

Believe In Him Ephesians 2:1-10 (ESV)

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I trust you were blessed as you listened to brothers and sisters proclaim in the midst of their pain and hurt, many grieving and in the midst of loss, that God is their salvation. It's a blessing for me to hear and it testifies to His glory, regardless of what happens around us. This is the God that we serve! We spent time in the book of Joshua, pressing onward despite the world around us. We know that he was not the final Joshua. There was another yet to come, the true salvation of Yahweh, Jesus.

Now we're talking about discipleship, following the leader. We spoke on His call, "Follow me," and the commitment it requires. It's an extreme one-way journey. Today we continue with where it begins; the first step. Ephesians chapter 2, verses 1-10. We'll read God's Word together.

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

It was a few weeks ago that we were having dinner with a family who were not followers of Jesus, and the discussion had turned to religion. We talked about the Bible, about Jesus, about God, eternal life. We uncovered a few areas where we agreed, but many where we did not. The conversation was friendly. It was kind. But throughout it all, there was one person at the table who had a very strong sense of concern. It was my daughter. She was listening intently, realizing that this family did not believe in Jesus as Savior, and that was a major concern for her. Several times in the conversation she almost interrupted with a deep concern over their rejection of Jesus as God. She seemed distressed because even though we were discussing the gospel and speaking about the need for a Savior and the exclusive hope of Christ and sharing His grace, this family was declining to respond. So during a brief pause toward the end of the conversation, my daughter darts a glance over in my direction and blurts out in a not-so-quiet whisper, "I think we need to go get Pastor Ritch." (Laughter!)

It was a revealing moment of so many things, but one of which I'll highlight here. My daughter could tell that the people that we shared this meal with were not followers of Jesus and she wanted to do something to make them believe. To be sure, Pastor Ritch has far more wisdom and experience in these matters than I do, and I'm thankful my daughter recognizes that. But when it comes to someone believing in Jesus, the most critical factor is not the skill of the presentation or the experience of the presenter, nor the volume of words, nor the depth of passion nor the defense of a worldview or the force of appeal. The first step of discipleship, the way following Jesus begins, when it comes to someone believing in Him, the most critical factor is in the best possible place it could be: entirely out of our hands!

It's almost too much to believe when you read this letter to the Ephesians, to this small group of people who trust that a Jewish man is actually the Savior of the world. He died, was executed on a cross, paid for their sins, rose again, resurrected, went to be in heaven with God, and now is their hope. Not many know about this message, and yet, they believe it. Paul is writing to them in this very pagan city, and they're deciding they're going to keep following Jesus despite what everything in the world screams otherwise. Paul encourages them to stand firm in what they believe and to walk on this path of following Jesus, and the reality of the thing that God has done and is doing. It's this letter that epitomizes the path of discipleship and walking after Jesus.

As much as we talk about discipleship, it's just not an easy thing. It's not just something we do. The call is broad in one sense. Yes, Jesus says, "Follow me," but so few do. Yes, the commitment is extreme. It's a one-way journey. We could say in a sense it costs nothing, and yet, it requires everything. Yet, following Jesus is no simple thing even if we choose that, because the first step of discipleship actually begins with God. Following Jesus starts with Him. He's the one who issues the call. He's the one who grants the grace. He's the one who gets the glory. From Him and through Him and to Him are all things. By His design, the first step of following after Jesus is to believe. It's to believe in Him with a true, living faith; with what we might just call trust. It's to turn away from any other hope and trust fully in Him. Believing in Jesus is how discipleship, following Him, begins. It's the very first step. It's a step that begins ultimately with God.

The journey begins here, so it's important not to jump past this too quickly. So we're going to look at this first step of belief through a few different angles from Ephesians chapter 2. Hopefully we'll touch on four, today; four realities about this saving relationship with Jesus that we'll try to explore. First, let's look at what it takes.

Our Mess—What Belief Requires True faith takes a miracle (1-3)

Following Jesus takes a miracle. Genuine discipleship always begins with a miracle. This idea of a miracle is that it's an act of God. It's something that requires His agency. It's an accomplishment of His hand. It's a resource beyond our natural realm. We can't do it on our own. Jesus performed many miracles in His lifetime and each one was a reminder of the power of God at work in their midst. We saw Him cast out demonic spirits. Blind

eyes were opened. Leprous bodies were cleansed. Dead corpses were raised to life. And sometimes we forget that the working of His miracles was not merely physical. In fact, it was more extensive. He performed miracles that were spiritual in nature; eternal life for those who dwelt in death.

The point being that any true faith response to God's call to follow Jesus relies not on a matter of skill. It takes a miracle. Following Jesus is no place for the self-sufficient person who thinks, "I want to get better. I want to do this on my own. I want to fix my life," and then they carry on, on their own. There is a miracle required. Why? It's because of our mess. It's the mess we're in without Jesus. Are you aware of the mess? No matter who you are, where you've grown up, what church you've been to, without Jesus, are you aware of the mess that you are in? Look at what God says about our natural spiritual condition on our own. This is what we need to be saved from. This is what begins with a miracle in verse 1. It's what we'll call the spiritual sensitivity we lacked. God says

1 And you were dead

You were spiritually unresponsive. We could do nothing without a miracle, in this state. Spiritually dead is our condition before Christ. Just like a body doesn't respond to light or smell or touch or sound or any stimulus, we were unresponsive without life because of the sensitivity that we lacked. This was our spiritual state. It's anyone's state without Jesus. Look at second, the moral depravity that we embodied. You were dead

in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked,

We were morally depraved. This is how we lived without the miracle of Jesus. We lived in rebellion. We're brought forth into a sphere of trespass and sin. Trespass means fall away or stumble or go the wrong way. Sin means missing the mark. Both of the terms are not different kinds of wrongdoing, but they are emphasizing the extent of our wrongdoing, the sphere that we live in, in our very nature. Now, this is not the way we were created to be from the beginning. Man was made in God's image to be good. But corruption occurred when we fell and rebelled. It is corruption at our very core. We're born now into a sphere of evil. We're born into this unrighteous realm where David would say in

Psalm 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

That's not to say that all people are equally sinful or even all as evil as they could be. Not every person is corrupt in every way that they could be, but every person is corrupt in every part of who they are. Mind, body, will, emotion, intellect, soul; all have been tainted with corruption. So not everyone bears the same extent of guilt, but everyone bears the same status of being guilty. This is the mess into which we're born, the mess that we're in without Jesus. Paul would say in

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

And later in

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death,

We were spiritually dead and physical death following close behind. So this is where we are without Jesus. True faith takes a miracle because of this moral depravity that we embody. You can see it at work through the principle trajectory that we follow. We're powerfully influenced. God says that we were

following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—

This is who we follow without a miracle; other rebels. Two rebellious influences he points out here are our culture and our ruler. First, he says we follow the values of our secular culture.

following the course of this world,

It's this system in which the world operates. It is influenced by the realm of rebellion and its values. But we're also influenced by the deception of its spiritual ruler. He says

following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—

There are the cultural values around us and there is also the spiritual deception among us. It sets the principle trajectory of our lives. This is what we follow without Jesus. Fourth, if you need more of an understanding, look at the instinctual propensity to which we are enslaved. It's our instinctive compulsion without a miracle. He says

3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind,

We were enslaved to our own passions. We did what we wanted and what we wanted was fleshly. Part of what seems to be the idea here is that we're not just sinners because we sin; we sin because we're sinners. This is part of our nature. We have a propensity and a desire that we cave to because we are enslaved. As a result, look at the eventual destiny that we face, in verse 3. We face a prospective condemnation. What we face without a miracle, he says we

and were by nature children of wrath,

This is the eventual destiny that we would await without Jesus. It's destruction! Judgment for our guilt! And we're not alone. You can see the universal company we share without Jesus.

like the rest of mankind.

This is the mess we're in without Jesus. We're spiritually unresponsive, morally depraved, powerfully influenced, instinctively compelled, prospectively condemned, universally accompanied. The point is following Jesus, belief, true faith takes a miracle. It must be a radical transformation by God for us to be helped out of our mess of guilt. This seems to be at the heart of what Jesus was teaching Nicodemus in John 3. He was a spiritual ruler who seemed to have it all together, who was hiding under cover of darkness. He came to Jesus, talking to Him about how it was a good thing that He was teaching. Jesus stopped him in his tracks and said

John 3:3-4 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

He's not getting it.

John 3:5-8 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

It's a supernatural work of God that is mysterious. It's beyond our control. It's a miracle. Paul would say in

1 Corinthians 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

The way Spurgeon would say it is, "I might as well teach a tiger to become a vegetarian, as I might depend upon my own ability to convince my listeners of sin and righteousness and the coming judgment." It requires a work of God and we recognize that God is not the only supernatural force at work in this world. There is another spiritual force at work and we can see the effect all around. Paul would say in

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

This is the same supernatural force of God at work to open our eyes to our need for Jesus. This is the mess we're in without Jesus. Have you faced your need for that kind of work? Have you faced and recognized and confessed your mess, your guilt?

There's a pretty common lie about being a pretty good person. We need to beware the lie of being a pretty good kid. I could ask the parents, how much trouble can a pretty good kid get into? Quite a lot! There are things that I've done, insults that I've spoken. There are lies that I've told. There are things that I've watched, actions I've taken that were wrong. They were wicked, selfish, unkind, rude, deceptive, hurtful. Without Jesus, I am a mess. And I recognize by the grace of God, that I stand guilty. Have you felt the weight of your guilt before God? There is no following Jesus without that, and it takes a miracle. True faith takes a miracle. If you feel that weight, couldn't you use some good news? Couldn't you use some hope? Well here's what true faith trusts.

The Message—What We Believe

True faith trusts the gospel (4-7)

Gospel means good news. We talked about the mess; this is the message. It's the good news about Jesus. There are lots of ways we hear the good news about Jesus presented in life and in Scripture. You see little books or little tracts or a wordless bracelet or a film. There's not necessarily a set formula, but there is an understanding of what it means and it often boils down to at least four aspects. The idea of God, who is our good creator and then we as men and women are guilty sinners. But then He sent the Chosen One, Christ, as the Savior who died in our place and rose again. We can receive salvation by turning from all substitutes to trust in Him alone. Paul says it like this in

1 Corinthians 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,

He took the punishment that our guilt demanded and gave us the reward His righteousness deserved. This is the good news! It's the message of faith that we believe when we trust in Jesus. You can see it unfold in verses 4 and moving forward. There are some divine blessings that we just cherish as we consider this good news that is so worth trusting. First, look at the blessing of divine initiative. It's the initiative God took. He didn't require any prompting. On His own, He acted. In verse 4, there are two little words with one huge implication.

4 But God,

This is our mess, but God... It's the blessing of divine initiative. So what did God do and why? Well, look at the divine benevolence He granted. He acted, and from which and in which He acted is this generous benevolence or favor or love, you might say. Look at the nature of this favor in verse 4.

4 But God, being rich in mercy,

He is rich in mercy! He had a wealth of kindness and compassion towards us because of, look at the intensity of His favor.

because of the great love

This was manifested, as 1 John 4:9 would say,

1 John 4:9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

The greatness of His love is to sacrifice His Son. What is especially sweet is the object of His favor, who it's for, the very ones in the mess. It's the love

with which he loved us,

What a precious gift! We're the object of His favor. The timing, when it happened was

5 even when we were dead in our trespasses,

Even when we were dead! This is before we cleaned ourselves up, before we started the journey to come back to church and start following Jesus; even when we were dead.

Romans 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We did nothing to make ourselves acceptable to Him. God did it all. Divine initiative and benevolence is good news. Third, look at the divine deliverance He secures. This is how He acts, the salvation He secures. Yahweh means "God saves." And here, what He does, verse 5, the essence of His work is He

made us alive

We who were dead, He made us alive. The manner through which He accomplishes this is

together with Christ—

He unites us with this one, the Chosen One who is resurrected. All others are dead, and here, He stands resurrected and we've been united with Him. This is how Peter would say it. He was one of the disciples. He knew Jesus had died and yet, he saw Him resurrected and he would say

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

We're united with Jesus. Paul would say in Galatians,

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Through Jesus, in Christ, this is how it all happens. In verse 5 he says

by grace you have been saved—

That's the means. It's by grace. It's an undeserved gift of favor; in Christ. This is what God accomplished. You can see the extent of the work, the position to which He saves us, our place and placement. He

6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

We've been granted this position. To what purpose does He do all of this? What's the point of all of this work? What's in it for God? Well, all of this saving work serves to give Him glory. It's that people would praise, just as we were singing, Praise Yahweh! The chorus so often sung Hallelujah, *hallel* means "praise" in Hebrew; *jah* is short for Yahweh. Praise Yahweh! He's the God who saves. It's His name. Jesus means "Yahweh is my salvation." He receives glory from people who recognize who He is. He does all this

7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

If you read Ephesians chapter 1, you read that all of this grace leads to the praise of the glory of His grace. He shows this kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Most of the time, when we read about believers in the New Testament, they're not referred to, per se, as Christians, but as "in Christ." That's where we live. We've been united with Him both in death and in resurrection. That's the message of good news. It's the only escape from the mess of our guilt. It's through the gospel, the grace that's available through Jesus. This good news has implications. We'll read this as we would read in John chapter 3, which continues on that conversation after Nicodemus. Here's what Jesus would say.

John 3:16-17 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

That's the nature of God.

John 3:18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

This is the path.

John 3:19-21 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and the people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be

exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

This is a work that God does as He unites us in Christ. There is something distinct and different about anyone who follows Jesus. They recognize their mess and their only hope is through Christ. The order is incredibly important. There is a result, an implication that happens when we believe the Gospel. We’re transformed. We’re different. We come into the light. We live differently. But the order is essential. Unlike any other religion or system of hope in this world, we are not saved by works for grace. But we are saved by grace for these works.

We talk with people, whether it’s in counseling...my wife and I will meet with people, and there will be oftentimes where they feel that they can’t get out of the mess of life. They can’t get rid of the guilt. They’ll say, “I can’t get clean. I can’t wash this off.” The reality is, no matter how many jobs you change or times you move or showers you take or hand sanitizers you try to put on or how many friends you change or habits you try to put off, you cannot cleanse yourself. Any other religious system is not good news that says, “Do some works. Get yourself clean. Get yourself clean before God.” The gospel says, “No. Live clean because God has made you clean, because you are.” In Jesus, that’s what is accomplished.

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

Now, we think about this idea of faith. But before we jump to the next point, I’ll ask this. Can you explain the gospel message? Can you explain it in a simple way, enough that you can trust it and enough that another could trust it? The world, to be sure, is in a mess and this is the only hope. Are you ready to share it? Let’s think about how we access these blessings.

The Means—How We Believe True faith must be total (8-9)

We’ve talked about what it takes, what it is in. Here’s how it happens. It must be totally in the grace of God through the work of Jesus Christ. Trust is a total reliance upon God. You see what is said here. He says

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

The illustration that is often used is that of a lifeguard who is coming in as someone is drowning. They’re panicking and trying to save themselves with any means. The reality is that they need to stop trying to save themselves and rest totally in the salvation that comes from their rescuer. It’s a total reliance upon the one object of hope. The other

image that is used often is a chair, where you sit fully, completely relying on the chair to support yourself. Your confidence, your hope is all centered upon one object, and that object is Jesus. We totally, through faith, trust in His grace. It's not anything of our own doing. It's not a result of works. The point is that no one would be able to boast. Anyone following Jesus would not be because, "Oh, those parents really know what they're doing." Or, "Oh, that pastor is really the best." Or "Oh, that sermon was really good." Or "Oh, that church, they really have it together." No. The whole point is we can't boast about anything. It is totally relying upon God. It's His grace at work.

The idea we're reminded of is in Mark chapter 10, where they're bringing children to Jesus, that He would touch them, and the disciples were rebuking them. "Get the kids out of here."

Mark 10:14-15 But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

Completely helpless! Dependent upon grace! Total trust! That's the role that faith plays. We're totally trusting God alone. It denies any claim as a role and it eliminates the outcome of anyone boasting. It's only God at work. God is the one who grants this new heart. John would say in John 6, quoting Jesus,

John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

God receives the glory. True faith must be total, a complete trust in Him as the means of salvation. Have you let go of everything to grab hold of Jesus? It's almost as if two sides of the same coin. Turning to Jesus is turning away from all else. The word "turning to" is, we often say, faith. The word "turning from" is repentance. We turn away from any other hope, any other pleasure, any other satisfaction, to trust in Jesus, totally trusting in His grace. And the reality is that's not a one-time event. While God causes that new birth to take place, it's a continual walking with Jesus, where we're turning from all the things of this world to Him. Is that characteristic of your life?

The Aim—What We Believe For True faith is truly purposeful (10)

It's tangibly purposeful. This is where it leads, what it's for. The aim for this belief is good works that lead to the glory of God. Just like when a seed that takes root produces fruit, so when grace flows through faith, it results in good works that bring glory to God. Others see it and say, "God is amazing!"

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

The word here in verse 10 is “workmanship.” It’s the Greek word from which we get the word “poem.” It’s a carefully crafted designed and tended structure. It’s something to serve a particular purpose. That’s what we are in Jesus, now. We’re designed by God for a particular purpose. It’s not that anyone would boast, but so that God would receive glory as we’re transformed and walk or live no longer in our flesh, but in the Spirit. We’re walking now, living no longer in the evil works of unrighteousness, but in good works of righteousness that are created in Jesus.

You see the realities of purpose in our new identity, here. The nature of this new identity is one of workmanship. The manner through which it happens is creation in Christ Jesus. The purpose it serves is for these good works that were prepared beforehand that we now walk in and participate in. If you walk through Ephesians, you’re going to see Paul unfold the rest of the discipleship path of the Christian life through walking. It’s this analogy of just simple day by day walking worthy, walking new, walking in love, walking in the light. This is how we live because of Jesus. For the glory of God, despite our guilt, through the grace of God, now we grow. This is how God works. You might say, well why me? Why us? Here’s what Paul would say in

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Yahweh saves! Paul, when he was sharing this gospel message with them, he said,

1 Corinthians 2:1 And I, when I came to you, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.

“I wasn’t the hottest show in town. And I didn’t have all kinds of ideas and manner of wisdom.” He said

1 Corinthians 2:2-5 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

You could summarize this passage in these four phrases. We’re saved by grace, in Christ, through faith, for good works. And it’s to the glory of God. This is what He does and He is purposeful in this salvation.

As you think about the call to discipleship, it's driving toward an aim. God is doing something, and He's doing it for His own glory. As you consider this path and taking this step, each one of these aspects of this first step of believing, there's no way forward without them. There's no way forward without grace. There's no way forward without Christ. There's no way forward without faith. There's no way forward without good works. That is the path that God laid out. He's the one who initiates and He is the one who Philippians 1 would say, completes it.

Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Here's how Paul would say it to Titus.

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

If this path is true of you, if you've recognized your mess and guilt and trusted in the grace of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ, by faith, then what are the works that He's calling you into? Even this week, what is He calling you into? One of the most important and simple works is to share this message with others. The world is in such a mess right now. They are desperately needing hope, and we have the sole answer in Christ Jesus.

You might think, "What do I have to offer? I need Pastor Ritch." We need God. In fact, God loves to use the weak and the foolish in the world because that way He receives the glory. Whichever one of us thinks, "Well, this certainly doesn't mean me. I don't know what to say. I'm afraid." God loves to use people who are willing and even weak, to ensure that He receives the glory.

Are you ready to share the good news with those who need it this week? This path of discipleship, following Jesus involves fishing for men. I think about my precious daughter. She's been a challenge to my wife and I even during this pandemic. She's been talking to our neighbors. She found some tracts. I don't even know where she found them, and she wanted to hand them out. She's bold! But I love that. She's ready to share the good news. I wonder what God will do with that. But I think often, the Holy Spirit might be more pleased to use her faithful efforts more than some Seminary training that I received because that way, God gets the glory. May we as a church be ready to call others to take that first step.

Here's a simple way hopefully we can help you. If you head outside in the foyer, we have little packets of wordless bracelets and a little card. There's a tract and there's also that evangelism tool kit that has some resources, ways to pray. You can grab it. It might be a

good reminder for you to pray for three people who are close to you and far from God. Consider the hope that we have to share with the world.

The first step of discipleship, the way that following Jesus begins, the most critical factor, is really out of our hands. In fact, when we recognize that, we can be one of the best tools for God to use, the one that is usually overlooked. If you feel weak, broken down after the last nine months, you feel exhausted, you feel needy, be ready to be used by God as you make yourself available to Him.

We've talked about the call to discipleship and the commitment. We've talked here about the first step. We're going to continue with some next steps over the next couple of weeks, talking about some areas and even practical steps, like baptism, like membership. We're going to try to offer some clear opportunities for those of you who are considering those, to take those steps. We're going to have, Lord willing, a membership class on November 7. We're going to try to have an evening service on November 22, where we'll have some opportunities for baptism and discipleship. So as you consider what God is doing in your life and some steps that He would have you take, we would ask that you would have a soft heart and be ready to honor Him so that we as a church can celebrate what it means to be a disciple and to follow the leader.