

What people are saying about ...

## START HERE

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“The story about Jesus is a simple one; so is His message. This is a book that blows the foam off the top and gives His simple message uncomplicated, accurate freshness. Whether you are thinking about a friendship with Jesus, started one recently, or know it’s been years in the making, you’re going to enjoy this book and the clarity of the message. It’s all about what love does when it comes to earth and what happens next.”

**Bob Goff**, author of *New York Times* bestseller *Love Does*

“Start Here is kind of like a Get to Know God 101 course—with clear, easy-to-understand answers to all your basic questions about what it means to be a Christian. What a relief! I can think of five people I want to give this book to.”

**Elisa Morgan**, speaker and author of *The Beauty of Broken*

“*Start Here* introduces basic Christianity to serious enquirers (and to Christians!) in multiple personal ways and was written by two authors who clearly love Jesus Christ and who want their readers to share that love within the church universal and out in a needy world. I warmly recommend it.”

**F. Dale Bruner**, author of commentaries on the gospels of Matthew and John and the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts

“This book is primer for those who have experienced a stirring in their soul and are looking for the path to a full relationship with Jesus. On the very first pages, David Dwight and Nicole Unice acknowledge these stirrings and then offer practical steps about what do next. If you feel that peculiar spiritual itch, that slight discomfort in your heart, that nagging irritation that cannot be soothed except through the balm of Jesus, then *Start Here* is the place to begin.”

**Frank A. James III, DPhil, PhD**,  
president and professor of historical  
theology at Biblical Seminary

“As a church leader, I’m always on the look out for resources to recommend to people who are

beginning a journey of faith. David and Nicole have done a brilliant job of simplifying concepts of faith while showcasing the beauty of starting a relationship with Jesus. Every church leader would benefit from adding *Start Here* to their discipleship process.”

**Jenni Catron**, executive director of Cross Point Church and author of *Clout*

“If you’re coming alive through new faith in Jesus Christ, I hope you’ll get your hands on this book! And if you’re a person who’s helping others find Jesus, you’ll be very glad to have this resource to share. I’m thrilled David and Nicole have written this book, which fills a huge need and helps all of us be reminded again about what Christ has done for us!”

**Norm Miller**, chairman of Interstate Batteries and cofounder of I AM SECOND

“All congregations need a resource that can help new believers grow into what God has called them to be. *Start Here* can be just such a resource. I see it being very helpful in new members classes, in discipleship

for new believers, and even as a kind of primer for believers who need a stimulus to grow.”

**Jim Singleton**, associate professor of pastoral leadership and evangelism at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

“Have you felt yourself strangely drawn to the person of Jesus Christ, even without knowing much about Him? Have you found yourself in a relationship with Jesus, wanting to know more about what it’s all about and where it all goes from here? It’s hard to imagine more capable guides into what relationship with Jesus is like than David Dwight and Nicole Unice, authors of *Start Here*. They’ve watched carefully as others have walked this way. They don’t assume they know everything about you. But I bet you’ll recognize the experience of coming into the relationship that they describe. In fresh language that’s never preachy, always kind, and consistently committed to what’s real, Dwight and Unice take up a conversation with people like us: attracted to Jesus, confused by some of what we’ve heard about Him, reluctant about religion, open to checking our impressions against the facts. I can’t think of a better place to start this journey into the most important

relationship you'll ever have than ... well ... *Start Here.*"

**Dr. David A. Baer**, president and  
CEO of Overseas Council

"Practical, loving, gracious, and highly approachable. David and Nicole made great choices in focusing on the key elements of Christianity in *Start Here*, and they managed to tackle deep theology without using insider church language that many new believers find off-putting. The use of actual stories of those new to their journey of faith, the practical nature of the material, and the tone of the book, which is filled with humor and generosity, made me excited to see how God will use this material in the lives of those who are starting their journeys with Christ. I have been a believer for almost forty years and a pastor for six, and as I read, I found myself encouraged and affirmed in my faith."

**Jennifer Lefforge**, lead team/pastor of  
Worship Experience at Irving Bible Church

"Dwight and Unice don't just point out the starting blocks of the faith journey; they lace up their shoes and run with you for a few laps. Reminding us that

it's about relationship over rules, and story over saccharine spiritual sentimentality, *Start Here* will set you on a course for the adventure of following Jesus. They will answer some important questions, but more importantly, they will help you ask the right questions. Start now with Start Here.”

**Heather Zempel**, discipleship pastor  
at National Community Church  
and author of *Community Is Messy*  
and *Amazed and Confused*

“*Start Here* is a great resource for those wondering where exactly to begin a journey with Jesus. It is a warm, easygoing approach to the rich life of faith that we all hope to live. With candor and a winsome spirit, Nicole and David bring people to a place of comfort and of knowing where exactly to start. A great resource for churches, small groups, and individuals.”

**Reverend Tracey Bianchi**, pastor for  
Worship and Women at Christ Church  
of Oak Brook, author, and speaker

“*Start Here* is a great primer to the Christian faith. Nicole Unice and David Dwight don't ‘dumb down’ Christianity by any stretch—instead they offer the

very basics to the Christ-curious while inviting them to enter the mysteries of our faith.”

**Caryn Rivadeneira**, author of  
*Broke and Known and Loved*

“*Start Here* is a helpful guide to beginning a relationship with Jesus Christ. The authors take pains to present the invitation of Jesus in clear, accessible, and compelling ways. Recommended for all who wonder what Christians mean when they talk about inviting Jesus into their lives.”

**Mike Erre**, senior pastor of EvFree  
Fullerton and author of *Astonished*

“A superb introduction to the Christian life written in an engaging style that will keep the interest of contemporary readers, even those with little previous knowledge of Christian truth.”

**Ajith Fernando**, teaching  
director of Youth for Christ

“This book will be *very* useful in encouraging people in our postdenominational culture. It is the engaging tool for which we have been searching that meets this generation ‘where it is’ without compromising

the core content of the Gospel. Our large church will certainly use it to help people discover and develop a relationship with Jesus Christ.”

**Rufus Smith**, senior pastor of Hope Presbyterian Church and former chaplain to the Houston Rockets

# START **HERE**



BEGINNING  
A RELATIONSHIP WITH  
JESUS

DAVID DWIGHT | NICOLE UNICE

David©Cook®  
*transforming lives together*



START HERE

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*Introduction*

# **GOD STIRRINGS**



We wrote *Start Here* because we wanted to help people who are seeking God or who are new in a relationship with Him. If that's you, we're thrilled for you. Now the real adventure, the real joy, the endless discovery of our infinite God begins. Either you've begun a relationship with God or you're interested in knowing more about the God who made you and who loves you beyond your wildest dreams. Either way, be sure to be honest with God. A quality search has to be authentic—no games, no facades. A real faith is an honest faith, and with God, real growth requires authentic honesty.

Regardless of where you are exactly, we suspect you may have many more questions after reading this book. We like that. You don't "do" or "master" Christianity—because you don't "do" or "master" God.

This is not like a race you finish; it's a relationship you enter. And that's the beauty of a life with God. This is where you're starting, and you have so many places to go next! An important Bible verse we want to share with you at the outset is Jeremiah 29:13: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."<sup>1</sup> That's an all-in agreement—God offers all of Himself, and we offer all of ourselves. To seek with all of your heart means to embark on an earnest journey into all of yourself—every part, in every condition. Giving Him access and authority over all of your heart is how you can experience the real God, the One who stirred your heart in the first place. When God starts to move in your life, you'll never be the same. But how He does that—well, that's as unique as each one of us.

Most people we know feel unsure of what to say when they begin to wonder about these things. They might say, "I don't really know," and, "This is weird." Maybe you are already saying or feeling these things, already wondering why you are even reading

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1 Throughout *Start Here* there are numerous Bible references. A Bible reference indicates first the book of the Bible, then the chapter number followed by a colon, then the verse numbers. For example, John 3:16–17 is referring to the book of John, chapter 3, verses 16–17.

this introduction to a book about God! We understand that—we've been there. We know what it's like to begin to wonder, to seek something more. If you have read this far, we'd guess you are the same. You've found yourself thinking about God, perhaps even arguing with yourself about all of it. You've started to ask questions, maybe only in your head, but the questions keep coming. You're wondering about this "way" that some of your friends live, wondering about how others treat all this God stuff. Even if you've been around religion or church for a while, you've realized the faith of your childhood or your Sunday morning churchgoing habit seems inadequate to support your current questions. And you are longing for more.

We've experienced it ourselves, and we've talked to many people about it too. Every person's story is different, but each person experiences this element of discomfort, or change, or "stirring": a God stirring.

God stirrings often start with saying yes to the smallest possibility of God. Maybe you've finally said yes to a friend's invitation to church. Maybe you've started to verbalize those questions you have—the big questions like what life is all about and why you are here. Some people tell us it's a culmination of things, one domino after the other, a series of events that seem

beyond coincidence, finally enough to get them to at least consider a God who's real and interested in them. *God?* Seems crazy ... but they are just crazy or curious enough to keep looking.

Perhaps for you, life has become hard. Your life isn't working anymore. You need to do something different because Plan A, your plan, isn't working out and you don't know where to go next. You feel confused and exhausted by doing life your own way. Perhaps you've been calling out to God, "I need help!" and you are ready to know Him and to feel Him in your life.

For others still, the stirrings are even more surprising: "I was just living my life, things were fine, but then ..." Part of the beauty of these beginnings is the seemingly infinite creativity of God. He knows your life, your personality, your heart, and your mind. In short, He knows you better than you know yourself. So He moves in ways that speak to you. Personal ways, unique ways, like a handwritten invitation crafted and designed to get your attention.

As we begin this journey together, we (David and Nicole) want you to know that we've experienced God in this way. Looking back, we see that these beginnings with God are important—the most important

thing that's happened in our lives. Stirrings like this get your attention and speak to an inner place. They might catch you a little off guard. This stirring you are experiencing, regardless of how subtle or small it feels now, is the beginning of a new story for you, just like it was for each of us.

## DAVID'S STORY

My journey began because I had a lot of questions about life—philosophical questions about why we are here and what it's all about. I began to ask religious questions, but early on I decided that since there are so many different religions, nobody really had the answers. It seemed to me that all religions were just different ways people tried to address their big questions and, moreover, their big fears. Most of the “religious people” I had met in my life were not my kind of people, which didn't help. In truth, the people I knew who were overtly religious turned me off.

But then one day in college, a friend asked me if I had ever read the Bible. Thinking of myself as an open-minded person, I said, “No, but I'd consider it.” I didn't know the first thing about the Bible. I had heard of the Bible, but that was it. I didn't know there was an Old Testament and a New Testament, books, chapters, or

verses. I had no idea about any of it. So I asked, “Do I just start in the beginning—like at page one?” This friend helped me understand that the Bible wasn’t quite like that, and he suggested I start my journey by reading the gospel of John in the New Testament. Problem was, I didn’t have a Bible. Not even a dusty one on a shelf that I’d put there to earn good-guy points. So he lent me one, and I began to read the gospel of John. His advice turned out to be good because that’s when the real stirrings began for me.

I remember sitting at my desk in my college dorm room, reading the book of John. I just read. The Bible I was reading had Jesus’s words in red print, and as I kept reading, it’s as if those red words would lift right off the page. Weird? I think so. But true.

Looking back on that time, I’d probably sum it up like this: “I started reading John because I was an ‘open-minded guy,’ but then the words of Jesus started really affecting me ...” This was a beginning. Small and subtle in some ways, but now I can see that it changed my entire life.

## NICOLE’S STORY

My God experiences started early, winding through my childhood years and into adulthood. As I’ve now spent

years working in student ministry, I recognize that many people have a “seed plant” experience, a time early in their lives where they recollect warm feelings about God or Jesus. My story also starts with a “seed plant.”

I grew up in the church and remember being very fond of the idea of heaven starting at age five. By the time I finished high school, I thought I knew everything there was to know about God, about Jesus, and about heaven. But then ... life happened. And when my life and my “firm” beliefs collided, I became discouraged and anxious. I was trying so hard to control everything in my life, and I realized controlling life wasn’t possible—and it scared me. My Sunday school faith didn’t have room for this kind of panic, so I was left feeling empty-handed and alone.

By my sophomore year in college, I had to admit that I didn’t know everything there was to know—and that perhaps I had a truckload of facts with a thimbleful of true conviction. This ended up being very good news, although at the time I felt confused, empty, and weary. So this God stirring was a deep need in my life for significance, for healing, and for hope beyond the glittery offerings of this world. God brought me to a place where I didn’t just need information about Him—I really *needed* Him. And so this was my starting place—a place where I

began to discover the truth of this life, the truth of myself, and God's plan to make it all work out. I'd describe this time as "I thought I had this whole God thing figured out, but then life made me believe otherwise ..." This was my beginning. And it changed everything.

## **YOUR STORY**

You may not think your story is inspiring or amazing—but like our stories, it's unique because it's yours. Right now, your story may be more about questions or objections to Christianity than anything else. If that's true for you, you are not alone—we understand and appreciate that. A relationship with God isn't a simplistic formula; it's an honest journey.

Your story is unique because it is God's way of showing you that He is both universal and personal. You are stirred. He is creating moments for you. This is your handcrafted invitation to a new start. But like any invitation, you can accept or decline. We would love for this book to help you accept His invitation. Reading *Start Here* is a small commitment, a chance to explore these ideas in an honest conversation at your own pace. That's how we think of this book—as a conversation. To be fair to the conversation, you should know something we already believe with all of our hearts: God is real,

and He is doing something in you, which is why you've got your hands on this book! We believe the promise from Jeremiah 29:13: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." So that's the best starting place: a promise from Him that He wants you to find Him.

We've started with our stories, and at the beginning of each chapter we've included a story from someone who wants to share with you. These are real people using their real names and their own words. We didn't change or edit anything about their lives or how they've told their stories. They wanted to offer their experiences in the hope that you will be encouraged, and we've included these different stories because we believe that the truth is best told through a variety of voices. We hope you find them as inspiring as we do.

So yes, it's happening. You are starting a journey, and if you accept this invitation to take that first step, this journey will change your life. It will redefine you and your understanding of the world. It will reorient your priorities. It will realign your perspective. You are taking a risk—creating an opportunity for these stirrings in you to expand into knowing God's realness, His closeness, and His love. We are so glad to take these steps with you. Here we go!





## Chapter 1

# IT STARTS WITH JESUS



**Pete Woods, information technology  
manager, age forty-two**



I grew up in a family of church CEOs. CEO stood for Christmas and Easter Only. My belief at the time was that there probably was a God, but He wasn't important. I never liked going to church. You had to dress up, sing a bunch of boring songs, and then listen to someone talk about passages from the Bible—a book I knew nothing about.



Then my sister became a Christian through a ministry called Young Life when she was in high school. When I came home from college, I noticed some odd things about her. She was reading the Bible and going to church on nonholidays.



I couldn't understand this. Why would anyone want to read the Bible and go to church?

Fast-forward a few years to when I started playing ultimate Frisbee with a group of people. They would invite me to go out to dinner after playing, and I became friends with many of them. I soon discovered that these people were like my sister—they also had this desire to go to church and to read the Bible.

My friends would sometimes talk about the Bible or people in the Bible. Since I did not know much about the Bible or any of its stories, I was usually very quiet during these conversations. "Luke is my favorite book in the Bible," I remember one person saying. *I didn't even know there was a book called Luke in the Bible*, I thought to myself.

After observing my sister and my friends, I decided that I should go and find out what was up with this God thing. In a way I was also looking for CliffNotes to the Bible so I would have some general understanding of what my friends were talking about. Someone at work told me about Hope Church. Hope was small at the time, and I didn't know anyone who went there. I thought

it would be a safe place to go, because if I went to church with friends but didn't want to keep going, then I would have to answer questions about why I didn't want to go anymore.

After a few weeks of attending Hope, I had lunch with David, the pastor. At lunch, David and I talked about my church life growing up, why I decided to start coming to Hope, and some questions that I had about God. After lunch David gave me a Bible and suggested that I read the gospel of John. That is when my stirrings really started blossoming.

I read John in October of 1999. That is when I started to believe, and I wanted to know more about God. I didn't ask Him to come into my life then because I really didn't know I was supposed to do that. I certainly would have if I had known.

After reading John, I had to find out more about Jesus. David encouraged me to read the rest of the Gospels. I also joined a small group and started attending an adult Bible class. The people I met helped me with my doubts and increased my faith.

However, I felt behind, especially when people would talk about biblical figures like

Abraham, Paul, Job, and David. I had heard these names (with the exception of Job), but I could not tell you anything about them. I didn't even know if they were part of the Old or New Testament. I was a slow reader, and I knew that it would take me a long time to get through the entire Bible.

I talked with someone in children's ministry, and she mentioned that the children learn a different Bible story each week. I asked David if I could help out in the children's ministry so I could learn along with the kids.

I was partnered with two other men who were the small-group teachers. The kids thought that I was a teacher as well. However, most of them knew more about the Bible than I did. I enjoyed spending time with the kids, and it was a way to help me learn those Bible stories that I had never heard as a child.

Throughout my journey with God, my relationship has had its ups and downs.

However, through it all, Jesus became the most important person in my life.

If you do a quick search for a definition of Christianity, you are likely to find something about “following the teachings of Jesus.” And that’s true—Christianity is about following Jesus’s teachings. The problem is most people turn the idea of “following Jesus” into “following rules”—and that’s not the point. The story of the Bible makes it clear that the point of knowing Jesus is for a relationship, not rules. As you begin to explore what God tells us about Himself through the Bible, you are going to find that being in a loving, committed relationship with Him is the main thing. So saying that the main idea of Christianity is to follow teaching points is like saying that the main idea of marriage is to share your household bills. Not exactly what we hope for in a great love story!

## **RULES VERSUS RELATIONSHIP**

This perspective of rules versus relationship is a great divide that distinguishes Christianity from other religions. Where most religions teach that the way to “be good” is through required practices and rigid beliefs, Christianity starts from a different place.

From the earliest times, Jesus’s followers weren’t known for following rules or “being good.” The thing that stuck out—the thing that was worth mentioning—was

the mere reality that they had “been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Not that they acknowledged Jesus, not that they followed the behavioral system of Jesus, but that they were “with” Him. Being with Jesus is what transformed these people from what the Bible calls “unschooled, ordinary men” into courageous, bold leaders. And that’s the same reality we are offered when Jesus invites us into a relationship: to “be with Him.”

## IT’S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

In a good relationship, we’re trying to stay in touch with each other, trying to keep close. This means we’re seeking to share our thoughts and experiences because in close relationships, we share our whole lives. This is true of a relationship with God. If you read the Bible, you’ll find this theme throughout—that God is love (1 John 4:8) and that He created human beings to live in full, life-giving relationship with Him.

However, it seems whether it’s with other people or with God, we have ways of fouling up our relationships—by retreating into ourselves, behaving selfishly, hurting others. When this happens, we feel it. We know something is not right, and the relationship becomes distant. Over time, it can feel like there isn’t a relationship at all.

But if the relationship is important, we might seek to reconcile. One of the ways we do this is by asking good questions of each other, questions like, “How are you really doing?” and, “Can you help me understand?” Such questions have the goal of bringing two people closer together, closer to a shared perspective and understanding. People who are gifted in the art of relationships are often people who ask some of the best questions. Here’s where God is a pro.

## THE FIRST QUESTION

Right at the beginning of the Bible, God demonstrated this aspect of His character through His relationship with Adam and Eve—a trusting, transparent, daily relationship. The example of their relationship suggests that when it comes to life with God, we’ve got nothing to hide and nothing to fear. In the third chapter of Genesis (the first book of the Bible), we read about Adam and Eve choosing to turn from God and live life apart from Him. When this happens, the relationship with God was broken—as happens in any close relationship when one party turns away. And when the relationship was broken, God came looking for Adam and Eve. He didn’t come to punish or shame them. He came looking to restore the relationship.

The account suggests that God was saddened and hurt that the transparent relationship they had known no longer felt the same way:

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, “*Where are you?*” (Genesis 3:8–9)

Think for a moment about the depth of this question: *Where are you?* It’s essentially a directional question with the intent to find someone, and in this instance, God wanted to find Adam and Eve for the purpose of reconciling. It’s the first time we see God taking an initial step to help restore the relationship that we people have broken. Since that time, He’s always been taking the first steps to restore this relationship. And when you can sense God stirring in your life, you, too, are a person He’s seeking out, so that you might be able to know Him and live in a relationship with Him.

*Where are you?* may be a geographically related question—as in, “I’m home; where are you?” But *where are you?* can be deeper, too. It can be a question about your emotional state, your thoughts or feelings. It’s significant that this profoundly relational question is the first question God asks in the Bible. God is asking it because He wishes for the relationship to be restored and reconciled. It’s God’s first question, and it reveals His heart—that He deeply misses this relationship. If God were to ask you right now, “*Where are you?*” what might you say to Him?

## **ANOTHER QUESTION: “WHAT DO YOU WANT?”**

The gospel of John in the New Testament has many parallels to the book of Genesis in the Old Testament. In the first chapter of John we see Jesus asking some curious men a question like God’s question. This question was similarly profound and simple. He asked them, “What do you want?” (John 1:38). It’s a pretty big question when you think about it—especially when God is the one doing the asking.

*What is it that I really want from God? Do I want answers; do I want peace; do I want Him to give me hope, give me money, give me a spouse?*

Perhaps surprised by the question, the men avoided it as we often do and then changed the subject. They asked Jesus, “Where are you staying?” Rather than give them an actual address, He answered them, “Come ... and see” (John 1:39). This response is indicative of Jesus’s invitation to a relationship with Him. Rather than giving an answer, He gives an invitation. Rather than offering an address, He offers a relationship. Rather than telling us rules, He invites us to be with Him.

Some of us might answer Jesus’s question “What do you want?” with something like this: “I’m just looking for some answers” or, “I just want God to make my life better.” This is understandable. If we are honest, many of us will agree that we’re usually saying to God, “I want something from You,” while God is saying to us, “I want to be with you.” That’s a very different request! We’re asking God to give us something; He’s asking us to be with Him. Yes, in all instances, Jesus is going to invite you to *be with* Him. “Come and see” implies being together, and that relationship will be central to the discovery.

## COME AND SEE

When Jesus told these men to “come and see,” He was offering them the chance to come be with Him.

He offers us the same thing: the opportunity to come check Him out. It's the first step toward a relationship. Jesus doesn't ever tell people who are truly seeking Him to go away and come back when they get their act together or jump through this hoop or that. He just invites them to follow Him. We can imagine Him saying, "Well, come along, and then we can take it from there." Relationship, not rules. A relationship with Jesus Christ. So regardless of what you've experienced with Christianity in your life, whether in church or on TV or through a billboard, the Bible tells us that the question of Christian faith—the core of faith—always starts with Jesus.

The question "who is Jesus?" is the main point of the New Testament. It's *the* question. Since Jesus is God in the flesh,<sup>1</sup> not just a famous religious guy, this changes everything. If He's just a religious guy, a good moral teacher, then we can learn some life lessons from Him, but that's about it. Put a little *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you* poem on our mirror, wear a cross around our neck, and be done with it. But Jesus lived a unique life and died a sacrificial death—a

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1 In the beginning of the gospel of John, Jesus is called "the Word." Later, it says, "The Word was God." In John 1:14, it says, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."



little extreme if your goal is to be a “good teacher.” C. S. Lewis said, “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be either a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else the Devil of Hell.”<sup>2</sup> Whew, that gives us something to think about. So who *is* Jesus?

## THE NEXT QUESTION

Consider the following conversation Jesus had with His closest group of followers (called disciples):



When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “*Who do you say I am?*” (Matthew 16:13–15)



.....  
2 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 1952), 52.



Jesus brings the question of who He is away from a theoretical and abstract idea to a personal place. It's clear it's the question of the Bible—and remarkably, it's Jesus's question to each of us:

*“Who do you say I am?”*

This is where Christianity begins. Your answer to that question *is* your start here, because it's where you get clear about what you think of Jesus. Ultimately, when it comes to your life, it doesn't really matter what someone else says or thinks about Jesus—it matters what you think.

When Jesus asked His disciples this question, He didn't do it to quiz them or make them feel dumb. He asked because He wanted them to have life as all of us are intended to have it and to experience the kind of hope that only He can give. He wants us to know life in a beautiful relationship with God. He asks this question of us because He loves us and because He knows that our answer is the starting point of finding that kind of life.

So what would it feel like to have Jesus standing in front of you, asking this question? Really, imagine it. Imagine this powerful, mysterious man looking

right into your eyes, asking you this question. We imagine we'd be a little hesitant to answer. It would be one of those moments that feel important, where we'd want to have the right thing to say. Maybe if we were quick on our feet, we'd answer with another question:

“Jesus, You're not really an easy person to figure out. You do remarkable things, but in other ways You seem pretty much like us. So I wonder, who do *You* say You are?”

## JESUS RE: JESUS

Fortunately, what Jesus says about Himself is recorded in the Bible. The words He used are sometimes referred to as the “I AM” statements of Jesus, and they include the following:

“I am God's Son.” (John 10:36)

“I am the light of the world.” (John 8:12)

“I am the resurrection and the life.”  
(John 11:25)

“I am the way and the truth and the life.” (John 14:6)

“I am the good shepherd.” (John 10:11)



“I am!” (John 8:58)

With this last statement, Jesus also made an audacious claim about Himself: that He doesn't just know about God or teach about God, but that He *is* God.<sup>3</sup> These are just some of Jesus's statements, the way He would answer the question about His identity. But Jesus doesn't stop; He makes it even more personal.

### **THE BIG QUESTION: “DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?”**

In another story in the Bible, Jesus was talking with a friend of His named Martha. Jesus had just told her an incredible thing, a thing that ordinary people wouldn't say: “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). He then went on to say,

“The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. *Do you believe this?*”  
(John 11:25–26)

.....  
3 Jesus clarified His equality with God when He said, “Before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:58). This refers directly to the Old Testament, when God described Himself: “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14).



Jesus always makes things personal. He said to His disciples, “But what about you—who do *you* say I am?” and He said to Martha, “Do *you* believe this?” Jesus asks these same questions to us, too, and answering these questions is a part of being in a relationship with God, of finding God and finding the truth. And finding the truth starts with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ—the living, breathing man who walked on this earth thousands of years ago. Jesus Christ—the man who millions of people have built their lives around for thousands of years. It all starts here. God stirs us, and the stirring brings us to Jesus. And that’s what happened with Josh.

## **JOSH’S STORY**

Josh represents everything we love about young people. He’s passionate about what he believes, he’s earnest, and he’s honest. While we were driving to a college conference, I (Nicole) asked Josh to tell me his story of faith, and he smiled and leaned forward as he began. Raised mostly by a single mom who managed to hold life together for him and his brother, Josh grew up in a family that didn’t recognize God at all. His mom “found Jesus” when Josh was in high school, and Josh hated what she became. He refused to go to church with her and became angry about everything, and he

wasn't even sure why. He expressed his anger by doing everything that would make his mom sad—running around to parties, moving from one drink to the next and one girl to the next.

Then he headed off to college, glad to be away from it all. But at school something happened. He became friends with a bunch of guys—and it turns out they were all Christians. One night, he had a powerful spiritual experience. He describes it this way: “It was like Jesus came to me and slapped me in the face with a two-by-four.”

Now, let me interrupt Josh's story and tell you that I've never felt like Jesus slapped me with a two-by-four, and my guess is Josh's mom hasn't experienced that either. But the amazing thing about God is that He comes to each of us in a way that is unique, a way that is powerful and just what we need. And as Josh tells the story, the two-by-four was exactly what he needed. He recalls that evening as a personal wake-up call from Jesus to him about his way of living and about what he was missing. It was the moment that started his honest journey, when he began to seek out the question of “who is Jesus?”

Maybe you've experienced a stirring or felt a longing in your heart for more than the life you're living.

Maybe you've had a more dramatic experience—one where you feel your heart moving within you—and maybe, like Josh, you've had a two-by-four moment. But whatever has brought you here, it's your answer to this question—*who is Jesus?*—that really matters. And just remember, it's not our answer or Josh's answer—it's yours. Who do *you* say Jesus is?

Jesus asked His disciples and He asks each of us,

*What do you want?*

*Who do you say I am?*

*Do you believe this?*

No matter where you are with those questions,  
His invitation is the same:

*Come and see.*