

✠ BEGINNING OF MINISTRY SERIES ✠

PAPER 5

WHEN THE CALLING
BECAME A
Ministry

LEARNING TO WALK IN WHAT
GOD WAS CALLING ME TO DO

*He who began a good
work in you will carry
it on to completion
until the day of
Christ Jesus.*

PHILIPPIANS 1:6

TRANSFORMED
TO SERVE
THE BROKEN
AS A SERVANT
OF GOD



CHRISTIE JOHNSON
SERVANT OF GOD

2026

To God alone be the glory.

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When the Calling Became a Ministry: Learning to Walk in What God Was Calling Me to Do

Beginning of Ministry Series — Paper 5

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This paper is the concluding paper in the **Beginning of Ministry Series**, which looks back at the author's earliest ministry journey—from a growing desire to know God and understand His Word, through personal transformation and the beginnings of a call to serve to learning to walk faithfully in the ministry God continued placing before her. Throughout the series, the emphasis remains on God's faithfulness, His continuing work of spiritual formation, and the call to follow Jesus Christ in obedience, service, and discipleship.

Servant of God Christie

Transformed to Serve the Broken as a Servant of God

To God alone be the glory.



Introduction

When the Next Step Became Obedience

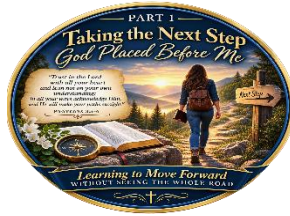
The first four papers in this series have allowed me to look back at where this journey began and recognize God's faithfulness more clearly. Paper 1 returned to the beginning of my pursuit to know God more deeply. Paper 2 preserved *Changing Your Thoughts*, the first sermon I preached in 2022, so that it could remain an honest picture of what I understood at that time. Paper 3 looked at what I understand differently four years later as my knowledge of Scripture, identity in Christ, transformation, and spiritual formation has grown. Paper 4 showed how what God was doing within me gradually began turning outward as a desire to encourage, teach, serve, and help others follow Jesus Christ. I did not recognize the entire direction when it was happening, but looking back, I can see God faithfully teaching and forming me through each stage.

Paper 5 is about what happened when that developing sense of calling had to move beyond recognition and into obedience. It is about learning that ministry is not simply sharing what God has taught me, creating resources, teaching others, or building something in His name. It is about faithfully following Jesus while continuing to be formed by Him. As my understanding of discipleship grew, I began to see that helping someone follow Christ requires more than giving biblical information. Ministry required me to take what God had taught me about Scripture, spiritual formation, discipleship, and service and begin learning how to live those convictions faithfully. I also had to understand the limits of my role: I could prepare, teach, encourage, disciple, and serve, but the work of transforming another person's life belongs to God.

That understanding changed the way I approached ministry. Paper 5 is the story of learning to walk in what God had been developing—not as someone who has arrived, but as a disciple who is still being formed while learning to help others follow 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





Taking the Next Step God Placed Before Me

Learning to Move Forward Without Seeing the Whole Road

When I look at the years following my first sermon, one of the clearest lessons I see is that God did not show me the entire road at once. I often wanted to understand where everything was leading, but most of the time I only knew the next step.

Following God required me to learn that obedience does not always come with a complete explanation. Sometimes faithfulness means trusting Him enough to move forward with what He has placed before me while leaving what I cannot see in His hands.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.” Proverbs 3:5–6

Theological education became one of those steps. I originally wanted to know God more deeply and understand His Word more faithfully. As I continued studying, however, I realized that a sincere desire to help people was not enough.

If I was going to teach Scripture or participate in another person's discipleship, I had a responsibility to prepare carefully. I needed to understand Scripture in context, distinguish biblical truth from my own interpretation and experience, and remain willing to be corrected when deeper study revealed weaknesses in something I had previously believed or taught.

“Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15

That became one of the most important differences between where I began and how I understand ministry today. In 2022, I wanted to share what God was teaching me because it was changing my life and I hoped it might help someone else. By 2026, I understood more clearly the responsibility that comes with doing that. My testimony and experiences may help me connect compassionately with people who are hurting, discouraged, spiritually weary, or struggling with identity, **but God's Word—not my experience—must remain the authority for what I teach.**



Scripture must remain the authority, and my story must ultimately point beyond me to Jesus Christ. **Psalm 119:105**

My understanding of transformation also became broader as I continued studying spiritual formation and discipleship. The renewing of the mind that was so important in my first sermon remained important, but I came to understand that God's transforming work reaches the whole person.

His purpose is not simply to help me think better about myself or become a more confident version of who I already am. He is forming those who belong to Christ increasingly into the likeness of His Son.

That formation reaches my character, desires, relationships, priorities, obedience, response to suffering, love for others, humility, service, and surrender to God.

Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18

That changed the way I thought about helping other people. I could not reduce spiritual transformation to a formula or promise that following Jesus would remove every painful emotion, difficult circumstance, or deeply rooted struggle.

I was also learning that ministry had to aim beyond simply helping someone feel better or giving them information. I wanted what I offered to direct people toward Christ, His Word, dependence upon the Holy Spirit, Christian community, and a life increasingly shaped by following Jesus. **Ephesians 4:11–16**

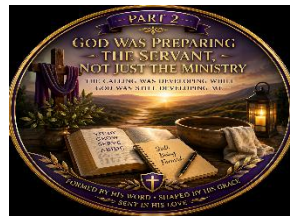
As that understanding developed, I also had to surrender my expectations about what the calling itself should look like. There is a difference between saying, **“God, use me however You choose,”** and deciding beforehand exactly how I believe He must use me. I could prepare and plan, but I could not turn my plans into promises from God. I could pursue opportunities without demanding that every door open. I could create something without knowing how many people would see it, serve someone without knowing the outcome, and continue learning without knowing exactly how God would use what I learned. **1 Peter 4:10–11**

- Over time, those individual steps began forming a clearer direction.
- Study God's Word, learn to handle it faithfully, and remain teachable.
- Understand spiritual formation and biblical discipleship more deeply.
- Pay attention to the people and needs God continued placing before me, then use what He entrusted to me to write, teach, encourage, serve, and develop resources.
- Most importantly, continue following Jesus while learning how to help others follow Him.



When I preached my first sermon in 2022, I wanted someone else to know something God was teaching me. Looking back in 2026, I understand that desire differently. Wanting to help someone was only the beginning. **Ministry requires me to prepare carefully, teach faithfully, remain humble, recognize the limits of my role, and continually direct attention away from myself and toward Jesus Christ.** I still cannot see the entire road or know exactly how God will use every step He has placed before me. But I no longer believe I need to.

The road from my first sermon to ministry was not one giant step. It was many smaller acts of learning, surrender, correction, preparation, and obedience. Some made sense when I took them; others became clearer only when I looked backward. **Through them, God brought me from wanting to share what He had taught me to understanding the responsibility of helping others follow Christ faithfully.**



God Was Preparing the Servant, Not Just the Ministry

The Calling Was Developing While God Was Still Developing Me

As I continued taking the steps God placed before me, I began to understand that He was not only preparing something for me to do; He was continuing to prepare me. Education, biblical knowledge, writing, teaching, and ministry skills mattered, but they were not enough. I could learn more theology and still need greater humility.

I could understand spiritual formation and still need the Holy Spirit to form me. I could teach about surrender while discovering areas I had not fully surrendered myself.

Ministry preparation was becoming more than learning how to serve. It was also about who I was becoming while following Jesus. Philippians 2:13.

2 Corinthians 3:18

That changed the way I understood spiritual formation in relation to ministry. **Spiritual formation could never become merely a subject I studied so that I could teach it to someone else.**



- If I encouraged others to submit to God's Word, I needed to remain under its authority.
- If I taught dependence upon the Holy Spirit, I needed to resist building ministry through self-reliance.
- If I spoke about humility, forgiveness, perseverance, obedience, or Christlike character, I had to remain willing for God to confront those same areas in me.

I was not standing outside the process of transformation telling others how to change. I was—and still am—one of the people God is forming.

That realization helped establish an important order in my life:

I am a disciple before I am a teacher.

Ministry does not place me beyond the need for correction, repentance, instruction, community, accountability, or growth. Greater knowledge has actually made me more aware of that need. Biblical truth must become more than something I can explain; God must continue working that truth into the way I trust, obey, persevere, and live.

One of the strongest lessons came through Jesus' teaching about abiding in Him.

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. 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 15:4–5

That picture changed the way I thought about ministry. **A branch does not produce fruit by proving how useful it is; it bears fruit by remaining connected to the vine.**

Before writing, teaching, encouraging, planning, creating, or serving, **I need Christ.** I can spend hours writing about God without spending meaningful time with God. I can study Scripture primarily because I need material rather than because I want His Word to form me. I can become so occupied doing things for Christ that I neglect communion with Christ. If service for Jesus begins replacing my relationship with Jesus, something has become disordered.

Abiding also helped me understand my limitations when serving other people.

My experiences may help me recognize pain, rejection, loneliness, discouragement, grief, or spiritual weariness, and they may help me respond with greater compassion.



- I can listen, pray, encourage, teach Scripture, and walk beside someone for part of the journey.
- I cannot transform another person's heart, take the place of the Holy Spirit, or promise outcomes God has not promised.
- My responsibility is not to make someone dependent upon me.
- It is to keep pointing beyond myself toward Jesus Christ. **Hebrews 4:14–16**

As this understanding developed, the words **Servant of God Christie** began carrying deeper meaning for me.

- A servant does not own the Master's work.
- A servant does not determine the mission independently and then ask God to bless it.
- A servant belongs to the Master and uses what has been entrusted to her for His purposes.

The question therefore became less, *What ministry do I want to build?* and more, *How can I faithfully serve Jesus with what He has entrusted to me?*

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45

Jesus changed the way I understood what Christian service should look like.

Ministry could not be about recognition, influence, usefulness, or proving that I had something valuable to offer.

The people I hoped to reach could never become numbers that proved whether I was successful. They were people to be treated with dignity, compassion, and truth while being pointed toward Christ.

That is why I no longer think preparation ends when someone earns a degree, preaches a sermon, creates a resource, launches a website, or begins a ministry. Those may be important milestones, but none of them marks the completion of the servant. **God was preparing me while I studied, while I served, while I was corrected, and even while I waited or could not understand what He was doing. Romans 12:1–2**

Before I am a writer, teacher, mentor, or ministry leader, I am a follower of Jesus Christ.

Before I can encourage someone else to follow Him, I must continue following Him myself.

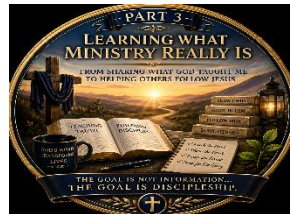


That may be one of the greatest changes in how I now understand calling:

God was not preparing a finished servant who would someday begin ministry. He was teaching a still-forming disciple how to serve while remaining completely dependent upon Him.

The ministry was developing.

The servant was still being formed. And she still is.



Learning What Ministry Really Is

From Sharing What God Taught Me to Helping Others Follow Jesus

My desire to serve and help others did not begin when I first understood what ministry was. Even when I was young, I carried a desire that other people would not have to suffer in the ways I had suffered. At that time, I did not understand where that desire came from or what God might eventually do with it.

After I was saved in 2006, that desire remained, but it was not until my journey of intentionally seeking to understand who God truly is began in 2021, and later as I entered school and continued studying His Word, that I began to understand it differently. I started recognizing that some of the things I had walked through had shaped my compassion for people who were hurting, struggling, or searching for hope. I also began to understand more clearly that God could use what He had been teaching me, and even what I had experienced, in the calling He was gradually revealing to me.

As God continued teaching me through His Word, those truths began changing me, and I wanted someone else to know what I was learning. If a Scripture encouraged, corrected, or strengthened me, I wanted to share it with someone who might need that same truth. What had once been simply a desire to keep others from suffering began developing into a deeper desire to point people toward Christ and help them know Him for themselves.

That desire was sincere, but as my understanding matured, I began recognizing that ministry could not stop with sharing what I knew or telling others what God had done in my life. Jesus had called His followers to something much greater.



“Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:18–20

Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples. That changed the question I was asking about ministry. Instead of primarily asking, *What can I tell someone?* I began asking, *How can what I teach help someone actually follow Jesus?* Teaching biblical truth remains essential, but discipleship is more than transferring information. A person can hear sermons, read devotionals, complete Bible studies, memorize Scripture, and understand theological concepts while still needing to learn how those truths should shape everyday life.

The goal is not merely knowing more about Christ. It is knowing Him, following Him, obeying His Word, and increasingly becoming like Him. **Ephesians 4:11–16**

That understanding also brought spiritual formation and discipleship together in my understanding of ministry. If God is forming believers toward Christlikeness, then discipleship should help people move beyond hearing biblical truth toward learning to live under its authority. What they learn from Scripture should increasingly shape how they believe, choose, relate to others, obey God, serve, and follow Jesus.

This became particularly important in how I thought about serving people who were hurting or spiritually weary. Compassion mattered deeply to me, but I began recognizing that compassionate ministry is not simply helping someone feel better. At the same time, biblical truth should never become an excuse for treating someone's pain as insignificant. Jesus demonstrated both grace and truth. **John 1:14**

I also came to understand that painful emotions do not automatically mean someone lacks faith. A believer can know that God loves them and still feel rejected. Someone can believe God is present and still experience loneliness. Someone can understand their identity in Christ while continuing to struggle with beliefs shaped through years of difficult experiences. Scripture does not teach God's people to pretend that fear, grief, discouragement, or sorrow do not exist. It invites them to bring those experiences honestly before God while allowing His truth to remain the final authority. **Psalms 62:8**

That understanding also established an important boundary for ministry. Compassion does not require me to assume a role that belongs to Christ or to appropriate professional care when someone's needs extend beyond biblical discipleship. My responsibility is to serve within the role God has entrusted to me while continually directing people toward Christ. **Hebrews 12:1–2**



Healthy discipleship should help people seek God for themselves through Scripture, prayer, dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and Christian community while growing in their identity in Christ and following Jesus. Because following Christ is personal but not meant to be lived alone, believers encourage, teach, pray for, serve, forgive, and bear one another's burdens as they help each other mature in Christ.

"Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near." Hebrews 10:24–25.

Healthy discipleship should therefore move people toward life with God and His people rather than dependence upon one teacher, ministry, or resource.

This also changed what I wanted my ministry resources to accomplish.

- A devotional should do more than provide something encouraging to read; it should encourage engagement with God and His Word.
- A Bible study should do more than supply answers; it should help someone learn to study Scripture.
- A discipleship resource should not become a substitute for Scripture, prayer, the Holy Spirit, or Christian community.
- My testimony should never end with what God did for me; it should point toward what my story reveals about Him. **2 Timothy 2:2**

Eventually, I also understood that discipleship should move outward. The goal is not simply that someone learns what I know. I want people to know Jesus, understand His Word, know who they are because they belong to Him, grow toward Christlikeness, and eventually allow what God is doing in their lives to overflow through service to others.

That is much larger than what I understood when I preached my first sermon. Then, I wanted to give someone something God had given me. Today, I understand ministry as faithfully participating in the role God entrusts to me as He makes and forms disciples of Jesus Christ.

The message matters.

The teaching matters.

The resources matter.

The encouragement matters.

But none of them is the destination. Jesus is.



“So we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ. That’s why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ’s mighty power that works within me.” Colossians 1:28–29

That passage expresses where my understanding of ministry has arrived.

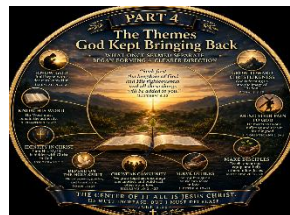
- Teaching and spiritual formation belong together.
- Truth and transformation belong together.
- Discipleship and Christian community belong together.
- Serving others and depending upon God belong together.

I began by wanting to tell someone what God had taught me. Over time, that desire became something deeper:

I wanted to help people know Jesus Christ and learn to follow Him.

That changed the question from *What kind of ministry do I want to have?* to something much more important:

What kind of disciples will this ministry help people become?



The Themes God Kept Bringing Back

What Once Seemed Separate Began Forming a Clearer Direction

As my understanding of ministry developed, I began recognizing that the themes God had been developing throughout the previous years were not separate interests. Knowing God, Scripture, identity in Christ, spiritual formation, compassion, discipleship, Christian community, and service were beginning to form one ministry direction.

Paper 4 traced how those themes gradually became clearer. What mattered now was how they would shape the ministry itself.



I wanted ministry to help people know God through His Word, understand who they are because they belong to Christ, depend upon the Holy Spirit, grow toward Christlikeness, live as part of the body of Christ, and learn to follow Jesus faithfully in everyday life.

Compassion for people who were hurting or spiritually weary remained important, but compassion could not become separated from truth. I did not want to treat people as problems to solve, nor did I want pain to become the center of someone's identity or the center of ministry. I wanted whatever I offered to acknowledge suffering honestly while continually pointing toward the hope found in Jesus Christ.

Beneath all of those convictions, one truth became increasingly important:

Jesus Christ must remain greater than anything I build in His name.

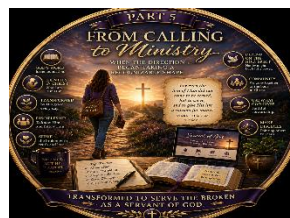
"He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less." John 3:30

A ministry may have a name, website, resources, studies, devotionals, testimony, teaching, and discipleship materials, but those are tools rather than the mission. My story cannot become more important than the gospel. Resources cannot replace God's Word. Education cannot replace dependence upon the Holy Spirit. And serving Jesus must never replace knowing and following Jesus.

The themes had become clearer, and because they were clearer, so was the ministry.

It began with a desire to know God.

Then that desire became a desire to help others know and follow Him too.



From Calling to Ministry

When the Direction Began Taking a Recognizable Shape

As the themes became clearer, the calling moved from something I sensed inwardly to something I needed to act upon. I could continue studying and preparing, but faithful stewardship meant using what God had already placed in my hands without waiting to see the entire ministry first.



“God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.” 1

Peter 4:10–11

That Scripture helped me understand ministry as stewardship.

Whatever gifts, education, experiences, opportunities, understanding, and resources God has entrusted to me are not possessions to keep for myself. They are things I am responsible to use faithfully. The question was no longer whether I felt completely prepared or whether what I had seemed impressive compared with someone else. The question became whether I was willing to use what God had already given me in service to others.

That conviction helped the ministry direction begin taking a recognizable form. Writing became an avenue for serving. Biblical teaching became another. Devotionals, Bible studies, discipleship materials, spiritual formation resources, testimony, mentoring, and eventually an online ministry became practical ways of putting into action what had previously existed mostly as desire and preparation.

As that ministry became more visible, two phrases took on greater meaning for me.

Servant of God.

I did not want those words to function merely as a ministry title. I wanted them to remind me of my position before God. A servant belongs to the Master. A servant is accountable to Him and uses what has been entrusted to her for His purposes. Ministry may require practical language such as *my website*, *my writing*, or *my resources*, but spiritually I need to remember that none of it ultimately belongs to me. **Romans 1:1**

A second phrase began expressing the direction that had developed through the journey:

Transformed to Serve the Broken as a Servant of God.

Those words now mean more to me than they would have when I preached my first sermon. *Transformed* does not mean that God finished changing me and then sent me to help everyone else. He has been transforming me, and He is still doing so. The word reminds me that I serve others as someone who remains under God's continuing work of spiritual formation.



To serve reflects what happened as that transformation began turning my attention outward. What God taught me was no longer something I wanted only for myself. I wanted to use what He had entrusted to me to encourage, teach, disciple, and serve others.

And **the broken** does not describe a group of inferior people standing below someone who has already arrived. I mean people who hurt – people who may be spiritually weary, discouraged, rejected, grieving, lonely, confused about their identity, or struggling to understand how biblical truth speaks into painful areas of life. I do not stand above them. I stand beside them as another person who needs the grace of God and points toward the same Savior. **2 Corinthians 1:3–4; Romans 3:23**

That is why the final words, **as a Servant of God**, are so important. The ministry is not, “God transformed me, and now I can fix broken people.” I cannot fix or transform another person. Rather, the message is this:

God has been transforming me, He is still transforming me, and I want to faithfully serve the people He places before me by continually pointing them toward Jesus Christ.

That understanding shaped the resources I began developing. Devotionals, Bible studies, discipleship materials, spiritual formation resources, testimony, mentoring, sermons, and the website could all become ways of serving people and directing them toward Christ.

But they are tools. None of them is the source of spiritual transformation.

God is. Zechariah 4:6

As ministry became visible, I also encountered another challenge: **visible ministry produces visible measurements**. People may visit or not visit. They may read or not read. A resource may receive a response or remain unnoticed. Those things can provide helpful information about whether something is serving people effectively, and I need to be willing to evaluate, listen, improve, and correct what needs correction.

But I have had to learn an important distinction:

Ministry evaluation is not the same thing as personal validation.

Numbers can help me evaluate a method. They cannot determine my worth. Feedback may help improve a resource, but another person's response cannot become the final measure of whether obedience mattered.



Faithfulness sometimes means continuing, and sometimes it means changing direction. Either way, I must remain willing to place the ministry back into God's hands.

Colossians 3:23–24; Proverbs 16:9

That brings me back to servanthood.

“But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:43–45

The more recognizable the ministry became, the more important that truth became. A ministry can grow while the servant moves away from servanthood. Knowledge can increase while humility decreases. A platform can become larger while dependence upon God becomes smaller. It is possible to do many things in Jesus' name while gradually allowing those things to become more important than Jesus Himself.

I do not want that to become the story.

The ministry was beginning to take shape, but its purpose needed to remain simple: point people toward Jesus, keep God's Word central, serve hurting and spiritually weary people with truth and compassion, help believers grow as disciples, and faithfully use whatever God places in my hands.

The calling had become more recognizable.

The ministry was becoming visible.

But the responsibility remained the same:

Follow Jesus.

Serve faithfully.

Leave the results with God.

And never forget whose ministry it is.





As ministry began taking a recognizable shape, I also had to consider what I could never allow it to become. This was especially important because of what God had already taught me about identity in Christ. If I had spent years allowing other people's opinions, circumstances, painful experiences, and emotions to influence what I believed about myself, I did not want ministry to become another way of searching for worth, approval, significance, or evidence that my life mattered. Something done in the name of God could still become spiritually unhealthy if I expected it to give me what should already be settled in Christ.

"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

Good works flow from what God has done for me in Christ; they do not establish who I am before Him.

I also had to learn that visible results do not determine whether obedience mattered. Naturally, if I create something intended to help people, I want it to help. If I teach, I hope someone learns. If I provide a discipleship resource, I hope someone uses it and grows. **Caring about effectiveness is part of responsible stewardship.**



But wanting fruit and needing visible fruit to validate me are very different things.

“I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It’s not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What’s important is that God makes the seed grow.” 1 Corinthians 3:6–7

I can plant and water faithfully. I can evaluate whether something communicates clearly, listen to feedback, correct mistakes, and change a method that is not serving people well. What I cannot do is force spiritual growth or know everything God may accomplish through an act of obedience.

That distinction also changes how I receive people's responses. Encouragement is a gift, and correction can be necessary. I want to remain teachable enough to listen when someone identifies something that needs to change. At the same time, praise cannot establish my worth, and criticism cannot destroy it. Neither should become the final authority over who I am. **Proverbs 12:1; Galatians 1:10**

Ministry also does not mean proving that I was right about the calling. I must remain willing for God to redirect me. A difficult path does not automatically mean I misunderstood Him, but neither should I become so attached to one ministry expression that I refuse to consider correction or change. The audience, method, location, resources, or opportunities may change.

Faithfulness requires perseverance, but perseverance is different from protecting my own plans. James 1:5; Proverbs 16:9

Another boundary became equally important: **ministry does not make me responsible for fixing people.** I can care deeply about someone and serve faithfully without assuming responsibility that belongs to God. Healthy discipleship should increasingly direct people toward maturity in Christ rather than dependence upon the person discipling them. **Galatians 6:2, 5; Ephesians 4:13–16**

I have also learned that ministry does not require making every part of my personal story public. Testimony can serve others, but vulnerability requires wisdom. Not every painful experience needs to become teaching material. The question is not simply, *Am I willing to share this?* A better question is, *Will sharing this point someone toward Christ and serve them wisely?* **Psalms 66:16**

Pain is part of my story, but it is not the whole story, and I do not want it to become the identity of the ministry.

The direction must remain toward Christ, biblical truth, spiritual formation, discipleship, and hope.



Perhaps the most important boundary is this: ministry does not mean I have arrived. Serving others does not remove me from God's transforming work. I remain a disciple who needs His grace, correction, Word, community, and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. **Philippians 1:6**

That truth connects this section to the entire series.

God began His work in me before there was a sermon or ministry, and He continues that work now.

So ministry no longer means proving that I have value, becoming important, gaining recognition, having every answer, fixing people, avoiding correction, or producing results that demonstrate my significance.

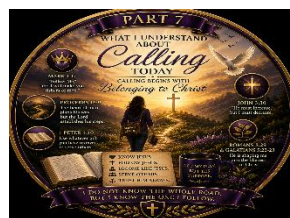
Ministry means serving from what I have already received in Christ. It means remaining under God's Word, depending upon the Holy Spirit, loving people without needing their approval, receiving correction without allowing it to define me, holding plans with open hands, and pointing people toward Jesus rather than toward myself.

Most importantly, ministry must remain an expression of my own discipleship.

I am not a servant of God because I have reached a spiritual destination. I am a servant of God because I belong to Him.

And while I serve, I must continue doing what I was called to do before there was ever a ministry:

Follow Jesus.



What I Understand About Calling Today

Calling Begins with Belonging to Christ

When I first began thinking seriously about calling, much of my attention centered on what God wanted me to do. I wanted to understand my purpose, where He was leading, whom I might serve, and how what He was teaching me could become ministry.



Those questions still matter, and I believe God equips and leads His people into particular forms of service. But today I understand calling differently. Before calling is about an assignment, ministry, position, platform, or particular work, calling begins with belonging to Jesus Christ and following Him.

That understanding changes how I look at the entire journey. When I asked God in 2021 to show me who He really is, I was not asking Him to give me a ministry. I wanted to know Him. Looking back, I am thankful that knowing God came before understanding what I might do for Him. Otherwise, I could have become consumed with discovering a purpose while neglecting the One who gives purpose.

The calling can never become more important than the Caller.

“Jesus called out to them, ‘Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!’” Mark 1:17

Jesus called His disciples first to follow Him. They did not know every place following Him would take them, every difficulty they would encounter, or every way God would eventually use them. Much of what they needed to understand was learned while following Christ.

That has become important to me because I naturally want to know where the road leads. I want to understand what comes next and whether what I am doing will accomplish what I hope. Yet this journey has repeatedly taught me that following Jesus does not require seeing the entire road.

Calling therefore involves surrender. I can make plans, develop resources, pursue education, set goals, and recognize particular people I hope to serve. But none of those things can become conditions I place upon obedience. The ministry may develop differently than I imagine. The audience may change. Methods may change. Some opportunities may continue while others end. I cannot know every future expression of the calling. **Proverbs 16:9**

What must remain is the One I am following.

I also understand more clearly that calling concerns who I am becoming, not merely what I am doing. Instead of asking only, *What should I do for God?* I also have to ask, *Am I becoming increasingly like Christ while I do it?* **Romans 8:29; Galatians 5:22–23**

Calling must therefore remain connected to discipleship. I am not called merely to perform Christian work. I am called to follow Jesus while serving Him.



Calling is also larger than formal ministry. Not every Christian will preach, create a ministry, earn a theological degree, write resources, or serve publicly. Yet every believer can faithfully use what God has entrusted to them. Service may happen through encouraging another believer, teaching children, praying, caring for someone who is hurting, giving generously, sharing the gospel, raising a family faithfully, or quietly serving where few people ever notice. **1 Peter 4:10**

Understanding this protects calling from becoming about status. It also gives deeper meaning to the words *Servant of God*. They do not make me more important. They remind me that I belong to Someone else.

I want to keep asking whether what I am doing makes Jesus more visible or makes me more important.

- Does my testimony point toward God's faithfulness?
- Does my teaching lead people into Scripture?
- Does discipleship help people mature in Christ?
- Does the ministry continually point people toward Jesus?

Those questions bring me back to what I now understand calling to be.

I did not know where that prayer in 2021 would lead. I did not know what would come from studying Scripture more seriously, preaching my first sermon, pursuing theological education, studying spiritual formation, or developing resources for others.

I still do not know everything that comes next.

But perhaps calling was never primarily about knowing the entire plan.

Perhaps it was always about knowing whom I was following. Proverbs 3:5–6

That understanding gives me freedom. If the ministry grows, I belong to Christ. If it remains small, I belong to Christ. If God redirects it, I belong to Christ. If people respond, I can thank Him. If I cannot see the results, I can continue serving faithfully. Whether I can see several steps ahead or only the next one, I can still follow Jesus.

That is what I understand about calling today. Particular assignments may change. Opportunities may begin and end. Ministry methods may develop. I still have much to learn, and God is still forming me.



But at its deepest level, the calling has become much simpler:

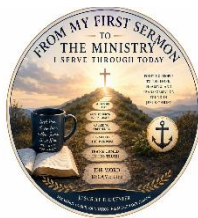
Know Jesus.

Follow Jesus.

Become increasingly like Jesus.

Serve others in the name of Jesus.

Trust Him with everything I cannot see yet.



From My First Sermon to the Ministry I Serve Through Today

Today, the online ministry that has grown from this journey has a clear purpose: to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and point people toward Him through biblical truth, compassionate encouragement, discipleship, prayer, testimony, mentoring, and Christ-centered resources. My desire is especially to serve people who are hurting, rejected, spiritually weary, or unsure where to begin and help them encounter the truth of Scripture, understand their identity in Christ, and grow as followers of Jesus.

At the center of the ministry are convictions that have developed throughout this journey: **salvation is by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, Scripture is the authoritative Word of God, and genuine spiritual transformation is God's work as He forms His people toward Christlikeness through the Holy Spirit.**

Because of those convictions, my commitment is not simply to create Christian content. By God's grace, I want everything I write, teach, develop, or share to point beyond me toward Jesus Christ. I want to serve with truth and compassion, encourage lifelong spiritual formation and discipleship, and faithfully use what God has entrusted to me for His purposes.

When I stood before a church in September 2022 and preached *Changing Your Thoughts*, I could not have understood how much God would continue teaching me in the years that followed. I was sharing something He was teaching me and hoping it might help someone else.



Today, the writings, studies, devotionals, discipleship resources, and ministry materials I create come from a deeper understanding of what it means to know Christ, follow Him, and help others do the same. But I do not share this journey so that you will expect God to lead you where He has led me. Your story does not need to look like mine. I share it because I hope my beginning encourages you not to dismiss your own.

No matter where you are beginning, how broken you may feel, how many questions you have, or how limited your understanding of God may seem today, you can seek Him. You can open His Word. You can come to Jesus Christ and begin knowing Him for yourself. As you seek Him through His Word and follow Christ, your understanding can deepen and you can continue growing in your knowledge of Him.

I do not know what your journey with God will look like or what He may have for you.

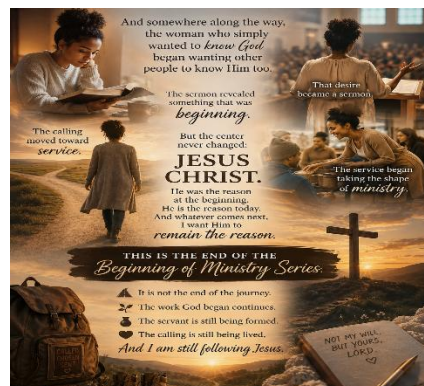
But I hope that seeing where mine began encourages you to beginners to keep going.

Seek Him.

Know Him.

Follow Jesus.

Trust Him with what comes next.



Looking Back at the Whole Journey

From a Prayer to a Life Still Being Formed

As I come to the final part of the final paper in the *Beginning of Ministry Series*, I return to where the journey began. Before the first sermon, theological education, an understanding of spiritual formation and discipleship, or a ministry taking shape, there was a prayer.

On July 30, 2021, I asked God:

“Show me who You really are.”

I did not know where that prayer would lead. I simply wanted to know God for myself.

“If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.” Jeremiah 29:13

God did not answer that prayer by showing me the entire journey at once. He drew me into His Word. What began as a desire to know Him became a hunger to understand Scripture more deeply. That hunger produced questions, and those questions led to greater study. Along the way, some things I believed needed correction, some needed deeper understanding, and others became convictions that grew stronger with time.

My first sermon, *Changing Your Thoughts*, became one visible marker along that road. When I look at it today, I can see things I would explain differently. But I can also see something I never want to lose: I was seeking God, opening His Word, discovering truths that were changing me, and wanting someone else to know what I was learning.

That desire was small compared with what I understand today, but it mattered.

Over the years, what once seemed like separate parts of my journey gradually became connected. Transformation became connected with discipleship. Compassion became connected with truth. Service became connected with calling. And calling became less about discovering something important for me to do and more about faithfully following Jesus.

Looking back, I can now see the progression more clearly:

- There was a prayer.
- Then a hunger for God's Word.
- Then questions.
- Then the first sermon.
- Then deeper study and correction.
- Then a broader understanding of transformation.
- Then spiritual formation.
- Then a growing concern for others.
- Then a clearer understanding of discipleship and calling.
- Then preparation.
- Then steps of obedience.
- Then ministry.

But through every stage, one thing remained true: God was still working. **Philippians 1:6**



That Scripture holds this entire series together. It allows me to look honestly at where I began without pretending I understood more than I did. I can acknowledge what needed correction without believing it erases what God was doing. I can recognize growth without pretending I have arrived. And I can remain grateful for what God has taught me while still being willing for Him to teach and correct me further.

Perhaps that is one of the greatest differences between where I began and where I stand today. In the beginning, I wanted answers. Today, I understand more clearly that knowing God does not mean reaching a point where I have no more questions. The more I learn about Him, the more I recognize how much more there is to know.

Everything eventually comes back to Jesus.

I wanted to know who I was. Scripture taught me to understand who I am because I belong to Christ.

- I wanted transformation. I learned that transformation is toward the likeness of Christ.
- I wanted purpose. I learned that purpose begins with following Christ.
- I wanted to help hurting people. I learned that I am not their Savior. Christ is.
- I wanted to understand ministry. Jesus taught me that ministry must remain service.
- I wanted to know whether what I was doing mattered. God continued bringing me back to faithfulness.

“We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.” Hebrews 12:2

So when I look backward, I no longer see this primarily as the story of how I discovered a ministry. I see the story of God working while my understanding developed and continually drawing me toward Himself.

In July 2021, I prayed, **“God, show me who You really are.”**

I cannot say today that I know everything about Him. I never will in this life. But I can say that He has continued answering that prayer by drawing me toward Himself — through His Word, through Jesus Christ, through correction, education, difficult seasons, other believers, opportunities to serve, and the continuing work of spiritual formation.



And somewhere along the way, the woman who simply wanted to know God began wanting other people to know Him too.

- That desire became a sermon.
- The sermon revealed something that was beginning.
- The calling moved toward service.
- The service began taking the shape of ministry.

But the center never changed:

Jesus Christ.

He was the reason at the beginning.

He is the reason today.

And whatever comes next, I want Him to remain the reason.

This is the end of the *Beginning of Ministry Series*.

It is not the end of the journey.

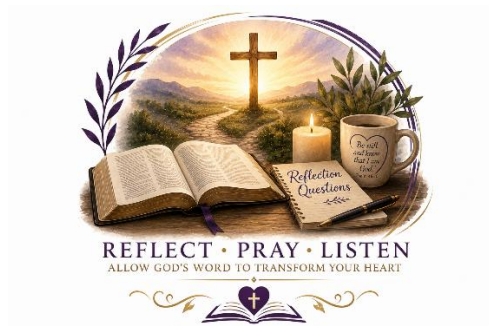
The work God began continues.

The servant is still being formed.

The calling is still being lived.

And I am still following Jesus.





Closing Reflection Questions

Looking Back, Looking Within, and Looking Forward

1. Where can you recognize God's work when you look back over your own journey?

Scriptures: **Philippians 1:6; Psalm 77:11–12**

From God's Word: What seems disconnected while you are living through it may look different when you look back. Remember God's faithfulness and consider where He may have been working even when you did not recognize it.

Reflection: Where can you now see God's faithfulness in places you did not recognize at the time?

2. How has knowing God through His Word changed what you believe about Him?

Scriptures: **Jeremiah 9:23–24; John 17:3**

From God's Word: God calls you beyond merely knowing facts about Him into knowing Him. Allow Scripture to continue correcting assumptions so that your understanding of God is shaped by who He has revealed Himself to be.

Reflection: What do you understand about God today that you did not understand when your journey began?

3. What does your identity in Christ mean for the way you understand yourself today?

Scriptures: **2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20**

From God's Word: If you belong to Christ, your deepest identity is not established by your past, other people's opinions, your accomplishments, or your failures. Your life is rooted in Christ.

Reflection: What belief about yourself needs to come more fully under the truth of who you are in Christ?

4. In what area is God still forming you toward Christlikeness?

Scriptures: **Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18**

From God's Word: God's transforming work continues throughout the Christian life as He forms His people increasingly into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Reflection: Where do your thoughts, desires, attitudes, relationships, or actions still need to become more like Christ?

5. Are you allowing God's Word to transform the way you think and live?

Scriptures: **Romans 12:1–2; James 1:22**

From God's Word: Scripture is not given merely to inform you. Biblical truth should increasingly shape how you think, choose, respond, obey, and live.

Reflection: What truth from Scripture do you already know but need to live more faithfully?

6. Are you following Jesus even when you cannot see where He is leading?

Scriptures: **Proverbs 3:5–6; Psalm 119:105**

From God's Word: God does not always show you the entire road before asking you to trust Him. Sometimes faithfulness means obeying the next step He has made clear.

Reflection: What next step of obedience do you already know you need to take?

7. What has God entrusted to you that can be used to serve someone else?

Scriptures: **1 Peter 4:10; 2 Corinthians 1:3–4**

From God's Word: Your gifts, experiences, knowledge, compassion, and opportunities can become ways of serving others while pointing beyond yourself toward Christ.

Reflection: Who has God placed in your life whom you can encourage, serve, teach, pray for, or walk beside?

8. What have you learned through this five-paper series about yourself and God's continuing work?

Scriptures: **Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 12:1–2**

From God's Word: You do not have to be finished for God to continue His work in you. Keep your eyes on Jesus, remain teachable, and continue following Him.

Reflection: After reading this series, what have you recognized about your own journey with God? What truth do you want to carry with you as you continue following Christ?

One Final Question

Are You Willing to Surrender to God's Continuing Work in Your Life?

Scriptures: **Luke 9:23; Romans 12:1–2**

From God's Word: Following Jesus involves surrender. Spiritual transformation is not something you accomplish by making yourself perfect. It is God's continuing work as you follow Christ, submit to His Word, depend upon the Holy Spirit, and respond to Him in faith and obedience.

A song for reflection: *Have Your Way* — Katy Nichole

Your Response to God

If you desire to follow Jesus more intentionally and remain surrendered to God's work in your life, consider what you want to place before Him today.

Complete these prayerfully in your own words:

God, as I continue following You, I commit to:

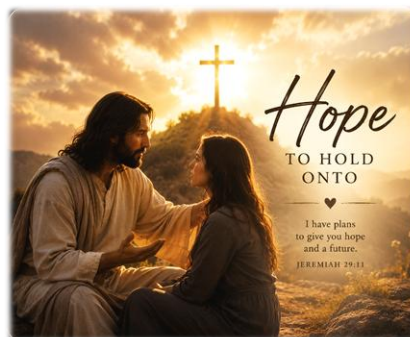
I surrender:

The next step of obedience I will take is:

And I will trust You with:

Date: _____

Signature: _____



A Final Word to the Reader

Your Story Is Still Being Written

If you have reached the end of these five papers, I hope you have seen more than the story of my first sermon or the development of a ministry. Above all, I hope you have seen the faithfulness of God.

I have shared this journey not because I believe my story should become a pattern for yours. God may lead your life very differently. Your experiences, struggles, gifts, opportunities, and ways of serving may look nothing like mine.

But Scripture gives us a truth that reaches beyond any one person's story: God continues His work in those who belong to Him. Philippians 1:6

Where you are today does not have to be where you remain.

You may be beginning to learn who God is. You may be discovering what it means to belong to Christ. You may be recognizing beliefs that need to come under the authority of Scripture. You may be walking through a season you do not understand, or you may sense God leading you toward something without knowing what it will eventually become.

Do not measure God's work only by what you can see today.

Growth often becomes clearer when we look back. Continue seeking God through His Word. Remain teachable when He corrects you. Depend upon the Holy Spirit. Stay connected to other believers. Obey what God has made clear, and when you cannot see the entire road, keep your eyes on Jesus. **Hebrews 12:1–2**

You do not need to become me, reproduce my journey, or build the kind of ministry God has allowed me to develop. My story is only my story. Your responsibility is to know Christ, follow Him faithfully, and trust Him with what your journey will become.

Your story is still being written.

Your spiritual formation is still taking place.

God may still have much to teach you, correct in you, develop in you, and accomplish through your obedience.

Whatever your next chapter holds:

- Keep seeking Him.
- Keep opening His Word.
- Keep following Jesus.

And trust God with what comes next.



A Prayer for You, the Reader

Father,

I pray for the person reading these words. More than anything else, I ask that they know You—not simply know information about You but increasingly know You through Jesus Christ and the truth of Your Word.

Give them a hunger for Scripture and wisdom to understand it faithfully. Where they have believed things about You or themselves that do not agree with Your truth, lovingly correct them. Help them understand who they are in Christ and keep their identity rooted in Him rather than in their past, accomplishments, failures, circumstances, or the opinions of others.

Holy Spirit, continue Your work within them. Form their thoughts, desires, character, relationships, choices, and actions toward the likeness of Christ. Give them courage to surrender what needs to be surrendered and strength to obey when they can see only the next step.

When they are hurting, help them come honestly before You. When they are uncertain, teach them to trust You. When they grow weary, strengthen them. Surround them with believers who will encourage them in truth and love. As they grow, show them how to use what You have entrusted to them to love and serve others.

Help them remain teachable when You correct them, patient when growth feels slow, and faithful when obedience seems unnoticed. Guard them from comparing their journey with someone else's. Remind them that they do not need to understand the entire road before taking the next faithful step. Teach them to depend upon Your strength rather than their own, to seek Your will above recognition or success, and to hold their plans with open hands. May their lives increasingly reflect the character of Christ in the way they love, forgive, serve, endure, and respond to others.

Above everything else, keep their eyes upon Jesus. May they know Him more deeply, follow Him more faithfully, and trust You with whatever lies ahead.

In His name,

Amen.

A Prayer of Thanksgiving to God

Father,

As I come to the end of this series, I want the attention to rest on what You have done, not on what I have accomplished. Thank You for hearing my prayer to know who You really are and for drawing me into Your Word. Thank You for patiently teaching, correcting, and transforming me.

Thank You for Jesus Christ, in whom my identity, salvation, hope, and purpose are found. Thank You for the Holy Spirit, who continues the work I could never accomplish in my own strength. Thank You for every person, opportunity, difficult season, and unanswered question You have used to help me grow and depend more deeply upon You.

Thank You for allowing my desire to know You to become a desire to help others know and follow You. Whatever comes next, help me hold it with open hands. Keep forming me, correcting me, teaching me, and humbling me.

The transformation is Yours.

The ministry is Yours.

The results are Yours.

And all the glory belongs to You.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen.

Prayerfully prepared by

Christie Johnson

Christie Johnson

Servant of God

"Pointing people to the hope and transforming truth found in Jesus Christ."

