

SAMPLE

JASON HAYES

# FOLLOW ME

LEARNING ABOUT  
FAITH, OBEDIENCE,  
AND BEING MADE HOLY

threads  
by LifeWay

# FOLLOW ME

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## MEET THE AUTHOR

# JASON HAYES

My name is Jason Hayes. I live just north of Nashville, Tennessee, and am happily married to my beautiful wife, Carrie. I'm also a proud dad to our sons, Hayden and Henley. I serve as a voice and face for Threads, LifeWay's Young Adult initiative. My primary role for Threads is to serve as a speaker, author, and ministry specialist.

I earned a Master of Divinity from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and my love for learning expands into many realms of academia and culture. Before seminary, I attended the University of Tennessee where I earned a degree in speech communication.

I've served in various roles over the years in both church and parachurch ministries. Prior to coming to LifeWay, I served at Long Hollow Church in north Nashville, where my responsibilities included teaching, spiritual growth, and much more. Although I'm now serving with Threads, our family is still active at Long Hollow.

I've been blessed to minister in North America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. In addition, I've had the incredible opportunity to speak at numerous churches, conferences, training events, camps, retreats, seminaries, universities, and various other venues around the country.

Our family enjoys spending time together and hanging out with the rest of our family and friends. I love exercising, traveling, and spending time outdoors. I also blog at [jasonhayesonline.com](http://jasonhayesonline.com).

I'm grateful you've chosen to begin this study. I'm praying you find yourself encouraged, challenged, and propelled toward a deeper walk with Christ.

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**SESSION**

**1**

JESUS INITIATES

CHANGE

## CELEBRATING CHANGE

The Fourth of July is one of my favorite holidays. I love the pageantry that comes along with it—the fireworks, the parades, the cookouts, and the time at the lake—it can't be beat. And it's appropriate. As an American, this is the day when I, along with millions of others, celebrate my national freedom. This day is our chance to externally express the internal pride we have in our country. Of course we're not limited to celebrating freedom only on this day, but there's no doubt that the Fourth of July marks our fullest expression of patriotism. And why do we celebrate this specific day? Because this is the day in history when everything changed for us as Americans.

With the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, our country was officially and permanently declared independent from the Kingdom of Great Britain. The political and cultural landscape of both nations changed forever. Our forefathers set events in motion that not only impacted them, but also impacted generations to come, including ours. And our children's. And their children's. You get the picture.

July 4, 1776, was a day when everything changed.

While national freedom, whether to America or any other country, is extraordinary and worth celebrating, I don't say all of this to point us toward patriotism. Christianity in its truest form is a celebration of freedom. As Christ-followers, we enjoy spiritual freedom through the redeeming work of Christ, who was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, took the weight of the world's sin on the cross, conquered it and the grave through His resurrection, and provided redemption and atonement for those who would accept Him as Savior and Lord. In exchange for this freedom we owe God our allegiance—an allegiance that reminds us neither this country, nor anywhere else on earth, is our home.

The gospel calls us to be aliens in this world while simultaneously taking on the role of ambassadors for God's kingdom. This allegiance is birthed out of change—the life-altering impact of meeting Jesus Christ. The moment we say OK to Jesus' "follow Me" call is the moment everything (and I mean *everything*) changes.

Over the coming sessions, we'll consider what that change means for different moments in our lives and what we learn about who Jesus is during each moment. But before we dive in, consider this: The greatest celebration of freedom is a commitment to that which makes me free. As an American, I don't celebrate my freedom best by lighting sparklers and eating ridiculous amounts of hotdogs. (Trust me. I've tried.) Instead, my actions throughout the year serve as the best testimony to my allegiance. When I pay my taxes, vote, follow the law, and respect the authorities chosen by the citizens of our democratic society, I'm proving my commitment to my country. This commitment celebrates freedom.



**The Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776, but the delegates didn't sign it until July 19, 1776, after it was engrossed on parchment.**



**See Matthew 1:18-23; John 1:1-5,12,14-15; Acts 2:22-36; Romans 3:21-26; 6:23.**

Have you thought of these examples as a celebration of freedom before? Do you agree that they are? Explain.

What would you add to the list of ways you celebrate your country's freedom year-round?



### THE MANY LOOKS OF CHANGE

When we reflect on changes we've experienced, we tend to think back to significant, life-altering moments, like starting college or a new job, getting married, having a baby, or facing the death of someone we love. But changes don't always drastically redirect the courses of our lives. Change usually shows up in little ways long before it shows up in big ways. We can have seasons of life when our circumstances slowly (and often unnoticeably) alter the course of our existence.

One of my favorite things about living in Tennessee is that we truly have four different seasons. All of them are unique, and I love things about each of them. With that said, it's hard to beat fall and spring. The weather doesn't change automatically, just because the calendar notes it's the first day of a new season. It doesn't happen overnight, although occasionally it feels that way. Instead, it's a slow and subtle process that often happens without our even noticing. Then the next thing you know, you're trading in flip flops for snow boots.

Seasons of life change are like this too. Occasionally they're overwhelmingly drastic, but more often than not the change happens gradually. When we do notice the change, it's often paralyzing. Without realizing it we allow our circumstances to consume and distract us from the greater work God is doing in our lives. We get distracted by focusing on ourselves and we lose sight of God. Our lives become much less about Him and more about us. We don't set out to walk away from or wander in our faith, but sometimes it just happens. And it often happens in times of change.

Wandering isn't the only negative temptation in moments of change. Sometimes we don't wander, we simply lose our zeal. We become apathetic sheep who lack any real excitement for our faith or interest in others' spiritual well-being.

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And maybe it's not wandering or apathy that gets us in these moments, but confusion. When we find ourselves caught up in the midst of changes, we often struggle to find our footing. We're left trying to figure out how our faith fits into our new contexts.

**Are you someone who reacts positively or negatively to change? Give an example.**

Regardless of our responses to change, two things are always true: Change happens, and God is a part of it. All the other variables may differ, but these two things remain constant. The irony here is that God never changes. But before you write Him off as this ancient Creator who put things into motion and then stepped away and lost touch, remember this: He is unchanging and yet constantly relevant.

Our culture is always evolving, and it's happening at a quicker pace now than ever before. Products and personalities come and go, but God is stable. This should provide us peace in these chaotic moments of change in our lives. But remember, our goal in the midst of change isn't simply to survive it. The disciples, who we'll discuss throughout this study, endured drastic changes in their lives so they could spend three years at Jesus' side. And through it all, they became gospel-advancers whose unstable lives would model true discipleship for those who followed.

If you think about it, the disciples' lives embodied change. And guess what? So do ours. We'll gain friends and lose friends; we'll start things and quit things. Whether related to our relationships, our locations, our careers, or our emotions, things will change.

So, what do we need to learn to help us face change? And better yet, what do we need to learn that will help us thrive, not just survive, during these times? We need to start with Jesus. I'm as directionally challenged as anyone I've ever met. And the irony is that God has me traveling a lot speaking and networking with leaders. These are new and different places to me. I couldn't survive without the GPS on my phone, my navigational guide. Our greatest tool in navigating life's challenges well isn't simply more self-discovery. Instead, it's discovering first who Jesus is and what we learn about Him through the changes we face, and then allowing that to shape how we examine ourselves.

As we observe the lives of the disciples, there's no question that these men were committed to their work as Jesus' ambassadors. Although we don't know all the specifics of each man's relationship with Jesus, in

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each encounter it's clear something happened that reoriented everything they thought they knew and wanted out of life. In those moments, things were set in motion that would alter not only their own lives but the entire course of history.

Change is universal—that's old news. You've either already experienced a major change in your life, you're experiencing one right now, or you'll experience one in the future. But becoming someone who can embrace change and whatever outcome it brings is more complicated than just talking about it. Let's take our cue from the disciples, a group of men whose responses to change led to incredible sacrifices for the sake of boldly following Jesus. For them, allowing Christ to change their lives was their celebration of the freedom they found in Him.

## SETTING THE SCENE

**Read John 1:29-51.**

While this passage in John (or any of the other Gospels that tell the story) seems only a few page turns away from the Old Testament, don't be thrown off by the biblical timeline. The Book of Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament and the final one of the books referred to as the "Minor Prophets."

Chief among Malachi's prophecies was the message of God's judgment on Israel for their continuing sin and God's promise that one day in the future, when the Jews repented, the Messiah would be revealed and God's covenant promises would be fulfilled.

Malachi's bold proclamations were followed by more than 400 years during which God was silent. For generations the Israelites were left with the prophet's words ringing condemnation in their ears. It wasn't until after those 400 years that God sent another prophet with a new, more hopeful message.

We meet that prophet in John 1. His name was John the Baptist, and his message was simple:

**"Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" (Matthew 3:2).**

John was tasked with proclaiming the good news that the Messiah, the promised Savior



John the Baptist's mother, Elizabeth, and the virgin Mary were relatives (Luke 1:36).



Check out Mark 1:1-20; Matthew 3; and Luke 3:1-20 for the other accounts of the start of Jesus' ministry.



Want to learn more about Malachi? Consider *Blemished* for your next study. It's also by Jason Hayes.

of Israel, was coming soon. Although Jesus and John the Baptist were related, John didn't know Jesus was the Messiah until John watched Him fulfill a sign God had promised:

**"And John testified, 'I watched the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He rested on Him. I didn't know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water told me, "The One you see the Spirit descending and resting on—He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." I have seen and testified that He is the Son of God!"' (John 1:32-34).**

This was the moment that changed everything for John. Not only did Jesus enter into His ministerial reign, this moment also marked the fulfillment of countless Old Testament prophecies, as well as John's. Although all of the Gospels have an account of Jesus' baptism, John's Gospel is the only one that mentions John the Baptist's witness of the Spirit descending on Jesus as a dove. But as we'll see, John the Baptist's testimony about the person of Jesus was critical to his witness and the passing of his prophetic baton, and this didn't go unnoticed on the Gospel writer John.

The prophecy John the Baptist spent his life proclaiming had come true. He was in the presence of the Messiah, the Redeemer, God's Son! Because his prophecy had been fulfilled, it was time for John to fade into the background as Jesus began His earthly ministry.

What names does John the Baptist apply to Jesus in this passage?

What is the significance of these names?

Describe the conflicting emotions John the Baptist might have felt in the midst of this transition. What do you think he was excited about? Sad about? Apprehensive about?



Messiah means "anointed one." Old Testament prophets used the term to describe a particular leader God would send to rescue His people.



Many think this was John, the Gospel writer, which makes sense because he described the exchange in such detail.

John the Baptist's wasn't the only life changed by that moment when God identified His Son. That was the moment that initiated change in the lives of Jesus' first disciples as well. The men we meet in this text weren't Jesus' disciples yet. Some of them were John's disciples (one was Andrew, but the other was unidentified), and others worked in various trades. We're not just talking about hapless nomads with no families, no jobs, and no purpose in life—these were successful, well-entrenched men. But each of them had a momentary encounter with Jesus profound enough to immediately redirect the course of their lives. In that moment they learned enough about Jesus to join Him in His work.

In John 1:29-51 we're introduced to four of Jesus' twelve disciples—Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. We don't know much about them, but here's what we do know:

**Andrew**, a fisherman by trade, was one of John the Baptist's disciples who decided to follow Jesus. Andrew believed the prophet's testimony that Jesus was the Son of God, and he was also eager to introduce Jesus to his brother, Simon Peter. That eagerness didn't stop with his brother, though. Each time Andrew is mentioned in John's Gospel he's introducing others to Jesus (see John 6:8; 12:22).

**Simon** (later renamed **Peter**) was a rough, tough fisherman before meeting Jesus. He was also a married man (as we are later told that Jesus healed his mother-in-law), but we never learn the name of his wife. Little did Peter know how foundational he would be to the spread of the gospel and the growth of the early church.

A day after meeting the first two men, Jesus met **Philip**, another fisherman from the same town as Andrew and Peter. Even though Andrew and Peter no longer lived there, it can still be assumed that they knew each other and were possibly already friends.

Philip then introduced **Nathanael**, later known as Bartholomew, to Jesus. Scripture tells us very little about Nathanael's background, except that he was from the town of Cana, near Nazareth. This explains his familiarity with the obscurity and seeming insignificance of the town from which Jesus came.

Put yourself in the shoes of these four men. How do you think you would have responded if you saw Jesus with your own eyes and heard John the Baptist's proclamation of His identity?



For a closer look at Jesus' disciples, read John MacArthur's book *Twelve Ordinary Men*.

*"But you," He asked them, 'who do you say that I am?' Peter answered, 'God's Messiah!'" (Luke 9:20)*

Do you think you would've reacted more like Andrew, Nathanael, or one of the many unnamed witnesses who turned and walked away? Explain.

Although Jesus didn't officially call these men to be His disciples until a little later (see Matthew 4:18-22), these initial encounters marked the moments when change began in their lives. No longer were they listening to prophecies about the coming Messiah and laboring in their jobs searching for life's meaning. Now they were in the presence of the Son of God, and He'd already begun the process of making them holy. Although they clearly knew there was something different about this Man, they had no idea just how big of a deal He was. As we know from the rest of the Gospel narrative, it took a long time for the disciples to understand that this Jesus they walked through life with wasn't only someone sent by God to lead them; He was God Himself.

### UNPACKING THE PASSAGE

At this point you may be questioning what Jesus' initiation of change in the disciples' lives could possibly have to do with you or me. That's a fair question. Let's explore more of John 1:29-51 and see what really applies. And let's consider if what the disciples learned can possibly be valuable for us to learn, too.

We know that at least two of Jesus' future disciples witnessed John the Baptist's proclamation that the prophesy he'd received had been fulfilled and his identification of Jesus as the Messiah. We read:

**"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the One I told you about: "After me comes a man who has surpassed me, because He existed before me." I didn't know Him, but I came baptizing with water so He might be revealed to Israel.' And John testified, 'I watched the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He rested on Him. I didn't know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water told me, "The One you see the Spirit descending and resting on—He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." I have seen and testified that He is the Son of God!' Again the next day, John was standing with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, 'Look! The Lamb of God!'" (John 1:29-36).**



The Gospel of Luke describes these prophecies in Luke 1:13-17 and 3:1-6.

Although I'm sure John the Baptist's excitement was contagious, was that alone enough to convince the disciples to follow Jesus? Maybe it was—I'm sure John was a captivating prophet, and the fulfillment of hundreds of years worth of prophecy was impressive, to say the least. But might there have been more? What about Jesus was so captivating?

Rarely do people realign their lives because of second- or third-hand information. While we know Jesus wasn't the king many were expecting, it was still clear He embodied something they could commit their lives to. These men wouldn't have been willing to drop everything for someone they couldn't support personally. I know I wouldn't.

Think about a time in your life when you were asked to submit to the authority of someone you didn't respect or like. How did you handle that situation?

List some of the negative characteristics that person had that made it difficult to follow him or her.

What are some positive characteristics a strong leader should embody?

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## AND THIS APPLIES TO ME HOW?

It's nearly impossible to follow someone who isn't worthy of being followed for even a season of life, not to mention for the rest of your life. The disciples clearly saw more in Jesus than just a prophecy fulfilled. But they hadn't yet witnessed His miracles or heard His teachings, so what compelled them to pick up everything and follow Him? This encounter in the Gospel of John shows us several character traits of Jesus the disciples discovered upon meeting Him.

### 1. Jesus is approachable.

In John 1:37-39 we read the following:

**"The two disciples heard him say this and followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and noticed them following Him, He asked them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to Him, 'Rabbi' (which means 'Teacher'), 'where are You staying?' 'Come and you'll see,' He replied. So they went and saw where He was staying, and they stayed with Him that day. It was about 10 in the morning."**

Two of the disciples heard John the Baptist refer to Jesus as the Lamb of God, the first of many titles that would identify Jesus as Messiah. As these two disciples overheard this, they began following Jesus. While Scripture doesn't give much clarity on this, it seems that they were only trailing Him for a brief moment before He stopped to address them.

When talking about following Jesus, we often use the verb *follow* to mean "to follow as a disciple." But in this case it has a more neutral meaning. The two were simply tagging along with Jesus and examining Him in lieu of the prophet's claims. In other words, these men weren't yet committed to walking through life with Him. In the coming pages, we'll discuss the condition in which God accepts us, but for now, let's simply camp out on the idea that God is OK with people being around Him. In fact, as His words indicate here, He actually welcomes it.

Since Jesus the Son is part of the Trinity, we can also conclude that God the Father is approachable, too. Not only that, but God actually desires for us to approach Him. This wasn't always the case. Under the Old Testament temple construction, God's dwelling place on earth was limited to the Holy of Holies, the innermost room of the temple. The only person able to enter the room was the high priest, and even he could only enter on one specific day each year. It was there that the high priest approached God on behalf of all the people. But when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple was ripped in two from top to bottom, breaking the barrier between the people and God (see Luke 23:44-46).

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Some of you may have been raised in traditions that deny the approachability of God's character. Perhaps your communication with God was limited by the mediation of a priest or clergyman. Or maybe you were brought up believing that some form of ritual must be done before encountering God.

Maybe you haven't been impacted by any of those beliefs, but do you ever catch yourself believing that others have been imparted greater access to God than you? Maybe it's the staff of your church, a grandparent, or a mentor. Sure, these men and women may have incredible faith. And their faith may be admirable and worth striving after. But don't miss this: They're not given special entry into God's presence that you and I can't access. That thinking completely discredits the atoning work of Jesus on the cross. Just as Jesus welcomed the disciples and invited them to spend a day with Him, He welcomes us when we approach Him each day.

**Do you consider God approachable? Why or why not?**

**If yes, do you take full advantage of His approachability?**

**Why is God's approachableness an important aspect of His character?**



"You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do." —Anne Lamott



During His earthly ministry, Jesus and His disciples walked an estimated 3,125 miles. That's a lot of lives touched by the Son of God.

## 2. Jesus' impact would be unforgettable and central to their lives.

Let's read John 1:39 again:

**"So they went and saw where He was staying, and they stayed with Him that day. It was about 10 in the morning."**

The Bible is made up of 66 books that tell detail after detail of the history of Christianity and God's work in the world. But how often is a story recounted in such detail that you know exactly what time of day it was? Not often. But John included it here, and I can't help but think it's an important detail. Now, different translations record the time of day differently. Some say 10 a.m., as stated above, while others say "about the tenth hour" (e.g. NIV). Scholars disagree about what was meant by the tenth hour, but some believe it to be 4 p.m., rather than 10 a.m., based on a 12-hour day that started at 6 a.m.

How we interpret the exact time isn't what makes this detail so significant, though. That moment when the two disciples first approached Jesus was so significant and central to everything they would be a part of that they vividly remembered when it happened. Their introduction to the Son of God was a life-altering milestone in their lives.

**Do you remember the details of your initial encounter with Jesus? If yes, describe the encounter—where you were, what time of day it was, and how you felt in the moment. If not, describe a recent encounter you've had with Jesus.**

Christianity, more specifically your own personal faith, isn't a ribbon to wear or a plaque to hang on the wall. Like these disciples, your relationship with Jesus should be a living, breathing relationship that has a distinctive beginning point—whether you remember it or not. A long period of time may have passed between your initial encounter with Jesus and your acceptance of the call to follow Him, but that introduction to Jesus marked the beginning of your transformation.

Being in relationship with Christ should be memorably life-altering. In *The Cross-Centered Life*, author and pastor C. J. Mahaney writes:

"Often my eyes fill with tears at the memories of my foolishness and sin. And in the same instant, my heart will be filled with unspeakable, holy joy. I am no longer the same! By the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross, I've been forgiven of the countless sins I've committed."



Becoming God's best version of yourself is the idea behind John Ortberg's book *The Me I Want to Be*.

That is the unforgettable life change Jesus longs for us all to experience.

### 3. Jesus not only wanted to change their lives, but the lives of those around them.

Jesus' desire to initiate change in people's lives wasn't limited to the lives of the two disciples who approached Him that day. See the following passage:

**"Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Him. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, 'We have found the Messiah!' (which means 'Anointed One'), and he brought Simon to Jesus" (John 1:40-42).**

Andrew was so intrigued by Jesus that he went and found his brother Simon Peter and brought him to meet the Messiah. Something about Jesus made Andrew want to introduce Him to his brother right away. And Jesus was interested in meeting others as well. That openness must have been extraordinarily compelling to those men.

Personally, I wouldn't be excited about following a man who wouldn't also accept those I loved most. But Jesus not only wanted a relationship with their loved ones, He wanted one with everyone. They didn't know it then, but the disciples weren't signing up just to follow a man; they were committing to a larger cause, a cause that was bigger than any one of them.

Do you ever find yourself acting as if the gospel is somehow reserved just for you, people like you, and the ones you love? Whether you live in the suburbs of Chicago, on the streets of Los Angeles, or in small-town Alabama, you don't have exclusive rights to the gospel. Despite what we often like to believe, the gospel isn't original to our western-hemisphere culture, either. Its origin doesn't trace back to us, and yet we act as if it's reserved for us. The very nature of the gospel is that it was meant to be shared. Jesus, who encompassed the gospel, made himself available to all people for all of time.

**What traces of this narcissistic mind-set—if any—do you see in how you live your life or share your faith?**

**What are some practical ways that you can daily remind yourself of God's love for the nations?**



Watch *Faith Like Potatoes*, a movie based on a true story about how God changed the life of one South African farmer.

Describe a time in your life when your love for Jesus was as infectious as Andrew's. What about that season made you feel that way? What has changed since then?

#### **4. Jesus not only knew them as they were, He knew who they would become.**

Jesus may have never met Simon Peter before, but He knew a lot about Him:

**“When Jesus saw him, He said, ‘You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which means ‘Rock’)” (John 1:42).**

Can you imagine someone walking up to you and changing your name on the spot? I can hear it now: “Hello, Tom. I will now call you, Frank.” How does one get away with that? I’m not sure I could. But Jesus did. From that point on Simon was known as Peter, a name Jesus expected him to grow into over time.

When Jesus looked at Simon, He saw who he would become and the greater potential he had. Jesus had a significant, meaningful future planned for this man, and He didn’t let any time pass before cluing Peter in to it. As verse 42 points out, *Cephas*, which is Aramaic for *Peter*, means “rock” or “stone.” Eventually, Peter became a solid rock in the foundation of the church. Sure, it took a long time for him to reach his full potential. The Peter we read about in the Book of Acts is a far cry from the Peter profiled in the Gospels. But he did grow into the new identity Jesus gave him.

That’s the beauty of the gospel. It’s easy to take people at face value, but it takes a compassionate heart and visionary mind to see who they can become. I’m grateful for men and women in my life who saw the potential in me, not the clueless wreck that I once was. It’s easy to see the alcoholic, the cheater, the irresponsible, or the annoying. But what if God has more planned for those people? Maybe the person who cheated on you will turn out to be a godly husband or wife someday. Maybe one day your irresponsible coworker will be the pastor of your church. Maybe your neighbor’s disrespectful child will cure cancer for the glory of God someday. God knows you, and He knows your potential. He accepts you as you are because He sees who you can become when transformed by Him. Don’t discount yourself or those around you.

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How do you think Peter felt about being so quickly and boldly assessed by Jesus?

What about you—how would you have responded?

### **5. Jesus was pleased with an honest, seeking heart.**

The following verses introduce us to two other disciples, Philip and Nathanael:

**“The next day He decided to leave for Galilee. Jesus found Philip and told him, ‘Follow Me!’ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the One Moses wrote about in the law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth!’ ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Nathanael asked him. ‘Come and see,’ Philip answered” (John 1:43-46).**

I love Nathanael’s bluntness. His simple questioning of Jesus stands out. Questioning the potential Messiah doesn’t seem right, but every group needs a good skeptic to ask the questions on everyone’s minds. If these men were going to commit their lives to journeying with Jesus, they were allowed to question who He was. Nathanael was from Cana, which is in Galilee, and Galileans despised people from Nazareth. Nathanael wasn’t afraid to question the claims of that stranger, Jesus. And once again, we see that this doesn’t put off Jesus.

Jesus didn’t expect Nathanael to have everything figured out before Nathanael could follow Him. This isn’t how we usually think about our relationships with Christ though, is it? We don’t have to be perfect and have everything figured out in order to follow Jesus. But we *are* called to continually trust in Him as He sanctifies and grows us along the journey.

Do you think Nathanael’s skepticism is OK? Why or why not?

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Can you sympathize with Nathanael's immediate response to Jesus? Explain.

## 6. Jesus knew things about these men that no one else knew.

"Then Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said about him, 'Here is a true Israelite; no deceit is in him.' 'How do you know me?' Nathanael asked. 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you,' Jesus answered. 'Rabbi,' Nathanael replied, 'You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!'" (John 1:47-49).

Jesus didn't hold Nathanael's skepticism against him. Instead, He simply followed up with a response about a fig tree. My hunch is that the fig tree Jesus mentioned wasn't all that impressive. I'm sure it was big and bountiful, but I doubt Jesus' knowledge of the fig tree itself was enough to convince Nathanael that Jesus was the Son of God. In this exchange, Jesus revealed something about Nathanael that no one else could've known. Maybe this fig tree was a special, private place where Nathanael went to commune with God. When Jesus told Nathanael He not only knew about that place, but He'd also seen Nathanael there, He established Himself as God to Nathanael.

Now consider our lives and all that Jesus knows about us. It's quite humbling to think about. He knows everything about our past, our present, and our future, and yet He still chose to die on the cross for us. He still chooses to love us. Now *that's* powerful. If we were to expose all that is deeply rooted in our hearts, all our thoughts, and all our mistakes to the public world, we'd be overwhelmed with shame. But Jesus knows those things and He still loves us. He also knows our dreams, our desires, and our hopes. We can't place enough value on this.

How does it make you feel to know God loves you and wants to have a relationship with you in spite of your selfishness and errs?

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Do you have a “fig tree” place? What are the benefits of having a physical place where you privately and regularly meet with God?

## **7. Jesus desired to teach them more than they could ever imagine.**

The first encounter between Jesus and a few of His future disciples closes with the following:

**“Jesus responded to him, ‘Do you believe only because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.’ Then He said, ‘I assure you: You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man’” (John 1:50-51).**

After the fig tree epiphany, Jesus essentially looked at Nathanael and asked, “You believe in me because I saw you under that old fig tree?” I can almost hear the loving chuckle in His voice. Then He responded by telling the men there was much more than fig trees in store for them.

For one thing, Jesus brought with Him the fulfillment of God’s Law. Verse 51 refers to Genesis 28:12, when Jacob dreamed about a ladder from heaven. But in this verse Jesus established Himself as the Ladder. Those who follow Jesus will experience supernatural communication with God, because He serves as mediator. Through His death and resurrection, the barrier between humanity and God was broken, and He became the bridge between the two. We are no longer dependent on a priest to speak to God for us.

What a great example of the intimacy God desires for you to have with Him. Have you fallen into the trap of believing your days will continue on uneventfully, and you’ll never grow closer to God? Jesus assures you, as He did Nathanael, that He’ll show you something grander and greater than you could ever imagine. But whether your life is filled with awe-inspiring encounters with God or it feels mundane and ordinary, you should never stop meeting with Him under the fig tree.

Of the seven characteristics of Jesus and His ministry seen in John 1:29-51, which do you find most compelling? Explain.

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Would any of those characteristics have been enough for you to uproot your life and join Jesus? Why or why not?

### **FOLLOWING JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING**

What does all this have to do with change? Often in Scripture God simply told people how to respond to their various circumstances. But there are certain other situations when God didn't directly say a lot about a specific issue. In these cases, we're forced to lean heavier on Scripture to provide us with direction and understanding.

This is one of those times. In John 1:29-51, Jesus never mentioned change. It almost seems crazy that He didn't in light of all the change the disciples were experiencing. Did He miss it? He must have known they needed some encouragement or at least an acknowledgment that they were on the brink of major transformation. I think maybe Jesus was letting His actions and character speak louder than His words.

The disciples believed Jesus was the promised Messiah, but they didn't realize yet that also meant He was God's actual Son and part of God Himself. Had they known that, they would've felt the encouragement they needed. Because we know through Scripture that God is intricately connected to change. In the Book of Malachi, God told the people of Israel that He doesn't change:

**"I will come to you in judgment, and I will be ready to witness against sorcerers and adulterers; against those who swear falsely; against those who oppress the widow and the fatherless, and cheat the wage earner; and against those who deny justice to the foreigner. They do not fear Me," says the LORD of Hosts. 'Because I, Yahweh, have not changed, you descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed'" (Malachi 3:5-6).**

As seen in the Old Testament, God the Father established that He is unchanging, and in that we have hope. In the New Testament, Jesus established Himself as God, the Son, and He pointed to a similar hope. He showed His disciples that He was bigger than their circumstances. He was unwavering. Timeless. In Revelation 1:8 we read:

**"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the One who is, who was, and who is coming, the Almighty."**

Likewise, Hebrews 13:8 states:

**"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."**

These verses speak of God's stability in a world of instability. And though God never changes, we see in other parts of Scripture that He clearly intends for us to change. The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 12:2:

**“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.”**

This establishes the fact that change, in the form of sanctification (being made holy), is at the forefront of our faith. We see similar teaching in 2 Corinthians 5:17, where we read:

**“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come.”**

So, here's what we can conclude about change in our lives:

1. The world is constantly changing.
2. God doesn't change, and thus He's clearly not of this world.
3. If He's not of this world, He is indeed God.
4. Since He's God, He's worth following.
5. Following Him changes us.

In the initial encounter between Jesus and His first disciples, change has a unique look to it. Jesus wasn't moving the disciples *through* change. He was moving the disciples *to* change. He wasn't freeing them from it. He was calling them to a life of it. And He was faithful to walk with them through the change He initiated.

The characteristics of Jesus that compelled the disciples to follow Him were the very things that sustained them in the midst of life-altering circumstances. During difficult moments of change in your own life, lean heavily on what you know. That's what I'm trying to do, and I can testify that it works. What did you experience in Christ that caused you to change your life and follow Him? These are the very things He expects you to hold onto during these times. When Jesus initiates change in your life, you can bet that the end result is to make you look more like Him than you did before the change took place. And that's a very, very good thing.

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# HOW DO YOU REALLY FEEL ABOUT CHANGE?

Believe it or not, how you react to change has less to do with what change you're facing and more to do with your personality. For some people, their personality enables them to be embracers of change who face it head on and often feel antsy when things in life have been stagnant for awhile. Other personality types, however, feel crippled or paralyzed in the face of change.

As unique as you think we think we are, our personality types can be quite predictable. If you've never taken a personality assessment, you should. It's shocking what you can learn about yourself through one. One popular personality assessment tool is the "DISC Model of Human Behavior," which measures a person in four behavior preferences: dominant, influential, steady, and conscientious. The test rates you in each category, and the one you score highest in reflects your behavioral bent.

In addition to testing our personalities, the DISC test has been used to assess the personalities and behaviors of four of Jesus' apostles based on what we learn about them in Scripture. Not only does this enable us to see which apostle we relate most closely with, but it also shows us how Jesus took each man's personality into consideration when He taught and served him. So, who are you most like: Paul, Peter, John, or Thomas? Take this into consideration next time you read about that man in Scripture.

## **Paul: Dominant**

*Characteristics include:* Independent, persistent, direct. Energetic, busy, fearless. Focus on own goals rather than people. Tell rather than ask. Ask "What?" Prefer change to stability, but are not flexible to a changing world.

"Paul's D shines through in the dynamic words he wrote to the Church: Stand fast . . . Press on . . . I have fought the good fight . . . We are hard pressed, but not crushed . . ."

## **Peter: Influential**

*Characteristics include:* Social, persuasive, friendly. Energetic, busy, optimistic, distractible. Imaginative, focus on the new and future. Poor time managers. More focused on people than tasks. Tell rather than ask. Ask "Who?" Prefer change to stability and are flexible to a changing world.

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I types “have a tendency to speak and act before they think. . . . What other people think is so important to an I”

### **John: Steady**

*Characteristics include:* Consistent, like stability. Accommodating, peace-seeking. Like helping and supporting others. Good listeners and counselors. Close relationships with few friends. Ask, rather than tell. Ask “How?” and “When?” Prefer stability to change, but are flexible to a changing world.

“John never mentioned his own name in his Gospel. He was identified as ‘the disciple Jesus loved.’ When Jesus died on the cross, John was there, giving support to His mother, Mary. . . . When you read John’s epistles, you’ll find his S style was under control: he loved people and encouraged them, but he boldly proclaimed what they needed to hear. He declared truth without hesitation. He was even blunt at times.”

### **Thomas: Conscientious**

*Characteristics include:* Slow and critical thinker, perfectionist. Logical, fact-based, organized, follows rules. Don’t show feelings. Private. Few, but good friends. Big-picture, outlines. Ask “Why?” and “How?” Prefer stability to change and are not flexible to a changing world.

Thomas “was a man who thought the world should make sense, who appreciated order and predictability. . . . [he] sought out quality answers.”

“If you are born again, the Spirit of God makes the change very evident in your real life and thought. And when a crisis comes, you are the most amazed person on earth at the wonderful difference there is in you. There is no possibility of imagining that you did it. It is this complete and amazing change that is the very evidence that you are saved.” —Oswald Chambers

# Threads



As an advocate for young adults and churches, the ministry of Threads is to connect them to each other for the glory of God.



We believe connecting over the Bible is a great place to start. Threads Bible studies help you start and sustain small groups, Sunday School classes, and all manner of Bible studies designed to introduce young adults to Jesus and help them grow as Christians.

Our events are built on research and experience--events for leaders are designed to help you reach and keep this generation.



# Grow your Young Adult Ministry today with our practical handbook



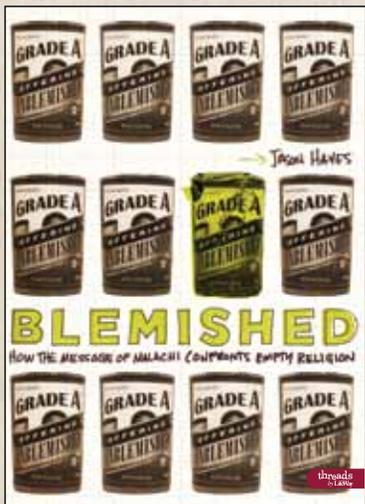
## CONTEXT

### *Engaging the Young Adults of Your Community*

Every young adult ministry has a setting—circumstances that surround it. *Context* is a handbook designed to help leaders determine where their ministry is—whether small or large, thriving or starting up—and where it has the potential to go. Using the spiritual markers of community, connection, responsibility, and depth.

Through the Threads Web site, leaders and churches submitted questions and challenges they face in ministering to young adults. *Context* examines those challenges and offers practical answers to some of the most frequently encountered issues. *Context* will help leaders develop a frame of reference and a plan of action that will equip them to grow their young adult ministry.

005126270 - **\$3.95**



## BLEMISHED

*How the Message of Malachi Confronts Empty Religion*  
by Jason Hayes



Malachi is a book about unfaithful priests, half-hearted religion, and blemished sacrifices. The people had become checklists, performing spiritual acts without the engagement of their hearts. And as we gaze across the landscape of the 21st-century church, we see that many of the same tendencies remain true today. Blemished is a study of what went wrong in the days of Malachi and a call to self-examination in the church. It's a reminder that God desires obedience at a deep level from His people who are still called to bring unblemished sacrifices, in a different way, before Him. (5 sessions)

**Member Book – 005184405 – \$7.95**

**Leader Kit – 005126269 – \$69.95**

Find out more about these studies!  
Visit [threadsmedia.com](http://threadsmedia.com) to see samples,  
promo videos and find digital downloads.

## LEGEND

Look for these icons to help check and maintain young adults' spiritual balance and health.



**CONNECT**  
with Spirituality  
March 20, 2017

**Connect** urges young adults to worship, pray, fellowship, and relate to others in positive relationships at work, at home, and anywhere else.



**SERVE**  
with Worship Leads  
March 4, 2017

**Serve** describes the work young adults do inside the church by using their spiritual gifts, skills, and passions to glorify God.



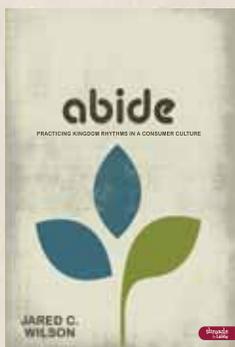
**GROW**  
with Bible Study  
March 13, 2017

**Grow** encourages young adults to learn and understand more about God and His expectations of His people through Bible study.



**GO**  
with Ready Feet  
March 26, 2017

**Go** moves young adults outside the church and into their community and the world.



## ABIDE

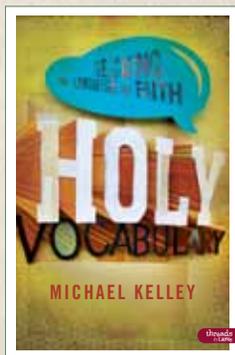
*Practicing Kingdom Rhythms In a Consumer Culture*

by **Jared C. Wilson**

Bible Study. Prayer. Fasting. Service. These are just a few of the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life. While all Christ-followers agree about the essential nature of these practices, most of us live with a sense of frustration when it comes to consistently implementing them. Examines key sections in the Sermon on the Mount and will help you come to see how these practices subvert the rhythms of culture so deeply ingrained in us. That subversion begins to happen when we stop striving to do a better job at Christianity and start finding the rhythm of truly being a Christian. It's time to cease striving and start abiding. Maybe it's time to find some rhythm. (5 sessions)

**Member Book** – 005271630 – **\$8.95**

**Leader Kit** – 005126268 – **\$69.95**



## HOLY VOCABULARY

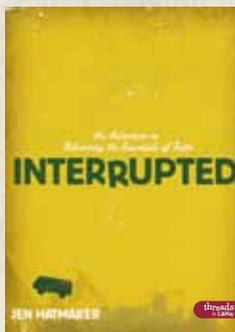
*Rescuing the Language of Faith*

by **Michael Kelley**

Saved. Grace. Sin. Repent. These words are synonymous with the Christian experience. But perhaps we've used them so often we've lost some of their meaning. Michael Kelley explores the classic, if over-used, words of the church and dives deeply to rescue their meaning. Whether you're new to church lingo or it's your native tongue, you'll find that these holy words have deep and significant meanings regarding faith. (7 sessions)

**Member Book** – 005271631 – **\$9.95**

**Leader Kit** – 005189434 – **\$49.95**



## INTERRUPTED

*An Adventure In Relearning the Essentials of Faith*

by **Jen Hatmaker**

God radically interrupted the direction of Jen's life and ministry, causing her to reevaluate the point of the Gospel. Through experiences with the Word, the poor, and the forsaken, she and her husband started a missional church in a racially diverse, low-income, high-need section of south Austin. Hardships, costly sacrifices, and uncomfortable self-evaluation came with the interruption, but so did Jesus—right where He said He would always be, with the least. Through the tough questions Christ asked, Scriptures, and the path Jen agreed to walk, readers are invited to take a similar journey, asking if his/her life brings integrity to the gospel. *Interrupted* is a very recent, sometimes messy, quite honest account of what happens in an average life when Jesus radically interrupts it. (5 sessions)

**Member Book** – 005201449 – **\$7.95**

**Leader Kit** – 005146603 – **\$69.95**



# LEARNING ABOUT FAITH, OBEDIENCE, AND BEING MADE HOLY IN A DO-IT-YOURSELF WORLD

**WHEN JESUS TOLD THE DISCIPLES, “FOLLOW ME,”** He wasn’t inviting them to live in isolation with the Son of God. Quite the opposite, actually. They quit their jobs, left home, and became participants in the miracles and work of Christ while literally following in His footsteps. They experienced change, fear, hope, and more—all experiences that became part of the process of being changed by Jesus and joining in the advancement of the gospel.

When we answer Jesus’ call to follow Him, we immediately join in the charge to spread the gospel. But what if we don’t know enough? What if we’re not ready to change? Or what if our faith isn’t strong enough? We’re not supposed to have it all figured out—we’re supposed to learn as we go, all the while being made holy. That’s the process.

In this study, we’ll revisit six life-altering encounters the disciples had with Jesus to find out what we can learn about Him through those encounters, and how those moments impact our own story of following Him.

## **IN A GROUP BIBLE STUDY? WE HIGHLY RECOMMEND IT.**

Check out the *Follow Me* leader kit, which includes this Bible study, a leader guide, three animated videos, a playlist to accompany the study, and more at [threadsmedia.com/followme](http://threadsmedia.com/followme).



**JASON HAYES** is the young adult ministry specialist for *Threads*, a speaker, and a church consultant. He is the author of *Blemished: How the Message of Malachi Confronts Empty Religion* and the co-author of *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them*. Jason lives in Nashville, Tennessee, with his wife, Carrie, and their two sons, Hayden and Henley.