

My First Sermon

Where My Journey of Knowing God Began



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My First Sermon

Looking Back at the Beginning of My Journey with Jesus

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Originally preached in September 2022. This edition includes a new introduction and reflections written in 2026 while preserving the original sermon as it was delivered.

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It reflects the biblical understanding, and spiritual growth God had developed in my life at that point in my journey. The reflections accompanying this edition demonstrate how the Lord has continued to deepen my understanding through ongoing study of His Word, formal biblical education, ministry experience, and the faithful work of the Holy Spirit.

My prayer is that this resource encourages you to trust God's ongoing work in your own life. Spiritual growth is a lifelong journey, and He is faithful to complete the work He begins in those who belong to Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

Servant of God Ministries

"To know Christ, to grow in Christ, and to faithfully serve others through the truth of God's Word."



My First Sermon

Looking Back at the Beginning of My Journey with Jesus

"And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns."

— Philippians 1:6

Originally preached
September 2022

Revisited and reflected upon
2026



Introduction

In September 2022, I was given the opportunity to preach my very first sermon at my church. Looking back now, I realize that I had no idea what God was beginning in my life. At the time, I simply wanted to share what He had been teaching me through His Word and how He was changing my heart. I never imagined that this message would become part of a much larger story that God was writing.

Only a little over a year earlier, in July 2021, I had prayed one simple prayer that would forever change the direction of my life:

"God, show me who You really are."

He answered that prayer in ways I could never have imagined.

After that prayer, I began reading the New Testament, studying the Bible every day, faithfully attending church, and listening more closely to the Holy Spirit's leading. God has changed me tremendously, but I am still being transformed. I was no longer satisfied with simply attending church. I wanted to know God personally and obey Him wholeheartedly.



The original sermon, presented as the next paper in this series, has been preserved exactly as it was delivered in September 2022. I intentionally chose not to rewrite or edit it because it represents an important milestone in my walk with Christ. It reminds me that spiritual growth is a lifelong journey. God does not expect us to understand everything when we first begin following Him. Instead, He patiently teaches, corrects, strengthens, and transforms us as we continue seeking Him.

As I continued walking with Christ, God led me to pursue formal ministry training. Over the following years, He faithfully guided me through earning my bachelor's degree, completing my Master of Arts in Christian Ministry, and continuing into doctoral studies in Christian Leadership with an emphasis in Spiritual Formation. Through those years of study, countless hours in His Word, seasons of joy, seasons of suffering, and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, my understanding of God's character and His transforming work continued to deepen.

I intentionally chose not to rewrite or edit the sermon itself because it represents an important milestone in my walk with Christ. It reminds me that spiritual growth is a lifelong journey. God does not expect us to know everything when we first begin following Him. Instead, He patiently teaches, corrects, strengthens, and transforms us as we continue to seek Him.

I have included the original sermon in this ministry series for one primary reason: to encourage you.

Perhaps you are just beginning your own walk with Christ. Perhaps you are asking questions, struggling to understand Scripture, or wondering if God could ever use someone like you. If so, I hope this message reminds you that God delights in working through ordinary people who are willing to trust Him. He meets us where we are, not where we think we should be.

Everything that follows in this series reflects God's faithfulness—not my accomplishments. Any growth you will see between this first sermon and my writing today is a testimony to His grace. He has faithfully continued the work He began in me, and He promises to do the same for all who belong to Jesus Christ (*Philippians 1:6*).

My prayer is that as you read this sermon, and the reflections that accompany it throughout this series, you will be encouraged to continue pursuing Christ with your whole heart. The God who began a good work in me is still at work today, and He is faithfully working in the lives of His children.

To God alone be the glory.





Looking Back Four Years Later

When I look back at the sermon I preached in September 2022, I can see someone who genuinely loved God and wanted to follow Jesus, but who was still learning what it meant to surrender her whole life to Him. I had spent many years believing in God and attending church, but there is a difference between knowing about God and truly learning to walk with Him. When I finally asked God to show me who He really was and began seriously studying His Word, Jesus started changing the direction of my life.

At the time of that first sermon, much of what God was teaching me centered on my thoughts. **For most of my life, I had allowed painful experiences, the words of other people, and my own emotions to influence what I believed about myself.** As I began reading Scripture, I discovered that many of the things I had accepted as truth did not agree with what God said. I began learning that I could not build my identity upon what had happened to me, what someone else thought about me, or even what I felt about myself. I needed to learn who I was because I belonged to Jesus Christ.

That was an important beginning, but four years later I understand that Jesus was doing something much deeper than simply teaching me how to replace negative thoughts with positive ones. He was teaching me about transformation.

Romans 12:2 says, "Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think" (Romans 12:2)

I used this Scripture in my first sermon, but I understand it differently today. **Renewing the mind is not simply learning to think more positively. It is allowing God's truth to reshape the way we understand Him, ourselves, other people, and the way we live.**

I have also learned that I cannot transform myself. I can read the Bible, pray, study, attend church, and practice spiritual disciplines, but none of those things give me the power to change my own heart apart from God.

Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5)



That truth has become much more meaningful to me over these past four years. Spiritual growth is not about trying harder to make myself into a better Christian. It is about remaining in Christ, surrendering to Him, responding to the Holy Spirit, obeying God's Word, and allowing God to continue His work within me.

This does not mean that every struggle disappeared when I began seriously following Jesus. I have learned that transformation is a process. There are truths in Scripture that I believed four years ago that God has since taught me to understand much more deeply. There are also areas where He has corrected my understanding. Other lessons have come through circumstances I never would have chosen. Through studying His Word, formal ministry education, serving others, suffering, prayer, obedience, and even times when I did not understand what He was doing, God has continued teaching me to depend upon Christ rather than myself.

One of the greatest lessons Jesus has taught me is that following Him is not primarily about what He can give me or how He can make my life easier. It is about knowing Him. Paul expressed this desire when he wrote,

"I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead" (Philippians 3:10)

When I first prayed for God to show me who He really was, I did not understand where that prayer would lead.

Today, I understand more clearly that knowing Christ is not something I complete. It is a lifelong relationship in which He continues teaching me, correcting me, strengthening me, and forming me to become more like Him.

I am still learning. I am still being transformed. There are still days when my emotions are strong, when I do not understand what God is doing, or when I have to remind myself of what His Word says. **The difference is that Jesus has taught me where to turn.** My feelings are real, but they do not determine what is true. My circumstances can change, but Jesus Christ does not.

Hebrews 13:8 tells us, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8)



Maybe you can relate to part of my story. Perhaps you believe in Jesus but are beginning to realize there is still much you do not understand. Maybe God is showing you something in His Word that challenges something you have believed for years. Or perhaps you are frustrated because you thought you would be further along in your walk with Christ by now.

If so, I want you to remember something I have had to learn myself:

God is not finished with us.

Following Jesus is a lifelong journey of being transformed into His likeness.

We do not have to know everything before God begins working in us.

We come to Christ, remain in Him, learn His Word, listen to the Holy Spirit, obey what He teaches us, and continue walking with Him.



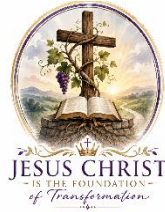
When I read my first sermon today, I can see how much I still had to learn. But I can also see something else. I can see that Jesus had already begun changing me. Some of the things I understood were incomplete, and some would need to be corrected or deepened, but God was already at work. Four years later, **He is still at work.**

That is what I want you to see through my story—not simply how I have changed, but

Who has been changing me?

Jesus Christ.





Jesus Christ Is the Foundation of Transformation

One of the biggest things God has taught me since preaching that first sermon is that **real transformation begins with Jesus Christ**. In 2022, I understood that I needed God's help to change, and I knew that Scripture was important in changing the way I thought. What I did not yet understand as deeply as I do today was that **Christianity is not mainly about taking the person I already am and trying to make that person better. Jesus came to give us new life.**

2 Corinthians 5:17 teaches that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new creation; the old life is gone, and a new life has begun. That Scripture was in my first sermon, but over the past four years God has helped me understand more of what it means.

Becoming a new creation does not mean that every old struggle, emotion, habit, or painful memory immediately disappears. It means that because I belong to Jesus Christ, my life is no longer defined by who I was before Him. My identity and the direction of my life now begin with Christ.

That changed the way I started looking at transformation.

For many years, I thought change depended mostly upon me. If I could just think differently, behave differently, work harder, or somehow become stronger, maybe I could finally become the person I thought I should be. Even after I began following God more seriously, some of that thinking was still there. I knew I needed Jesus, but I was still learning how completely dependent upon Him I really was.

Jesus taught His disciples something that has become very important in my own walk with Him:

“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5)



The more I have studied this passage, the more I have come to understand that Jesus was not asking me to change myself first and then come to Him. **He was teaching me to remain connected to Him.** A branch does not produce fruit because it struggles harder. It produces fruit because it remains connected to the vine that gives it life.

That picture has helped me understand my own spiritual growth.

There are things in my life that I desperately wanted to change. There were thoughts I wanted gone, emotions I did not want to feel, habits I wanted to overcome, and areas where I wanted to become stronger. I used to look mainly at those things and think *I need to fix this.* **Jesus has been teaching me instead to look first toward Him.**

That does not mean I do nothing. **Following Jesus requires obedience.** Scripture calls us to put away sinful patterns, renew our minds, practice spiritual disciplines, love others, forgive, serve, pray, study God's Word, and walk according to the Spirit. But even our obedience is not meant to be independent from God. *Philippians 2:13* reminds us that God is working within His people, giving us both the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.

That has become a very important distinction for me.

I participate in what God is doing in my life, but **I am not the source of my transformation.**

God is.

The Holy Spirit works within me. God's Word teaches and corrects me. Jesus shows me what it looks like to live in obedience to the Father. **My responsibility is to continue surrendering, listening, learning, and responding to what God reveals.** This is one reason *Romans 12:2* means much more to me now than it did when I preached my first sermon.

“Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think” (Romans 12:2)

Notice who is doing the transforming: God.



I have a responsibility to surrender my thinking to Him and allow His Word to correct what is false, but transformation is His work. Over time, He changes the way I see Him, myself, other people, suffering, obedience, ministry, and even the purpose of my life.

I also understand now that God's goal is greater than making me feel better about myself. He is forming me to become more like Jesus.

2 Corinthians 3:18 teaches that believers are being transformed increasingly into the image of Christ through the work of the Lord, who is the Spirit. **That means spiritual transformation has a direction.**

God is not simply making me into a stronger version of Christie. He is forming the character of Christ within me.

That has changed many of the questions I ask.

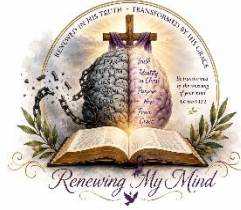
- Instead of only asking, *How can I stop feeling this way?* I have learned to also ask, *Jesus, what are You teaching me here?*
- Instead of only asking, *How can I make this situation change?* I have learned to ask, *How do You want me to respond in a way that reflects You?*
- Instead of only asking, *Why is this happening to me?* I am learning to ask, *How can I remain faithful to You while I walk through it?*

I do not always ask those questions immediately. Sometimes my emotions speak first. Sometimes I struggle. Sometimes I have to return to the same biblical truth many times before my heart begins to settle into what I already know from God's Word. But Jesus has taught me that struggling does not mean He has stopped working in me.

That is part of why **Philippians 1:6** has become such an important Scripture for this series. Paul reminds believers that God, who began His good work within them, will continue that work until it is completed when Christ returns.

My transformation did not begin because I finally figured everything out. God began His work in me, and He continues that work today.





From Changing My Thoughts to Renewing My Mind

When I preached my first sermon, the main message I wanted people to understand was that **we could change negative thoughts by replacing them with what God says about us**. That was something God was teaching me personally because I had spent so many years believing things about myself that were shaped by hurt, rejection, other people's words, and my own emotions.

When I began seriously reading the Bible, I started discovering that what I had believed about myself did not always agree with what God said.

That was an important lesson, and I still believe we need God's Word to confront thoughts that are contrary to His truth. **But over the past four years, God has taught me that the renewing of our minds is much deeper than simply changing a negative thought into a positive one.**

The question is not whether a thought is negative or positive.

The question is whether it is true according to God's Word.

That distinction has become very important to me.

There are times when God's truth is comforting and encouraging, but there are also times when His Word confronts me, corrects me, or shows me something about myself that I do not necessarily want to see. If I only look for thoughts that make me feel better, I can miss what God is trying to teach me. Jesus did not come simply to make me feel better about myself. He came to save me from sin, reconcile me to God, and give me new life in Him.

Jesus taught that those who remain faithful to His teaching will know the truth, and that truth brings freedom (*John 8:31–32*). That freedom comes from knowing and following **His truth**, not from creating a better version of my own truth.

I have had to learn this in my own life.



Sometimes what I feel and what I know from Scripture do not seem to agree. I may feel alone, rejected, afraid, discouraged, or uncertain. Those emotions are real. I do not have to pretend they are not there. But I have learned that my emotions cannot have the final authority over what I believe.

God's Word must have that authority.

This is one reason Romans 12:2 continues to be so important in my life.

"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." Romans 12:2

God transforms us through the renewing of our minds.



As I have continued studying Scripture, I have realized that this renewal affects much more than how I think about myself. God has been changing how I think about Him, how I understand Jesus, how I view other people, how I respond to suffering, how I understand obedience, and what I believe the purpose of my life should be.

The Bible also teaches us to bring our thoughts under the authority of Christ. 2

Corinthians 10:5 speaks about taking thoughts captive and making them obedient to Christ. I used this passage in my original sermon when talking about spiritual warfare. I still believe our minds are an important part of the spiritual battle, but today I understand more clearly that taking a thought captive is not simply saying something positive in response to something negative.

It means examining what I am thinking in light of Christ and His Word.



I have learned to ask myself questions such as: *Is what I am believing actually true? Does Scripture support it? Am I responding from fear, hurt, pride, anger, or something God has said? Does this thought lead me toward obedience to Christ or away from Him?*

Those questions have helped me because sometimes the thoughts I struggle with are connected to things that really have happened. Painful experiences cannot simply be labeled a lie and forgotten. People really do hurt us.

- Loss really does hurt.
- Rejection hurts.
- Loneliness hurts.
- Disappointment hurts.

Following Jesus does not require us to pretend those experiences are not painful.

Jesus Himself showed us that sorrow and faith can exist together.

Before His crucifixion, Jesus experienced deep anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, yet He still surrendered Himself to the Father's will (*Matthew 26:36–46*). That has taught me something important about bringing my emotions before God. **Biblical faith does not mean denying what I feel. It means bringing what I feel to God while continuing to trust Him and submit myself to His truth.**

I did not understand that distinction as clearly when I preached my first sermon.

At that time, I was focused heavily on defeating negative thoughts. **Today, I understand that sometimes I do need to reject a false thought, but sometimes I need to sit before God and allow Him to show me what is underneath it. Sometimes I need correction. Sometimes I need to forgive. Sometimes I need to repent. Sometimes I need to grieve. Sometimes I simply need to wait and trust God when I do not understand.**

Through all of those situations, His Word gives me a foundation.

Philippians 4:8 reminds believers to focus their minds on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and worthy of praise. This does not mean ignoring pain or pretending that difficult things do not exist.

It means choosing to let God's truth guide what receives the greatest influence over my mind.



Over these past four years, Jesus has been teaching me that renewing my mind is not a one-time event. It is something I continually need Him to do in me. There are still old thoughts that try to return. There are still moments when emotions speak loudly. There are still times when I have to stop and ask myself what I am believing and whether it agrees with God's Word.

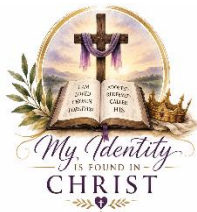
But now I understand the process differently.

I am not trying to convince myself that everything is positive.

I am learning to bring everything—my thoughts, emotions, fears, questions, wounds, and reactions—under the truth and authority of Jesus Christ.

That is a much deeper kind of change than I understood when I preached my first sermon.

And it is still happening.



Learning Who I Am Because of Jesus

As Jesus continued renewing my mind, He also began teaching me something I had struggled to understand for most of my life:

who I am.

When I preached my first sermon, I talked a lot about changing the way I saw myself. I had spent many years allowing rejection, painful experiences, other people's opinions, and my own thoughts to tell me who I was. As I began studying Scripture, I discovered verses that told me something very different.

I learned that I was loved by God, that I was His child, that I had been forgiven, and that my life had purpose.

Those truths were important to me then, and they are still important to me today. But over the past four years, Jesus has taught me to understand them differently.

My identity in Christ is not about developing a better opinion of myself. It is about understanding **who I have become because of what Jesus has done for me.**

That changes the focus completely.

I do not have value because I have convinced myself that I am valuable. I do not belong to God because I have worked hard enough to earn a place in His family. I am not forgiven because I have finally become good enough. None of those things begin with me.

They begin with Jesus.

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus accomplished what I could never accomplish for myself. My sin separated me from a holy God, and I could not repair that relationship through good works, positive thinking, religious activity, or trying to become a better person. Jesus took the punishment for sin upon Himself so that those who place their faith in Him can be forgiven and reconciled to God (*Romans 3:23–24; 5:8–11*).

“God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” Ephesians 2:8–10

This truth has helped me understand the difference between trying to prove my worth and learning to live from what Christ has already done.

For much of my life, I looked to people for evidence that I mattered. If someone loved me, accepted me, needed me, or approved of me, I could feel valuable. When that acceptance was missing or taken away, it affected how I saw myself. Even after becoming a Christian, those old patterns did not immediately disappear.

People were never meant to have the final authority to determine who I am.



That does not mean relationships do not matter. God created us for relationship with Him and with one another. *The love, encouragement, fellowship, and support of other believers are important parts of the Christian life (Hebrews 10:24–25).* But another person's acceptance cannot give me the identity that only Christ can give, and another person's rejection cannot take that identity away.

When I belong to Christ, Scripture tells me that I am a child of God through faith in Jesus (*Galatians 3:26*). Through Christ, I have been adopted into God's family (*Ephesians 1:5*). I am God's workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus for the good works He prepared for me (*Ephesians 2:10*). My life belongs to Christ, and He is now the foundation from which I understand who I am.

“My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20

I used *Galatians 2:20* in my first sermon, but I understand its importance much more deeply today. Christianity is not simply Jesus helping me improve the life I already had. My old life no longer has the final claim upon me. **I belong to Christ.**

That does not mean my past no longer affects me. I still carry memories. I still experience emotions connected to things that have happened. I still have areas where God is working in me. **Knowing my identity in Christ does not require me to deny those realities.**

Instead, it gives me a foundation from which to face them.

- I can acknowledge that I have experienced rejection without allowing rejection to become my identity.
- I can acknowledge that I have been hurt without allowing what happened to me to determine who I am.
- I can experience loneliness without concluding that I am unwanted by God.
- I can recognize weakness without believing that God cannot use me.
- I can make a mistake without believing that the mistake defines my entire life.

Why?

Because Jesus has already told me where my identity is found.

It is found in Him.



This is something I am still learning to live out. There are moments when old thoughts return and my emotions try to pull me back toward the way I once saw myself.

Knowing biblical truth does not mean that I automatically feel that truth every moment. Sometimes I have to return to Scripture again and remind myself of what Jesus has already done.

But there is an important difference now.

I know where to return.

I return to Christ.

The more I have come to understand my identity in Jesus, the more I have also realized that identity carries a calling. **Being a child of God is not simply something that makes me feel secure; it changes how I am called to live.** *Jesus calls His followers to deny themselves, follow Him, love others, serve, obey His teachings, and participate in making disciples (Luke 9:23; John 13:34–35; Matthew 28:18–20).*

That means my identity in Christ is not centered on me.

It leads me back to Him.

The more Jesus teaches me who I am in Him, the more I understand that my life is His.

- **My gifts are His.**
- **My testimony is His.**
- **My education is His.**
- **My ministry is His.**
- **Even the painful parts of my story can be surrendered to Him and used to point someone else toward the hope found in Christ.**

That is one of the greatest changes I can see between the woman who preached that first sermon and the woman writing this today.

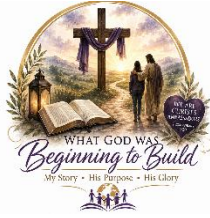
In 2022, I was beginning to discover that God's Word said something different about me than what I had believed for most of my life.

Four years later, Jesus has taught me something deeper:

I do not need to spend my life trying to create an identity for myself.

I need to know Christ, understand who I am because I belong to Him, and then faithfully live from that truth.





What God Was Beginning to Build

When I look back at my first sermon today, one of the things that stands out to me is how often I wanted what God was teaching me to help someone else. I did not understand where that desire would eventually lead. I certainly did not have a complete ministry plan. I was simply sharing what Jesus had been doing in my life and hoping that someone listening might realize that He could work in their life too.

Looking back four years later, I can see that God was beginning to turn my personal transformation outward.

That is important because our testimony is never meant to end with us.

Jesus changes us, but then He sends us into a world filled with people who also need Him. Some need to hear the gospel for the first time. Others already belong to Christ but are hurting, discouraged, confused, spiritually weary, or struggling to understand who they are in Him. **God has increasingly given me a desire to come alongside those people and point them toward the truth of His Word.**

I did not understand all of that when I preached my first sermon.

At that time, I simply knew what it was like to live for years believing things about myself that were not grounded in God's truth. I knew what it was like to attend church without really understanding what it meant to surrender my life to Christ. Then I began experiencing what happened when I opened God's Word, sought Him seriously, and started learning to obey what He was teaching me.

So I wanted to tell somebody.

That desire is still part of me today, but Jesus has taught me that ministry is about much more than telling people what happened to me.

My story can open the door, but Jesus must remain the reason I tell it.



Paul describes believers as Christ's ambassadors and explains that God makes His appeal through His people (*2 Corinthians 5:20*). I used that Scripture in my first sermon when I was beginning to understand that God had given His followers a purpose. Four years later, I understand more clearly the responsibility that comes with representing Christ.

- If I tell someone about what I have survived but never point them to Jesus, I have only told them about me.
- If I tell someone how much I have changed but never explain who changed me, I have only shown them my progress.
- If I teach someone principles for improving their life but do not lead them toward the truth of God's Word, I have missed the most important part.

I want people to see Jesus.

That is why I share the difficult parts of my story. They are not there so the reader will feel sorry for me or admire what I have overcome. They provide a backdrop for showing what Jesus can do in a life surrendered to Him.

There are things I can see today that I could not see in 2022. God has used His Word to deepen my understanding. He has used education to teach me how to study Scripture more carefully. He has used other believers to teach and challenge me. He has used ministry experiences to show me the importance of serving people rather than simply teaching them. He has even used seasons of suffering to expose areas where I still needed to depend more completely upon Him.

None of those things make my story special.

They show me that God is faithful.

Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples and teach others to obey what He commanded (*Matthew 28:18–20*). I understand that calling much more deeply today. Discipleship is not simply giving someone information about God. It involves helping people learn to follow Jesus with their lives.

That understanding has become increasingly important in the ministry God has allowed me to develop.

When I write about identity in Christ, spiritual transformation, suffering, obedience, prayer, Scripture, community, or learning to process emotions through biblical truth, I am writing about areas where Jesus has first been teaching me. I do not write as someone who has mastered all of them. I write as someone who is still walking with Christ and wants to share what He has taught me along the way.



That is also why I want the person reading this to look beyond my story.

Maybe your experiences are completely different from mine. Maybe you cannot relate to everything I have gone through. You do not need my story to match yours.

You need the same Jesus.

The Jesus who called His first disciples still calls people to follow Him. The Jesus who forgives sin still offers forgiveness. The Jesus who taught His disciples still teaches us through His Word and the Holy Spirit. The Jesus who transformed lives throughout Scripture is still at work in His people today.

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” Hebrews 13:8

When I stood in front of that church in September 2022, I could not have explained where God would lead me over the next four years. I did not know everything He would teach me. I did not know the ways my understanding would grow or the ways He would use both joy and suffering to continue forming me.

But I knew Jesus had changed me. And I wanted somebody else to know Him too.

Four years later, that desire has not gone away. It has become clearer.

I want my life, my testimony, my teaching, and everything God allows me to do in ministry to point beyond me to Jesus Christ.

Because when everything else is stripped away, He is the reason there is a story to tell at all.

Closing Reflection

When I look back at my first sermon and then look at where God has brought me today, I do not see a finished story. I see the faithfulness of God. I see places where my understanding was only beginning, places where He needed to correct me, and truths that He has continued to deepen through His Word.

Most importantly, I see Jesus. He is the One who saved me, gave me new life, taught me who I am in Him, renewed my thinking, and continues transforming me into the person He has called me to become.

My story may not look like yours, but that is not what matters. My hope is that something you have read causes you to look at your own journey with Jesus. Where did you begin? What has He already taught you? Where is He correcting, strengthening, or transforming you today? You do not have to have everything figured out before you follow Him. I certainly did not.

Keep seeking Him, remain in His Word, surrender what He shows you, and allow Him to continue the work He has begun in you. Your story is still being written too.



Reflection Questions

Before moving on to my original sermon, I encourage you to take a few moments and think about your own walk with Jesus. My journey will not look exactly like yours, but God is continually at work in the lives of those who belong to Him. **These questions are not meant to have perfect answers. They are simply an opportunity to slow down, pray, open God's Word, and consider what He may be showing you.**

1. Where did your journey with Jesus begin?

Can you look back and recognize a time when believing in God began becoming a personal relationship of knowing and following Jesus?

Scriptures to Consider: *John 3:16–17; Romans 10:9–10*

What God Is Asking You to Consider: Think honestly about your relationship with Jesus. Do you simply know about Him, or have you placed your faith in Him and begun learning what it means to follow Him?

2. How has Jesus changed you?

Think about who you were when you first began following Him compared with who you are today. Where can you recognize His work in your thoughts, attitudes, choices, relationships, or understanding of God?

Scriptures to Consider: *2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 1:6*

What God Is Asking You to Consider: Look for evidence of God's work rather than expecting perfection. Where can you recognize that Jesus has already changed you, and where is He still working?

3. What are you allowing to define who you are?

Are there experiences, wounds, failures, emotions, or other people's opinions that still influence how you see yourself more than your identity in Christ?

Scriptures to Consider: *Galatians 3:26; Ephesians 1:3–5*

What God Is Asking You to Consider: Examine where you are getting your identity. Are you allowing your past, your feelings, or other people to define you, or are you learning to understand yourself through who you are because you belong to Christ?

4. Is there something God has been teaching or correcting through His Word?

Spiritual growth sometimes requires us to recognize that something we once believed needs to be deepened or changed. Are you willing to allow Scripture to correct your understanding?

Scriptures to Consider: *Romans 12:2; 2 Timothy 3:16–17*

What God Is Asking You to Consider: Come to Scripture willing not only to be encouraged but also to be taught and corrected. Ask yourself whether there is something you have believed that needs to be brought into agreement with God's truth.

5. Where might Jesus be asking you to surrender and obey Him?

Is there an area where you know what God's Word teaches but are finding it difficult to follow Him?

Scriptures to Consider: *Luke 9:23; John 14:15*

What God Is Asking You to Consider: Following Jesus involves surrender as well as belief. Consider whether there is an area of your life that you are holding onto when Jesus is asking you to trust Him enough to obey.

6. How could what Jesus has done in your life help someone else?

Your testimony does not have to be dramatic to have value. Is there something God has taught you that could encourage another person and point them toward Christ?

Scriptures to Consider: *2 Corinthians 5:20; Matthew 28:18–20*

What God Is Asking You to Consider: Your story does not end with what Jesus has done for you. Consider how God might use what He has taught you to encourage, serve, disciple, or point someone else toward Jesus.

Take some time with these questions. You do not have to answer all of them at once.

Bring them before God in prayer, read the accompanying Scriptures in their context, and allow the Holy Spirit to show you where He is working.

The purpose is not to compare your spiritual journey with mine or anyone else's. It is to look honestly at your own relationship with Jesus and ask Him to continue forming you into His likeness.





A Prayer for You

Father God,

I pray for the person reading these words right now. You know their story in ways that I never could. You know where they have been, what they have experienced, what they believe about themselves, the questions they carry, the things they are struggling to understand, and the areas of their life that still hurt. Most importantly, You know exactly where they are in their relationship with You.

Lord, I pray that through Jesus Christ they would come to know You more deeply. If they have spent years knowing about You without truly learning to follow You, draw them closer to You. Give them a hunger for Your Word and help them understand Your truth. Teach them to recognize Your voice through Scripture and to surrender their lives to the work of the Holy Spirit.

If they are carrying thoughts about themselves that do not agree with Your Word, help them learn to bring those thoughts under the authority of Christ. If they are allowing their past, their failures, their pain, their emotions, or the opinions of other people to determine their identity, help them understand who they are because of Jesus.

Father give them patience with the process of spiritual growth. When they cannot see what You are doing, help them continue trusting You. When obedience is difficult, give them strength to follow You. When they fail, remind them to return to Your grace rather than running away from You. When they are hurting, help them bring that pain honestly before You instead of believing they must hide it.

Most of all, Lord, help them see Jesus.

Let them understand what He has done for them and learn to remain in Him. Continue renewing their minds, transforming their hearts, and teaching them to live in a way that reflects Christ. Show them how even the parts of their story they wish were different can be surrendered to You.

May their lives become testimonies not of their own strength, but of Your faithfulness.

In Jesus' name, amen.





A Prayer of Thanksgiving

Father God,

As I look back over these past four years, I simply want to say thank You.

Thank You for hearing the prayer I prayed when I asked You to show me who You really are. I did not know where that prayer would lead, but You have remained faithful through every part of the journey.

Thank You most of all for Jesus. Thank You for His life, His death on the cross, and His resurrection. Thank You for forgiveness, salvation, reconciliation with You, and the new life I have in Christ. Everything that has changed in me begins with what Jesus has done.

Thank You for Your Word, which continues to teach, correct, encourage, and renew my mind. Thank You for the Holy Spirit, who works within me, helps me surrender, gives me strength to obey, and continues forming the character of Christ in me.

Thank You for every season You have used—the joyful ones and the painful ones, the people who encouraged me, the experiences that challenged me, the opportunity to study Your Word, and every chance You have given me to serve others.

Lord, thank You for that first sermon. Looking back, I can see how much I still had to learn, but I can also see that You were already working. You were teaching me, changing me, and beginning something I could not yet see.

Whatever You do with my testimony, writing, education, and ministry, let it point people to Jesus.

Continue the work You began in me. Correct me, teach me, humble me, and give me strength to remain faithful whether anyone sees it or not.

Thank You for who You are, for what Jesus has done, and for everything You are still teaching me.

My life belongs to You.

To You alone be the glory.

In Jesus' name, amen.



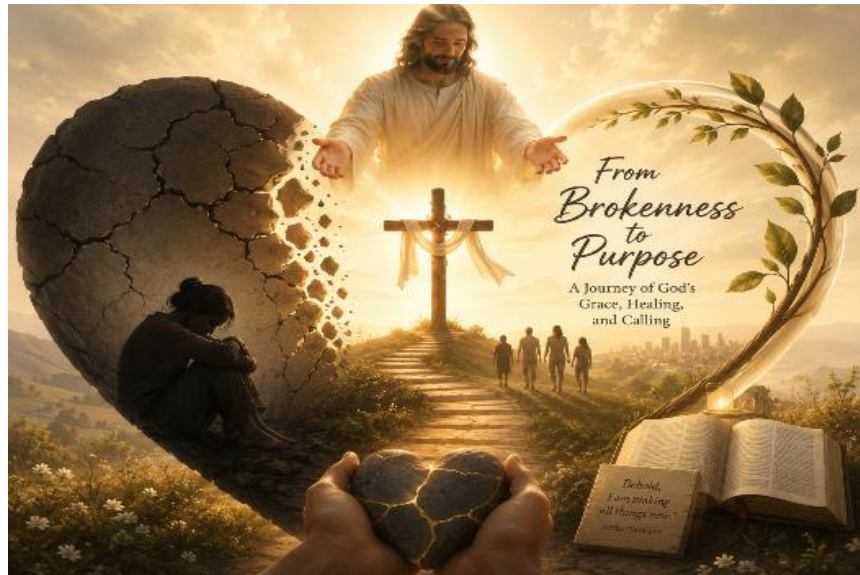
Prayerfully prepared by

Christie Johnson

Christie Johnson

Servant of God

"Pointing people to the hope, healing, and transformation found in Jesus Christ."



Continue the Journey

My first sermon was only the beginning. God was already at work, but over the years that followed, Jesus would continue teaching me what it means to surrender, grow, and live a life that belongs to Him.

If you would like to continue this journey with me, please continue to the next paper in this series:

From Knowing About God to Truly Following Jesus

"And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns."

—Philippians 1:6

The story continues because His work in us continues.

