



THE BEGINNING

FIRST STEPS FOR NEW DISCIPLES

Lifeway Press®
Nashville, Tennessee

DISCIPLES PATH

Disciples Path is a series of studies founded on Jesus' model of discipleship. Created by experienced disciple makers across the nation, it offers an intentional pathway for transformational discipleship and a way to help followers of Christ move from new disciples to mature disciple makers. Each study in the series is built on the principles of modeling, practicing, and multiplying:

- Leaders model the life of a biblical disciple.
- Disciples follow and practice from the leader.
- Disciples become disciple makers and multiply through the *Disciples Path*.

Each study in the series has been written and approved by disciple-makers for small groups and one-on-one settings.

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Item: 005727822 • ISBN: 978-1-4300-4032-3

Dewey decimal classification number: 266

Subject heading: EVANGELISTIC WORK \ MISSIONS \ DISCIPLESHIP

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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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Printed in the United States of America

Groups Ministry Publishing, LifeWay Resources
One LifeWay Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234-0152



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A NOTE FOR DISCIPLE-MAKERS

Several years ago I was a part of a massive research study that sought to discover how the Lord often brings about transformation in the hearts of His people. The study became a book called *Transformational Discipleship*. Basically, we wanted to learn how disciples are made. Based on study of Scripture and lots of interactions with people, we concluded that transformation is likely to occur when a godly **leader** applies **truth** to the heart of a person while that person is in a teachable **posture**.

- **LEADER:** You are the leader. As you invest in the people you're discipling, they will learn much about the Christian faith by watching you, by sensing your heart for the Lord, and by seeing you pursue Him. I encourage you to seek to be the type of leader that can say, "Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ."
- **TRUTH:** These studies were developed in deep collaboration with ministry leaders who regularly and effectively disciple people. The studies are designed to take the people you disciple into the Word of God—because we're confident that Jesus and His Word sanctify us and transform us. Our community of disciple-makers mapped out a path of the truths we believe are essential for each believer to know and understand.
- **POSTURE:** Hopefully the people you will be investing in adopt a teachable posture—one that is open and hungry for the Lord. Encourage them to take the study seriously and to view your invitation to study together as a sacred opportunity to experience the grace of God and the truth of God.

We hope and pray the Lord will use this study in your life and the lives of those you disciple. As you apply the truth of God to teachable hearts, transformation will occur. Thank you for being a disciple-maker!

In Christ,



A stylized, handwritten signature in dark ink.

Eric Geiger
Vice President at LifeWay Christian Resources
Co-author of *Transformational Discipleship*

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

Congratulations! If you've chosen to live as a disciple of Jesus, you've made the most important decision imaginable. But you may be wondering, *What does it mean to be a disciple?*

To put it simply, a disciple of Jesus is someone who has chosen to follow Jesus. That's the command Jesus gave to those He recruited as His first disciples: "Follow me." In Jesus' culture, religious leaders called rabbis would gather a group of followers, called disciples, to follow in their footsteps and learn their teachings. In the same way, you will become more and more like Jesus as you purposefully follow Him in the weeks to come. Jesus once said, "Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

On a deeper level, disciples of Jesus are those learning to base their identities on Jesus Himself. All of us use different labels to describe who we are at the core levels of our hearts. Some think of themselves as athletes or intellectuals. Others think of themselves as professionals, parents, leaders, class clowns, and so on.

Disciples of Jesus set aside those labels and base their identities on Him. For example:

- **A disciple of Jesus is a child of God.** In the Bible we find these words: "Look at how great a love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children. And we are!" (1 John 3:1). We are God's children. He loves us as our perfect Father.
- **A disciple of Jesus is an alien in this world.** Disciples of Jesus are aliens, or outsiders, in their own cultures. Because of this identity, Jesus' disciples abstain from actions and activities that are contrary to Him. Peter, one of Jesus' original disciples, wrote these words: "Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you" (1 Peter 2:11).
- **A disciple of Jesus is an ambassador for Christ.** Another of Jesus' disciples recorded these words in the Bible: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, 'Be reconciled to God'" (2 Corinthians 5:17,20). Ambassadors represent their king and country in a different culture for a specified period of time. Because we have been transformed by Jesus and are now His disciples and ambassadors, we represent Him to the world through our actions and by telling others about Him.

The journey you are about to take is one that will transform you more and more to be like Jesus. Enjoy! No one ever loved and cared for people more passionately than Jesus. No one was ever more sincere in His concern for others than Jesus. And no one ever gave more so that we could experience His love than did Jesus on the cross.

As you grow to be more like Jesus, you'll find that your relationships are stronger, you have more inner peace than ever before, and you look forward to the future as never before.

That's the blessing of living as a disciple of Jesus.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

Welcome to *The Beginning*. This resource serves as an introduction for new disciples of Jesus to the core truths of the Christian faith. As you get started, consider the following guides and suggestions for making the most of this experience.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Because the process of discipleship always involves at least two people—the leader and the disciple—each session of *The Beginning* includes a practical plan for group engagement and discussion.

This plan includes the following steps:

- **GET STARTED.** The first section of the group material helps you ease into the discussion by starting on common ground. You'll begin by reflecting on the previous session and your recent experiences as a disciple. After spending time in prayer, you'll find a practical illustration to help you launch into the main topic of the current session.
- **THE STORY.** While using *Disciples Path*, you'll find opportunities to engage the Bible through both story and teaching. That's why the group time for each session features two main sections: **Know the Story** and **Unpack the Story**. **Know the Story** introduces a biblical text and includes follow-up questions for brief discussion. It's recommended that your group encounter the biblical text by reading it out loud. **Unpack the Story** includes practical teaching material and discussion questions—both designed to help you engage the truths contained in the biblical text. To make the most of your experience, use the provided material as a launching point for deeper conversation. As you read through the teaching material and engage the questions as a group, be thinking of how the truths you're exploring will impact your everyday life.
- **ENGAGE.** The group portion of each session ends with an activity designed to help you practice the biblical principles introduced in Know the Story, which are fully explored in Unpack the Story. This part of the group time often appeals to different learning styles and will push you to engage the text at a personal level.

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

Each session of *The Beginning* also includes content for individual use during the time between group gatherings. This content is divided into three categories:

- ↑ **Worship:** features content for worship and devotion. These activities provide opportunities for you to connect with God in meaningful ways and deepen your relationship with Him.
- ⇒ **Personal study:** features content for personal study. These pages help you gain a deeper understanding of the truths and principles explored during the group discussion.
- ⇐ **Application:** features content for practical application. These suggestions help you take action based on the information you've learned as you grow in Christ.

Note: Aside from the reading plan, the content provided in the individual discovery portion of each session should be considered optional. You'll get the most out of your personal study by working with your group leader to create a personalized discipleship plan using the "Optional Activities" checklist included in each session.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- You'll be best prepared for each group discussion or mentoring conversation if you read the session material beforehand. A serious read will serve you most effectively, but skimming the Get Started and The Story sections will also be helpful if time is limited.
- The deeper you're willing to engage in the group discussions and individual discovery each session, the more you'll benefit from those experiences. Don't hold back, and don't be afraid to ask questions whenever necessary.
- As you explore the Engage portion of each session, you'll have the chance to practice different activities and spiritual disciplines. Take advantage of the chance to observe others during the group time—and to ask questions—so that you'll be prepared to incorporate these activities into your private spiritual life as well.
- Visit Lifeway.com/DisciplesPath for a free PDF download that includes leader helps for *The Beginning* and additional resources for disciple-makers.
- For helps on how to use *Disciples Path*, tips on how to better lead groups, or additional ideas for leading this session, visit: www.ministrygrid.com/web/disciplespath



SESSION 1

WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

You were created by a passionate God
who relentlessly pursued you to bring
you into His family. Welcome home.

REFLECT

In this study, we'll explore what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. You're probably reading this because you've recently made a decision to take a step of faith. This decision may seem like something you initiated, but God has been at work in your life and pursuing you for quite some time. Take a moment to describe some of your encounters with God.

Describe the first time you heard about God.

Describe the first time you prayed to God.

Describe a time that God may have been present and active in your life but you didn't recognize it at the time.

PRAY

One of the ways we communicate with God is through prayer. At its core, prayer is simply talking to God—telling Him what's on your heart and actively listening for His response. When you're starting out, it might feel uncomfortable, erratic, and difficult. If so, don't worry. That's normal.

Spend a few moments with God by bowing your head to acknowledge who He is. Close your eyes to block distractions. If you need help getting started, here's a five-point prayer for guidance. We'll be looking at other approaches to prayer in the next few sessions.

- Greet God. How you address God may depend on what you want to talk to Him about. He functions in a limitless capacity: Father, Daddy, Friend, Almighty, Savior, and Redeemer.
- Tell Him what you're thankful for.
- Tell Him what you're concerned about.
- Ask Him to help you understand the elements of the study today.
- Take time to listen for His response.

INTRODUCTION

New creation. Saved. Born again. Redeemed. These are just a few ways the Bible describes “conversion,” our response to the great gift of salvation, through which we’re forgiven for being less than God created us to be. Jesus called the disciples, “Follow me” and explained that we must be “born again.” But what does “born again” mean?

Ultimately, salvation or to be “born again” means leaving your old ways behind and trusting God. He initiated a relationship with you and offered you a way to experience that relationship. And you responded. That’s what just happened to you. You’ve turned from your old life and turned toward God. You’ve been freed from sin and made right in His eyes. And you’ve been rescued from the enemy of God, Satan, and adopted by God.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. What old things are you hoping will go away?

What new things do you hope Jesus will bring to your life?

The way we experience God’s grace and mercy looks different for different people. Perhaps it felt as though you turned a corner in your life and discovered God right in front of you, or maybe you felt like He chased you down and caught you from behind. Regardless of how you describe your own journey, all such stories share a few things in common—a change in what you believe, a transfer of loyalty, and a reversal of direction. God forgives, saves, restores, and reconciles.

Are there people you’ve “followed” over the course of your life? There are a few ways you can follow someone or something. You can follow people on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram. You can follow a favorite sports team or celebrity gossip. You can follow a philosophy or an idea. But when the Creator of the Universe, God in the person of Jesus Christ says “follow me” (see Matt. 4:19), we know intuitively that’s something much different.

KNOW THE STORY

One day as Simon Peter was cleaning his fishing nets after an unsuccessful day on the water, Jesus climbed into his boat. Jesus had an unusual instruction for Simon Peter with a miraculous outcome. He told Simon Peter to push back out into the water and to cast out his net again. With much hesitation he did as Jesus said. The net filled up with fish. After the massive amount of fish began to sink his boat, Simon Peter realized who Jesus was and it brought him to his knees.

⁴ When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, “Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵ “Master,” Simon replied, “we’ve worked hard all night long and caught nothing! But at Your word, I’ll let down the nets.” ⁶ When they did this, they caught a great number of fish, and their nets began to tear. ⁷ So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them; they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, because I’m a sinful man, Lord!” ⁹ For he and all those with him were amazed at the catch of fish they took, ¹⁰ “Don’t be afraid,” Jesus told Simon. “From now on you will be catching people!” ¹¹ Then they brought the boats to land, left everything, and followed Him.

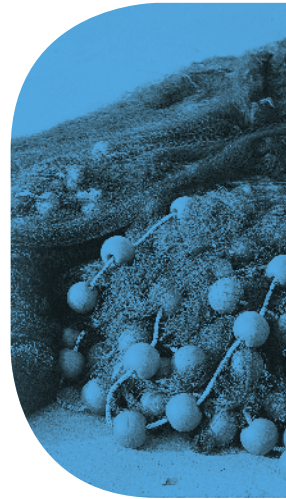
LUKE 5:4-11

What are some practical examples of what it will look like to follow Jesus in your life?

What will make it difficult to follow Jesus? In what ways will it be easy?

Being a Christian isn’t about following rules; it’s about following a Person. It’s not about asking Jesus to follow us but about deciding to follow Him. Jesus doesn’t stand in a far off place and demand that we get our act together before approaching Him; rather, He invades the reality of our lives and beckons us into a life larger than our own.

Following Jesus is ultimately about doing what Jesus did the way that He did it. It’s that simple. We love the people He loved, serve the people He served, and do the things He did. We strive to replicate His character, ways, and mission.




UNPACK THE STORY

Creation. Fall. Redemption. Re-creation. These four events represent the great story of God—the gospel story. It was the story Simon Peter was swept into and it's the story you have now been swept into. Our lives make sense only as we understand them against this backdrop. Let's examine each of these events.

CREATION—In the beginning, God created. At the sound of His voice, galaxies were hurled into orbit and the smallest organisms were established. Water was pure, creation was untainted, and life was perfect. Then God created man and woman. Fashioned with His own hands and infused with His own breath, He created Adam and Eve to be in relationship with Him and to be stewards of His creation.

Why do you think it's important to know God as Creator?



“God created man and woman. Fashioned with His own hands and infused with His own breath, He created Adam and Eve to be in relationship with Him and to be stewards of His creation.”

FALL—Then, the Villain entered the story. Twisting the words of God and promising a better life, Satan planted a seed of unbelief in the woman's heart. Eve doubted the goodness and trustworthiness of God and reached for the very thing that compromised her relationship with Him. Adam and Eve believed a lie, turned against God, and pursued a story of their own making which left them separated from their Creator. Sin entered the world through humanity and everything broke. And that's what sin is: turning away from God's desire with actions, attitudes, or thoughts.

Discuss the idea that everything broke when sin entered the world through humanity.

How do you see sin's effects today?

Violence. War. Dishonesty. Greed. Sickness. The perfect creation became overgrown with evil, chaos, and despair. It was soon overrun with people who searched for meaning and salvation through selfish ambition. The world needed a Savior.

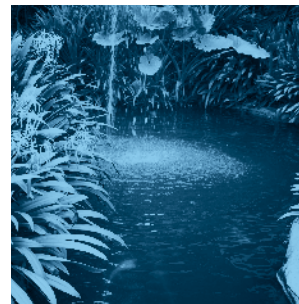
For centuries, God pursued His people. He gave them leaders, prophets, and priests to guide them into relationship with Him. But over and over, the people became distracted and turned their attention to man-made gods. God's complete redemption was yet to come.

REDEMPTION—In order to reverse the disastrous effects of sin, to free people from the clutches of the Villain, and to restore people to God the Father, Jesus came to the earth with His eyes on the cross. Fully God, Jesus made the perfect sacrifice to pay the debt of our sin and to cancel the curse of death on our lives. Fully human, Jesus was able to fully represent man before God. Redemption had come. On the third day, Jesus rose from the grave to conquer sin and death once and for all.

What is significant to you about Jesus being both fully God and fully man?

RE-CREATION—The story didn't end at the empty tomb; it had just begun. The great story of God would explode across the globe and change the hearts and lives of men and women for all eternity. All of creation is moving toward a great day when Jesus returns and fixes everything that's broken once and for all.

When you read the overarching story of God, is there anything that surprises you? Why?



"All of creation is moving toward a great day when Jesus returns and fixes everything that's broken once and for all."

In addition to studying God's Word, work with your group leader to create a plan for personal study, worship, and application between now and the next session. Select from the following optional activities to match your personal preferences and available time.

↑ **Worship**

- ☒ Read your Bible. Complete the reading plan on page 16.
- ☐ Spend time with God by reading and answering the questions on page 17.
- ☐ Connect with God each day. Start each morning with the five-part prayer included in the beginning of this study. At the end of every day, reflect on the times you felt closest to God and when you felt most distant.

➡ ← **Personal Study**

- ☐ Read and interact with "How Jesus Came" on page 18.
- ☐ Read and interact with "Why Jesus Came" on page 20.

← ➡ **Application**

- ☐ Connect with your church. Attend a church worship service and take notes as the pastor teaches from the Bible.
- ☐ Connect with others. Seek out someone of the same gender who has also recently come into a relationship with Christ. Discuss your individual experiences over dinner or coffee.
- ☐ Memorize 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come." Share this newly memorized verse with two different people.
- ☐ Spend time journaling. Benjamin Franklin said, "The shortest pencil is longer than the longest memory." Keeping a record of the things you are learning and the ways God is working in your life is a great way to track your spiritual growth. Each day, write down one thing you are learning about God.

☐ Other:



WORSHIP

READING PLAN

Read through the Gospel of Mark this week. Use the space provided to record your thoughts and responses.

Day 1

Mark 1:1-20

Day 2

Mark 1:21-45

Day 3

Mark 2:1-17

Day 4

Mark 2:18-28

Day 5

Mark 3:1-19

Day 6

Mark 3:20-35

Day 7

Mark 4:1-20

HOMECOMING

The first words preached by Jesus are found in Matthew 4:17 where he said: "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" It's also the foundation for the first sermon preached in the book of Acts, when Peter declared: "Repent ... and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

When we hear "repent" we often think it includes punishment or correction. But this word gives life. It doesn't mean "get your act together" or "clean up your behavior" so much as it means to simply turn around: to turn from sin and turn to God. It implies readiness. It results in a complete change of mind, heart, and action, but the first step is to turn around and see God.

Repentance isn't something we do in order to come to God, it's simply our coming to God. What is your reaction to this statement?

Take a moment and read Luke 15:11-24. What are your initial thoughts from the parable of the lost son?

This story follows the journey of a man who strays far from home and far from the man he was destined to be. But eventually he backs away from his depraved life, turns around, and walks back home. And that's what repentance is. It's homecoming. And when we return home, we don't find a father who is angry or eager to say "I told you so." Rather, we see a Father who runs to us. Jesus doesn't call us to repentance to just change our behavior. He calls us to change our hearts and where we rest our heads. It's about who or what we are trusting in.

Before trusting in the work done by Christ on the cross, what were the things you trusted in?

The journey home begins with repentance at the cross. The greatest plot twist in history was God himself coming to earth to deal with sin. At the cross, Jesus took all our sin onto him and paid our debt. This paved the way for us to go back home. Because of this we know we were created by a passionate Father in heaven who relentlessly pursues His children to bring them back to the family. Welcome home.

Give an example of an area in your life in which you need to change direction.

Have you ever thought that your sin made you too far removed from God's pursuit of you? Explain.

HOW JESUS CAME

For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on His shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

ISAIAH 9:6

God made a promise at the very beginning of time that He would make things right, and that's what the coming of Jesus was about. Jesus came not just to teach moral lessons or to set good examples. He came to liberate, make things right, and start a revolution. Let's look at four of the ways Jesus came to us.

1. Jesus left His rightful place in heaven and came into the chaos of humanity.

In a stone feeding trough for animals, the voice of God was heard in the cry of an infant. He came dressed in the skin of His own creation, subjected Himself to the care of His own creation, and fixed His eyes on the salvation of humanity. He turned water into wine. He showed mercy to sexually promiscuous women. He healed the sick. He commanded dead men to walk out of their graves. He loved and showed honor to the scum of society.

But we do see Jesus—made lower than the angels for a short time so that by God's grace He might taste death for everyone—crowned with glory and honor because of His suffering in death.

HEBREWS 2:9

Have you ever thought of Jesus in these terms? How does the way Christ came to Earth encourage you as we live in a culture tainted by sin?

2. Jesus came as a man.

He was born; He had a physical body and physical limitations; He expressed human emotions; He grew physically, emotionally, and relationally (see Matt. 1:18, John 4:6, John 19:28). Because He was fully human, He's able to represent us, to pay our penalty, to mediate for us before God, to serve as our example, and to identify with us.

⁷ He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, ⁸ He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.

PHILIPPIANS 2:7-8

3. Jesus also came as God.

His birth was supernatural. He claimed to be God, God declared him to be God, and even the demons recognized Him to be God. He displayed attributes of deity such as working miracles and forgiving sins (see Matt. 1:18, Col. 2:9). Because He was fully God, He was able to offer a perfect sacrifice.

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know the true One. We are in the true One—that is, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.
1 JOHN 5:20

Is it difficult for you to grasp the thought of Jesus as fully God and fully man? Why or why not?

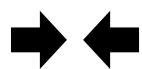
Why is it important that He is both?

4. Jesus came to serve, sacrifice, and save.

Romans 5:8 declares, “But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!” He is uniquely designed to represent people to God and God to people. Because He is fully human, He can offer the sacrifice on our behalf. Because He is fully God, He can offer the perfect sacrifice.

⁹ God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His One and Only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
1 JOHN 4:9-10

The Bible teaches that salvation isn’t found in what we do for God; rather, it’s all about what He has done for us. What is your reaction to this statement?



WHY JESUS CAME

Being a Christian isn't about what you do for God; it's about what God has already done for you. Jesus paid our debt, freed us from sin and death, and reconciled us to God and others. Jesus divinely disrupted and reversed the story of humanity. On the cross, our guilt, the bondage of sin, and our separation from God was reconciled. During this exercise you're going to unpack these terms for better understanding.

Guilt: Everyone understands words like “guilt” and “debt.” But what many don’t realize is that we’re born into much less-than-favorable standing with God—by association with Adam. We’re literally “born into” guilt and bondage. But Jesus paid a debt that He didn’t owe and that we couldn’t pay so that the charges of sin are canceled against us. Through Jesus, we experience forgiveness and cleansing. This is called *propitiation*.

He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

Journal your thoughts on the concept of guilt.

Bondage: Jesus defeated the power of sin and death on the cross, liberating us from its grip on our lives and granting us eternal life in Him. Through Jesus, we are freed from sin. This is called *redemption*.

²² But now, since you have been liberated from sin and have become enslaved to God, you have your fruit, which results in sanctification—and the end is eternal life! ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 6:22-23

Journal your thoughts on the concept of bondage.

Separation: Jesus removed the wedge between us and God and made a way for us to have a relationship with Him. Through Christ, we are reunited with God. This is called *reconciliation*.

¹⁰ For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life! ¹¹ And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have now received this reconciliation through Him.

ROMANS 5:10-11

Journal your thoughts on the concept of separation.

Respond to the following statement: Jesus' work on the cross pays for our sin and removes our guilt. It liberates us from bondage and restores our relationship with God.

Which term do you not fully understand? Who will you seek out this week to gain a better understanding of this?

Jesus didn't die on the cross to give us comfort and safety. Some people sell salvation like it's an insurance plan or a safety net. Unfortunately, we sometimes think that coming to God means that everything will be OK. Life will get better. Sometimes, it gets worse. We aren't promised that everything will be OK; we're promised His presence. He doesn't promise to keep us safe; rather, He invites us into a dangerous story to be proclaimers of hope in the midst of a very unsafe world.

Jesus didn't die to make us safe but to make us proclaimers of hope in an unsafe world. How might this affect the way you view life?