ll want others to be released from the depressions of hiding and being overlooked. To put this idea into a short phrase, found people find people. This would be the very mission the twelve disciples, including Philip and Nathanael, would be sent on after Jesus ascended into heaven: To find the lost, lonely, and destitute people of the world and tell them they had been found by a gracious God who would bring them comfort.

We read the Great Commission in *Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

True joy found from being known by God is a catalytic chain where individuals pull others into the community God is building around Himself.

In some ways, we all hide parts of ourselves from the outside world, only letting parts of ourselves to be known. The parts we think are the best parts. This ultimately leaves us feeling fragmented and afraid of letting our true colors out. All while still longing deep down to be completely noticed and recognized, seen and heard, embraced and encouraged, whether that’s for who we are or despite who we are. We can take heart in the fact that as God finds us, we can be surrounded by other followers of Jesus who want to know and love us, too. It’s important in our walk with the Lord that we forge genuine relationships built on trust and vulnerability. It’s a gift when we’re able to get to a place with people where we feel truly seen. Getting here takes time and requires that we feel safe. But soon enough we’ll find the peace of being known and accepted.

Don’t let yourself continue to be burdened by feelings of being unseen. Whether you’re in a season of stability or feeling like you’re barely keeping your head above water, our souls long to be seen and known by the God of the universe. Think of Adam and Eve in the garden. After they ate the fruit God forbid them from eating, they were aware of their nakedness, were ashamed, and hid from God. But their souls’ longing to be with God never departed from them. Though He knew exactly what they had done, God responded by looking for them. Calling out for Adam. Determined to find him. To see him. Despite Adam and Eve’s shame, God loved them and pursued them. And it was only once they allowed themselves to be seen by God that He was able to provide for them and promise to take away their sins.

Because Jesus died on the cross for our sins, everything separating us from Him has been stripped away. We don’t have to wear a mask or play that part of an actor in the theater that is the world. We can bring ourselves, our whole selves, to God. And what we’ll find is a loving Father, a faithful Friend, and the greatest comfort we could ever know. God sees you, He knows you, and He accepts you, just as you are.