



# FIRST STEPS

IDENTITY + BELONGING + PURPOSE





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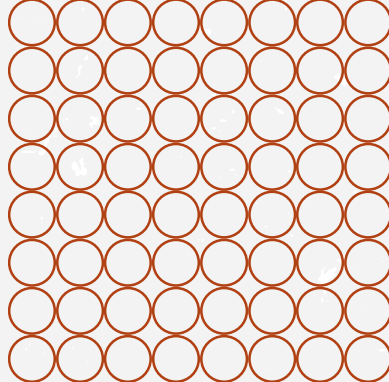
At some point in life,  
most people wonder about these

## 3 big questions:

Who am I?

Where do I belong?

Why am I here?



These questions expose the deepest needs of our hearts. Many people search their entire lives but never find the answers that will satisfy their souls.

As a follower of Jesus, your restored relationship to God through Christ now provides **amazing answers** to these foundational questions.

In the next few pages we will see how Jesus gives His followers a new...

IDENTITY  
BELONGING  
PURPOSE





# WALKING TOGETHER

As we take the first steps in our journey of following Jesus, it is always good to walk along with someone else! When you meet with a friend to talk about these questions, make sure that your time together includes space to:

## **connect**

**relationally through genuine care and prayer for each other**

Ask each other about your current life experiences. What have been some highs and lows recently? How is Jesus relevant to what you are going through? Pray together about these things.

## **grow**

**biblically through reading and talking about God's Word together**

Followers of Jesus believe that the Bible is God's direct communication to us and the ultimate source of truth. It is important to begin to read the Bible regularly on your own and with others.

## **engage**

**practically by taking beginning action steps**

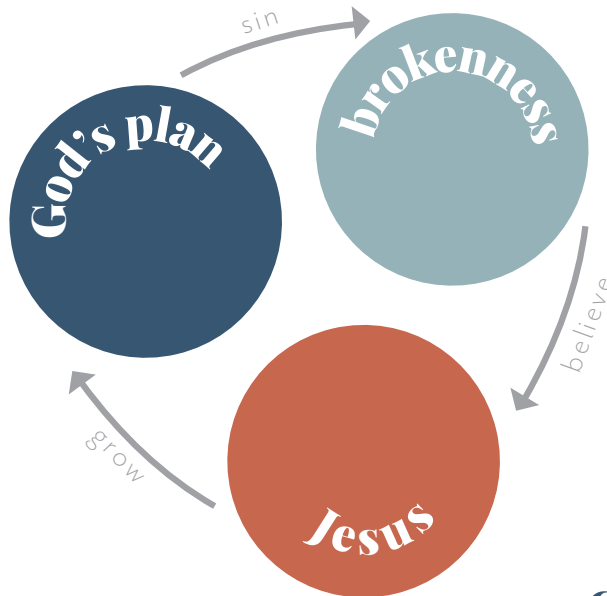
The life of a person who follows Jesus is active! We grow by learning AND doing. Each of the 3 Big Questions suggests some action steps to take.

Before we look at the **3 big questions** and the answers Jesus provides, let's review the most foundational truth of all — the Gospel!



# THE GOSPEL

the good news of how we can be  
reconciled to God through Jesus



## God's plan

Out of His great love, God created this world and the people in it (us) to live in relationship with Him. He gave us a great purpose: to multiply in number and to create a culture of goodness on the earth in partnership with Him.

*Genesis 1:26-28*

## brokenness

Tragically, we chose to reject God's plan (the Bible calls this sin) which resulted in relational brokenness between us and God (the Bible calls this death).

*Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23*

This broken relationship with God also resulted in broken relationships with other people and with the world we were designed to care for.

*Ephesians 2:1-3*

## Jesus

But God did not leave us in brokenness! He sent His own Son Jesus to rescue us. Jesus lived the life we could not live (without sin) and died the death we deserved. Then God raised Him from the dead to demonstrate Jesus' defeat of sin and death.

*Romans 5:8, Ephesians 2:4-6*

Because of God's amazing grace toward us, we can choose to simply believe in what Jesus did for us, and when we do we are restored in our relationship with God and forgiven.

*John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8*

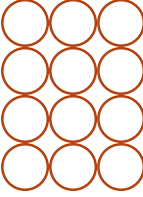
We now live the incredible adventure of following Jesus - partnering with Him to grow in maturity and to proclaim His goodness to the broken world around us.

*1 Corinthians 5:17, Colossians 2:6-7, Ephesians 2:10*

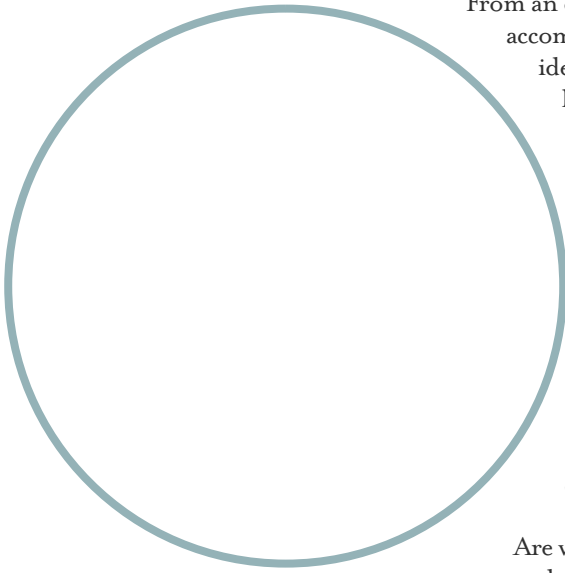
**Have you gratefully received the FREE GIFT of a restored relationship to God through Jesus?**



# WHO AM I?



Write your name inside the circle along with some achievements, roles, or characteristics that describe you, such as graduate, husband, runner.



From an early age we begin to define ourselves by what we do or accomplish. We listen to what others say about us and our identities begin to form. The choices of our careers, our hobbies, our friends and even our entertainment often become the building blocks we use to create an identity for ourselves.

At our core, **we long to know that we are valuable** and we work to build an identity that satisfies this longing. Yet creating an individual identity is a challenge, especially in today's culture. Tim Keller offers this insight.

*"[There] is a new weight on the soul put there by modernity. Success or failure is now seen as the individual's responsibility alone. Our culture tells us that we have the power to create ourselves."*<sup>1</sup>

Are we merely the sum of our own successes and failures or our strengths and weakness? Are we who others say we are?

Read the Bible verses below together.

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name[...]" **John 1:12**

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." **2 Corinthians 5:17**

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." **John 10:27-29**

*Note: Jesus lived in an agricultural society often calling Himself "the Good Shepherd" and the people who believed in Him His "sheep."*

"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." **1 John 5:13**

<sup>1</sup> Keller, Timothy. *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* (pp. 128-129). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.



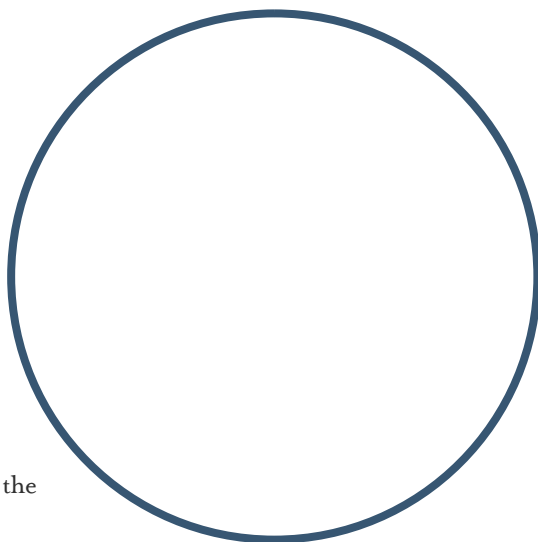
**Discuss together:**

What do these verses tell you about God?

What do these verses say about people?

How does knowing you have received your identity from God the Father, rather than working to achieve it, change how you view yourself?

How could your lasting identity as a child of God begin to impact your roles at work, at school, and in your family? How could it affect your relationships?



**Reflect:**

Write your name in the circle to the right along with some of the things you have learned about your new identity in Christ.

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**ACTION STEPS**

**Word:**

Read the four Bible verses again and spend time thinking about them (the Bible calls this meditating on God's word). Write down some of your thoughts. Read Psalm 23, an Old Testament passage about our identity.

**Prayer:**

Talk to God and ask Him to show you where you may be listening to and believing what other voices are saying about who you are. Ask Him to remind you throughout your day who He says you are.

**Share:**

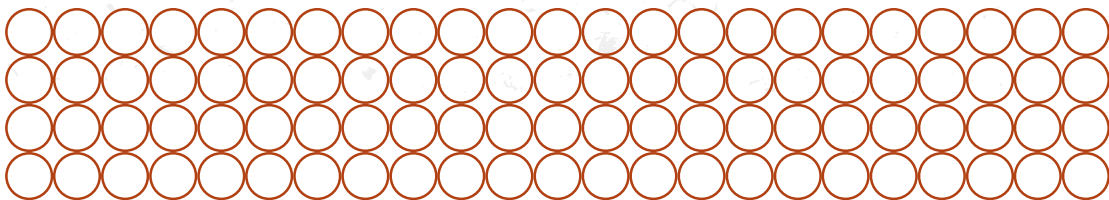
Tell a friend this week what you have learned about your identity.

**Remember:**

Who am I?

**I am a loved child of God now and forever.**

- My new identity is given to me by God.
- My new identity is eternally secure.





# WHERE DO I BELONG?

In the boxes below, describe a time and a place when you felt like you really belonged, and another time and place where you felt isolated, even unwelcomed.

belonging

A second great need of the human heart is to belong - to form significant and lasting relationships. We all long to be welcomed, accepted and known. When we don't belong in a community, we are often isolated and lonely. In fact, loneliness has become a modern "epidemic."

A 2018 survey by the health insurer Cigna found that **loneliness is widespread in America**, with nearly 50 percent of respondents reporting that no one knows them well.<sup>1</sup>

In January of 2018, the United Kingdom appointed the country's first Minister for Loneliness to tackle the issue of more than **nine million people in Britain who often or always feel lonely**.<sup>2</sup>

Do the significant people in your life really know you? Are there groups that you wish you could join but feel like you could never be a part of? Do you have a community where you don't need to perform for acceptance?

isolation

Read the Bible verses below together.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

**Ephesians 2:13**

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household."

**Ephesians 2:19**

"So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

**Romans 12:5**

"Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing."

**1 Thessalonians 5:11**

Discuss together:

What do these verses tell you about God?

What do these verses say about people?

How do these verses describe the community of Christ followers?

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://time.com/5248016/tracey-crouch-uk-loneliness-minister/>



As a believer in Jesus, you not only have a new relationship with God, but you also have a new relationship with His people. All believers in Jesus collectively make up the Church which the Bible often refers to as a house, a body, a family/household.

## universal Church

The Church consists of all people, over all time, who trust in the person of Jesus — His death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of their sins and eternal life.

## local church

The church is also a local group of Christ followers who regularly meet together to grow in their faith.

### Reflect:

How could forming lasting relationships with other Jesus followers impact your life?

Do you feel like the local church is a place where you can belong?  
Why or why not?

Who are some of the people in your life who need the belonging found in Jesus?

“The church is not an institution forcing us to follow rules but a community inviting us to still our hunger and thirst at its table.”

-Henri Nouwen

### ACTION STEPS

#### Word:

Read the Bible verses again and spend time thinking about them.  
Write down some of your thoughts.

#### Prayer:

Ask God to show you practical ways to begin forming relationships with fellow Christ-followers.

#### Do:

Attend a local Bible-teaching church this week.  
Find out about opportunities to connect in a small group with other Christ-followers.

#### Remember:

Where do I belong?

**I belong to God's family - the Church.**

- The barriers to belonging have been removed for me by Christ.



# WHY AM I HERE?

**In the triangle, list some of your heroes. What are some reasons these people inspire you?**

Have you ever looked up to someone and wanted to be just like him or her? Whose character and accomplishments do you admire the most? A third need of the human heart is for significance. We long to spend our days participating in things that make a real difference now and even have lasting value. Often, the people we look up to, our heroes, lead lives of significance. That's why we want to be like them!

The need to live for something greater than ourselves is widely recognized. Famous Holocaust survivor and author Viktor Frankl concluded that "life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose."<sup>1</sup>

Who is the ultimate hero we can model our lives around? Where do we find a great purpose to which we can devote our time, talents and energy? What can we do now that will last beyond our lifetime?

**Read the Bible verses below together.**

"For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." **1 Peter 2:21**

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." **Ephesians 2:8-10**

"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.'" **Matthew 28:18**

"Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence." **2 Peter 1:3**

<sup>1</sup> Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*



### **Discuss together:**

What do these verses tell you about God?

What do these verses say about people?

How do these verses describe what a follower of Jesus is called to pursue?

What resources has God given us to help us live out our purpose?

### **Reflect:**

In what ways could becoming like the ultimate hero, Jesus, change the way you live every day?

When you think about the end of your life on earth, what do you think will matter most to you?

## **Become like Jesus:**

During His life on earth, Jesus demonstrated how to live the ultimate life of love for God and people. As His followers, we can grow to become like Him in both our character and actions. After all, we are one of the family now, and family members look alike!

## **Help people find and follow Jesus:**

We are also called to have a lasting impact on the people in our lives by loving them and introducing them to the source of true life - Jesus!

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### ACTION STEPS

#### **Word:**

Read the four Bible verses and spend time thinking about them. Write down some of your thoughts.

Begin to read the book of Mark in the New Testament. Pay attention to what Jesus was like. What did He spend time doing? How did He interact with people? What was His relationship to God? What was His life's purpose?

#### **Prayer:**

Ask God to begin to reveal specific areas in which you could become more like Jesus in your character and relationships.

Ask God for opportunities to start conversations about Jesus among your friends, family and acquaintances.

#### **Share:**

Tell a friend about what you've learned regarding lasting significance.

#### **Remember:**

Why am I here?

**To become like Jesus and to help people find and follow Him.**



**who am I?**

I am a loved child of God now and forever

**where do I belong?**

I belong to God's family, the Church

**why am I here?**

To become like Jesus and to help people find and follow Him

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood,  
a holy nation **(identity)**, a people for God's  
own possession **(belonging)**, so that you may  
proclaim the excellencies of Him **(purpose)**  
who has called you out of darkness into His  
marvelous light.

**1 Peter 2:9**

