

PROCLAIM PEACE

Sharing Good News for All People



MOPS

Proclaim Peace

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How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Isaiah 52:7



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A Special Thank You

- “Learn and Study” word studies by Hananh Hladek. Follow Hannah on Instagram: [@hannah_hlad3](https://www.instagram.com/hannah_hlad3).
- “Letters From the Divine” by Leeana Tankersley. Read and listen to more at leeanatankersley.com.
- To all the MOPS leaders around the world who share their stories with us. Share at leaders@mops.org.

Good News for All People

Mandy Arioto // President and CEO of MOPS International / mandyarioto.com

Here at MOPS, we exist to share the message of Jesus.

The cultural norms around talking about faith are shifting rapidly. In a recent Barna study called “Reviving Evangelism,” there were some startling statistics reported:

- Nearly half (47%) of *Christian* millennials think sharing one’s faith is wrong (outpacing non-believers and lapsed believers).
- Yet, 94% of these same *Christian* millennials think knowing Jesus is the best thing that could happen to anyone.

While it is tempting to be disoriented by those statistics, here at MOPS, we view it as an incredible opportunity to reclaim conversations around faith and train women to share about Jesus in ways that are compelling, authentic and effective.

At MOPS, we focus our efforts on sharing the message of Jesus with moms; because a fact that psychologists all agree on is that one of the top three life experiences that cause people to evaluate their faith journey is becoming a parent. There are 2 billion moms in the world, 84 million moms in the United States, which means there is abundant opportunity to speak into the lives of moms around the globe, and point them to Jesus. Moms have different life experiences than they did 50 years ago when MOPS began. In fact, we are seeing tectonic shifts in the landscape of motherhood which in turn impacts how we share the message of Jesus.

Here are some of the biggest lifestyle changes moms navigate today:

- 45% of households across America have a mom who is the sole or primary bread winner. In 1960, it was less than 12%.
- According to a new United Nations report, 40% of babies born this year will be to unmarried moms, compared to 10% in 1970.
- 23% of moms have a child with special needs at home, and the divorce rate for parents of special needs children doubles the average divorce rate.

But it isn’t just the lifestyle trends that have shifted, moms struggle with social-emotional health like never before:

- Last year, the Obstetrics Clinical Committee in Australia reported that suicide has become the leading causes of maternal death in Australia.
- In the United States, rates of depression and anxiety have reached epidemic rates at nearly 78% of moms reporting daily debilitating symptoms.
- 85% of moms don’t think society understands or supports the women who are supporting the next generation – up more than 10% since last year.
- UNICEF reports that 1 in 3 moms worldwide will have experienced violence or abuse at some point in their life while having children living in their home.

Moms are navigating cultural changes like never before in history and as a result, longing for the hope of Jesus like never before. That’s why we take evangelism so seriously at MOPS.

The foundational structure of how MOPS shares the Gospel is by creating groups in partnership with the local church. These MOPS groups are gatherings where moms' felt needs are addressed, relationships are cultivated, and spiritual conversations take place. Through robust training, MOPS equips volunteer leaders to share their faith every chance they get, as well as present the Gospel in a formal way twice a year through MOPS curriculum. In addition, mentors in each group guide and pray for each mom who enters the doors of a MOPS group. Mentors provide faith formation and discipleship with the goal of ultimately connecting every woman to the local church, where she and her family can experience life-long faith formation.

The 5 Core Values of the MOPS Evangelism Perspective

1. We Welcome All Moms at MOPS

MOPS is a place where every mom is welcomed and affirmed as a human being created in God's image. Regardless of her lifestyle choices, beliefs, mistakes, political leanings, habits, relational status or any other qualifiers. The MOPS program is designed to be a place where there are no barriers that keep her from coming to a group. We often hear from people who are searching for faith that they feel skittish about showing up to a church because they are worried they are going to be judged. To clarify – they are OK being judged by Jesus, but they are worried about being judged by the people of the church.

This is why we take a posture that **behavior follows belief**. We don't expect the women who come through our doors to have their lives together before they come to MOPS. Eventually, once they decide to have a relationship with Jesus, we anticipate evolving alignment with the guidelines that God has laid out for holy living. However, in order to really engage people who are far from faith, we need to be in proximity with them. The study revealed that 38% of Christians say they have no non-Christian friends or family members, which begs the question: *How can we share the message of Jesus with people who don't know Him, if we are never in relationship with these people?*

2. We Believe in the Power of the Holy Spirit and Prayer

We believe that the Holy Spirit is working in people's lives well before they come to a MOPS group. We also trust that the Holy Spirit does the work of prompting, convicting and revealing the truth of Jesus throughout every meeting and conversation. We know that our job isn't to save people – that is the work of Jesus. Our responsibility is to communicate through our words and actions the truth found in Scripture, and then leave the outcome to God.

We also trust in the power of prayer and encourage our leaders to cultivate robust prayer lives where they are actively interceding for every mom in their group. Prayer is an act of worship that connects us with the heart of God, provides us with wisdom, and allows us to intercede for others.

3. We Forfeit Our Right To Be Offended

Taking offense is a national pastime. We feel offended by other people's choices and ideologies, and respond to these offenses as a strategy to protect the integrity of the Church as an institution. What we notice about Jesus is He encountered people in all sorts of moral messes, yet He was never taken aback, never indignant, and never took offense. Jesus offered each person he encountered dignity and a seat at the table, despite her sins or differences. At some point, He offered perspective about her sins, but He rarely led with that approach.

Because of what Jesus modeled, we ask our leaders to forfeit their right to be offended, because we believe that taking offense is a terrible evangelism strategy. When we find ourselves chronically offended by people's political leanings, social media postings, or lifestyle choices, it is difficult to build meaningful relationships with them. This doesn't mean we don't hold true to biblical mandates or good theology, it means we model ourselves after what happened at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts.

In Acts 15, Paul, Barnabus, Peter and James came together to address the question of whether the church should insist that new converts be made to adopt the predominant religious customs. The decision that was made encompassed the following belief: **in everything that is negotiable, believers should not make it difficult for those who do not know God to come to Him.** We can remove the unnecessary barriers facing those who seek God, but have not found Him yet. It is the paradox of the unchanging truth of God's word and the changing expression of every culture and people who respond to the God of grace. This first major council was about theology, but it was also about how the church would engage culture, and they chose to be unoffended in order to bring more people into the saving truth of Jesus.

4. We Empower Amateurs

Roland Allen in his book, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, observed that the churches in China seemed to flourish whenever the missionaries were forced to leave. We see the same thing happen at MOPS. MOPS is most effective when it is led by volunteers who are learning to lead, who make mistakes and don't have all the answers, and who are so passionate about Jesus that it is contagious.

Just like Jesus, who strategically entrusted His message of the coming of God's kingdom to a capable but unpolished group of volunteers, MOPS does the same. We task our volunteers to faithfully share His message by training them to do things that stretch them outside of their comfort zones and by sharing their faith. God honors their faithfulness.

In fact, 74% of MOPS leaders say they have shared their faith perspective with another unbelieving adult in the past six months, compared with only 39% of the general population of believers who say the same. (*According to research done by the Billy Graham Evangelical Association.*)

Not only that, but we see a 22% increase in attendance by new unchurched families when a church implements a MOPS program and actively supports their volunteers. Churches share with us that nearly all of their women leaders come through their MOPS ministry. Women are being trained to step into other leadership roles within the church and the community even after their time with MOPS wraps up.

5. We Answer Different Questions

Women are asking different questions than women who came to MOPS 20 years ago. In the past, seekers were asking: “How do I get to heaven?” Today, the most common questions they are asking: “What is my purpose?” and “How do I live a meaningful life?”

Neither question is inherently better or worse; they are just different. Radically different questions require radically different approaches to the conversation. Just like the Apostle Paul varied his approach depending on his audience; speaking to Greeks in Athens required a different line of argument than speaking with Jews, we too recognize in the face of shifting cultural norms that we need agility to answer the questions people are actually asking – not the ones we assume they are asking.

No question is too tricky for the Gospel. The incredible thing about the Gospel is its adaptability. The message of Jesus has been relevant in a premodern world, a modern world, and now in postmodernity. While the core truths haven’t changed, the tactics have. What a brilliant God that His word would be relevant and applicable across generations, cultures and questions.

That’s why at MOPS, we talk about the real issues and questions women have; we don’t shy away from any topic, because women need a safe space to talk about the things that are keeping them in shame and bondage to sin.

The Impact of MOPS Evangelism

Last year alone*, over 10,000 women decided to follow Jesus as a result of their MOPS experience, the work of the Holy Spirit, and volunteer leaders sharing the Gospel.

Over the course of 50 years that MOPS has been in existence, we have seen over 220,000 women come into a saving relationship with Jesus.

But here is the remarkable news: **When a mom meets Jesus, not only does her life change, often her children and spouse encounter Jesus as well.** It is exponential evangelism. But it doesn’t stop there. Evangelizing women mobilizes a movement of some of the most effective, but unexpected evangelists on the planet: moms. Moms have incredible influence and when they are passionate about the Gospel, they become powerful conduits of truth; spreading the message of Jesus in their homes, communities and around the world.

May the Spirit of God give all of us courage as we share about the Good News of Jesus, because, *How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”* Isaiah 52:7

67 countries*
17 languages*
35,000 volunteer leaders*
85,000 members*
4,500 churches*
1 million moms influenced*

**statistics compiled from 2019-2020*

Pursue Peace

Tyler Jordan // Pastor / actlovewalk.blog

How would you define peace? Some would say happiness, fulfillment or completion. Some think of world peace by everyone finally getting along. What about answering the question, “What is the opposite of peace?” Your answer may be chaos, hopelessness, restlessness, angst, worry. Some say the opposite of peace is the feeling that something is missing. It’s the classic “hole in my soul” feeling. Regardless of a person’s belief about the presence of a soul, spirit or being in each of us, I think we can all relate to the feeling of emptiness.

In the beginning, God creates. Out of everything He creates, it is the man and woman that is set above everything else in the created order. It doesn’t take us long to realize that out of everything God made, His most prized creation is the human. After all, we are the only part of creation into which He breathed His own breath of life! (Genesis 1) It is here, in the genesis of the world, where humankind is present with God in paradise. No sin, no shame, no separation between Creator God and His most loved creation. It is the original design by the master designer that we live in peace.

However, in Genesis 3, the story takes a turn. Humanity disobeys; sin enters the picture and because sin ALWAYS leads to consequence and separation, Adam and Eve are booted from the garden. God’s perfect creation is disrupted; the “hole in the soul” is born.

Fast-forward through the Old Testament narrative, we can basically summarize the story like this: God’s people disobey; God saves; God’s people disobey again. In the early books, the separation between God and His people is not huge. God has verbal conversations with Noah, Abraham and Moses. God visibly leads His people through the wilderness as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, (Exodus 13) protecting them from their enemies and delivering them to the Promised Land. After all of this, however, God’s people are not satisfied.

“We want a king!” the people of Israel would demand from God. (1 Samuel 8) God warned them of the downfall that would follow, but God’s people were determined. They wanted a leader that looked like them, talked like them, smelled like them, and hurt like them. So, God complied with their request. Israel had many kings who showed incredible leadership, leading Israel to become one of the strongest and most admired nations in the world. These same kings, however, led to the downfall, split and eventual dispersion of the Kingdom of Israel.

With every passing story, the gap would get wider between God and His people. With every selfish king, every prophet who was ignored, and every time “again, Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord,” the chasm grew.

This gap represents the true opposite of peace. This gap is present in each of us. Regardless of belief system, church denomination or spiritual practice, every person is born with this “hole in the soul” as a result of living in a fallen world.

This was the state of the world 2000+ years ago - the most chaotic, restless, hopeless time in the history of God's story. It's at this point in the story, at the end of the Old Testament, when we arrive at what is known as the 400 Silent Years. Between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament, God did not speak a word to Israel for 400 years. No voice in the wind, no prophets, no judges, no kings, no more promises, no hope, no peace.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son ... Galatians 4:4

It was in the midst of the most hopeless time in history that the announcement came: *"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you ... "* Luke 2:10-12

The multitude of angels would sing, *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."* Luke 2:14

It was on that silent night that God did the unthinkable. Creator God, King of the Universe, got up off of his throne and moved toward his people. This gap had been separating them long enough. The peace of God was such a foreign idea, a forgotten reality, seemingly a fairy tale. But God had a plan. As God moved toward his people, he moved from a God who could sympathize with His people to a Savior who can now empathize with His people.

God can look at all of the things with which we try to fill this gap in our souls, and He can say, "I get it. I was tempted by that very same thing, and now I want to help you beat it!" The Spirit of Jesus can bring us true peace on earth because Jesus experienced all of the things on earth that seem to cast shadows on our peace.

PURSUE:

- Define peace.

- Describe the opposite of peace.

- What have you used to try and fill the "hole in your soul"?

Practice Peace

Tyler Jordan // Pastor / actlovewalk.blog

We are all on a life-long search for peace. According to a recent study by Amazon, the most highlighted verse in the Bible, at least by those who use the Bible via Kindle App, is Philippians 4:7:

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7

This tells us a lot about our world today. We are all looking for something that brings hope, happiness or peace. We try to fill this gap with many different things: relationships, achievements, accolades, substances, paychecks, memories, and the list goes on. All of these things can bring a feeling of satisfaction for a moment or even a season, but that feeling always wears off.

The reality is this: 1 in 4 people between the ages of 12 and 40 have experienced anxiety or depression in the last year and 1 in 10 have had suicidal thoughts in the last year. This shows us how critical it is to feel a sense of peace. It's not limited to a feeling, of course. It's also not found in the absence of conflict, but it's found in the confidence that God is in control. It surpasses all understanding, which means it's not a perfect, complete logical system, at least according to our limited perspective.

It also cannot be self-generated. It must come from outside of us as individuals, from outside our fallen world, from outside of creation itself. When our peace comes from God alone, then it will be able to "guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

So how do we get it? Let's keep reading ...

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Philippians 4:8

In these verses, Paul tells us to think on these things:

- *Whatever is true* – think on whatever is honest
- *Whatever is honorable* – think on whatever exalts your character and reflects the character of Jesus
- *Whatever is just* – think on whatever meets God's standard of rightness
- *Whatever is pure* – think on whatever elevates those around you, as opposed to taking advantage of or creating regrets for those around you
- *Whatever is lovely* – think on whatever is pleasing or agreeable
- *Whatever is commendable* – think on those currently in your life if they will be thankful or regretful they were a part of your story 10 years from now

Thinking on these things, however, doesn't get us all the way to that peace we desire:

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me - practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:9

It's not enough to simply know the right thing to do; it's not even enough to do what we believe is the right thing to do. The peace of God meets us when we commit to think on and carry out the absolute best thing. Not necessarily the best thing for "me" in the moment, and not even the best things for others, but the best thing for the Kingdom of God.

- Was it best for God to come to earth and to be born in a manger?
- Was it best for Jesus to be brutally murdered for a crime he did not commit?
- Was it best for Jesus to come during a time when Rome was in power and was known as one of the most brutal executioners?

It didn't seem like it in the moment. It didn't feel like it on the night before he was crucified when he asked the Father if there was another way. But, Jesus understood that the peace of God is bigger, stronger and will endure through even the most painful circumstances.

This is Peace.

PRACTICE:

List the things you can think on that are:

- True
- Honorable
- Just
- Pure
- Lovely
- Commendable

Proclaim Peace

Kelli Jordan // Leadership Development Manager / leaders.mops.org

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Isaiah 52:7

In Isaiah 52:7, Isaiah prophesied concerning the Jews who were exiled in Persia. In that day, King Cyrus had permitted the Jews held captive in Babylon to return to their native land. Isaiah's words referred to the messengers who proclaimed the freedom message to the Jewish people - they were free to go home. That was good news.

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Romans 10:14-15

In Romans 10:15b, the apostle Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7 and relates it to the ultimate Good News message, the Gospel itself.

But where there is good news, there is usually bad news first.

The bad news is that everyone has sinned. Because God is holy and righteous, that sin separates us from Him. But the good news is God loves us so much that He sent His only son, so that if we believe in Him we will not be separated from Him forever, but will instead spend eternity with God. Jesus Christ demonstrated God's great love for fallen humanity by suffering the judgment and wrath for sin that was meant for us. Dying on the cross, Jesus provided a way for us to receive forgiveness of sin and be made righteous.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

But there is more Good News. Jesus died on the cross and was buried, but on the third day He rose again! He conquered death so for those who truly repent of their sins and trust in Him, rather than in themselves, they can be forgiven and set free from everything sin steals, kills and destroys in our lives.

And the Good News continues. Not only does God want us to spend eternity with Him so much that He sent His son to die for us, but He offers us a full life here on earth.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10

And that full life includes peace. The world may not feel peaceful, our homes may not feel peaceful, but we can have peace with God - deep, lasting, soul-filling peace. Romans 5:1 shouts, *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

That is good news! And the news is so good that we can't possibly keep it to ourselves.

We are commanded to go and share what we know about Jesus with others. Sharing the story of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection and how knowing Jesus has guided our steps and shaped our lives is bringing good news.

Romans 10:14 ends with “... *and how shall they hear without a preacher?*”

The word “preach” or “preacher” today makes us think of a church with a pulpit in the front. Actually the word “preach” simply means *to proclaim - to make known*.

To God, there is nothing more beautiful than feet that carry the Good News of Jesus Christ, whether it is across the street or around the world.

Romans 10:15b says, *As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*

The word “beautiful” in Hebrew is *na'ha*, which means *befitting, becoming or perfectly appropriate*. If we believe the message of John 3:16, then it is perfectly appropriate for those who have heard the Good News and have a relationship with Jesus to proclaim that news to others. We should not sit in our homes or churches or MOPS meetings and live like those who have not been saved from anything.

But as we share the Good News, we have to remember that it isn't our job to reveal Jesus. We share what we know about Jesus and He reveals Himself. WHAT He reveals about Himself doesn't change - who He is, what He did for us, how He feels about us, but HOW He reveals Himself does change. In Scripture, Jesus uses different parables to reveal Himself in ways so we can understand. To this day, He continues to reveal Himself through our griefs, sorrows, crises and joys. We are told to tell, preach and proclaim the Good News.

You have good news; the kind that brings what the world needs, what it's searching for - the very thing that can fill a “hole in a soul.” It is good news that leads to peace.

So go and proclaim peace, because our God reigns. And that is good news.

PROCLAIM:

- Who shared the Good News of Jesus with you?

- When was the last time you shared the Good News of Jesus with someone? How did they respond?

- How has Jesus revealed Himself to you?

Dear Leader,

This book is for you – bold, brave leaders with beautiful feet.

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns.” Isaiah 52:7

At MOPS, we plan our meetings, bring our best ideas and words, and then watch as amazing, God-inspired things happen. We cultivate a space for people to gather and begin conversations that point toward Jesus. As leaders, we may not always feel like we know the right thing to say, but when we are willing to use our gifts and voices to speak of Jesus, the Holy Spirit fills in the gaps for us and uses our stories to make Jesus known. God asks us to share what we know and then leave the rest up to Him.

The words in the following chapters are important words when it comes to following Jesus. Every word in this book points us back to how deeply and how extravagantly God loves His people. Many are words we don't use in everyday conversation, but we see them in action when we are willing to speak the truth of Jesus wherever we are.

We pray this book inspires you to pursue and practice peace, and to proclaim the truth of that peace as you are awed by the way Jesus uses it. Study these words – either on your own or with your team – answer the questions, read the stories, pray about your story, and then proclaim what you've learned. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus transformed your life, now let Him use your story to reveal Himself to someone else. Proclaim the peace, salvation and truth of Jesus. Proclaim, preach, publish, whisper, shout and live the Good News.

Cheering you on,

Your friends at MOPS

PROCLAIM

HEBREW

שָׁמַע
(*shamā'*)

to announce, to tell

GREEK

κηρύσσω
(*kerysso*)

to publish, proclaim openly

Occurs in **32** verses in the English Standard Version

LEARN

In Hebrew, the word “proclaim” has derivations from words meaning “to hear.” This gives the implication that in order to proclaim, one must first hear something worth proclaiming. In both Hebrew and Greek, the word “proclaim” is used to indicate magnitude and intentionality behind what is being told. *To proclaim* is not to whisper quietly or speak without conviction. For both Hebrew and Greek, when something is proclaimed, hearers are assured that the proclaimer wholeheartedly believes not only in what she is saying, but that it is worth sharing with others.

This is not to say that whatever is being proclaimed must be proclaimed with volume. Proclaiming the Good News of Jesus does not necessitate shouting from a street corner. The primary difference between “telling” and “proclaiming” is the conviction and magnitude that drives what is being proclaimed. Proclaiming the Good News of Jesus, then, means speaking passionately and with full faith in His Gospel. It means looking for every opportunity to tell others about the hope you’ve found in Jesus, and what He’s done in your life. Proclaiming your faith in Jesus means attributing Him as the source of your joy, peace and life; not hiding it or beating around the bush when others ask. It means offering to pray for others when they share their hurts, even if they don’t believe in God. It means acting the way Jesus acted, treating people the way He treated them. Proclaiming the Good News means telling others what you have heard and believe. The message of Jesus is too good to keep concealed. Proclaiming Jesus means to share Jesus with those around you, because you know He can do in their lives what He has done in yours.

STUDY

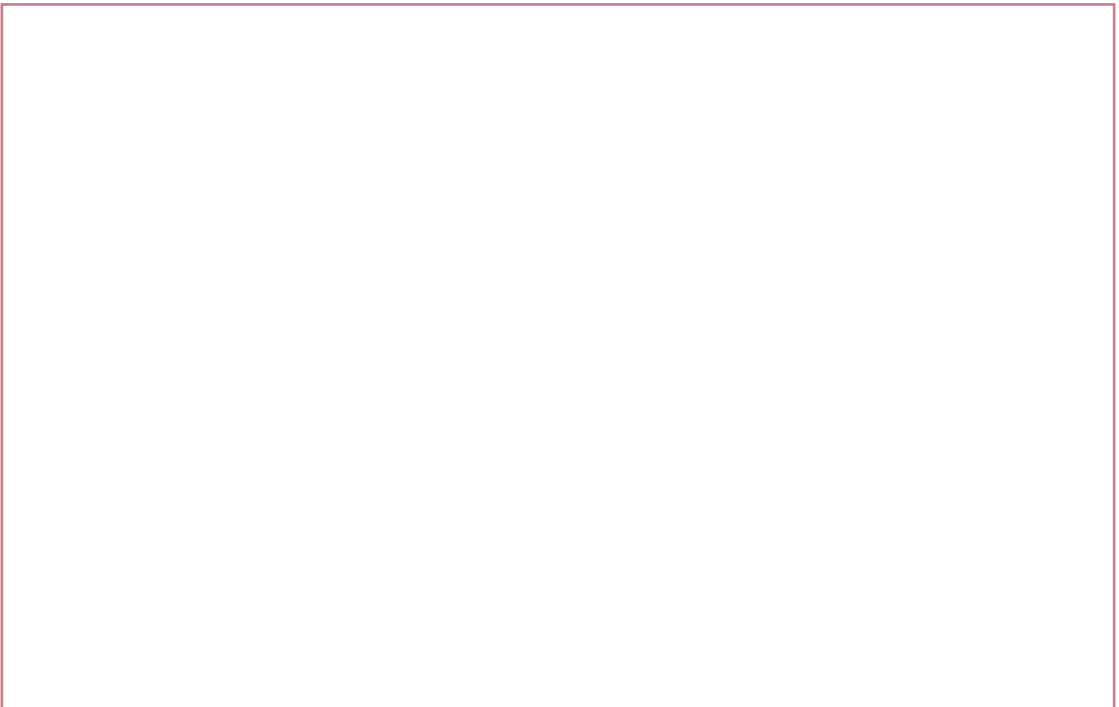
Read Luke 4:18-19.

How did the way Jesus lived support His call to proclaim Good News?



Read 1 Corinthians 11:26.

In what ways do our actions play a role in proclaiming Jesus?



PROCLAIM

Kelli Jordan // Leadership Development Manager / leaders.mops.org

At MOPS, we know the Good News is worth proclaiming! We proclaim the Good News of Jesus in a lot of different ways.

We proclaim the Good News when we invite a mom to our group and save her a seat. Once she is comfortable there, we invite her to church and meet her at the door.

We have a mom who attended our group for three years and never attended church. This past year, she walked into a church service for the first time. She was surrounded and supported that first Sunday by several of her friends she had made in MOPS. She felt comfortable attending church because for the past three years she had attended MOPS in the same building. MOPS broke down barriers that scared her away from Jesus.

We proclaim the Good News in words that women who don't have any knowledge of church or "religious" language can understand.

When I came to MOPS, I saw moms who were Christians doing life together in a non-judgmental way and talking about church casually in a positive way. It was so different from what I was used to. The casualness of the religious talk helped me to feel more comfortable listening and asking questions. After finding MOPS and meeting the amazing moms there, I searched for a new church and found one I loved. I was able to find my way back to God. My life would have been completely different if I had not seen Christianity portrayed in such a loving and accepting way. It wasn't pushed down my throat; had the meetings been all about religion, I likely would have left, as would many who aren't religious or have had bad past experiences with church. MOPS reaches those who don't go to church and helps them see Christ's impact through those who serve. If you would have told me two years ago that I'd be serving faithfully at church and having an impact on others coming back into church, I would have called you crazy.

The MOPS Experience is all about feeling accepted and having a safe place filled with encouraging words and leaders committed to loving moms like Jesus does. We want every woman who steps through the door at MOPS to feel at home. As each woman comes in, regardless of her story, you get to wrap your arms around her and celebrate all of who she is.

As a mom settles in, you greet her, care about her, and pray for her. And when she wonders about Jesus and how much He loves her, you have set the perfect table for that conversation.

I did not grow up in a religious family. But it was always something I was curious about. MOPS opened that door for me! They even gifted me my very first Bible.

Letter From the Divine

Proclaim

My Precious One,

Ours is a one-of-a-kind story, a narrative that is written from the most sacred steps on the most holy ground. I know it's vulnerable to talk about what we've been through together, the miles we've seen, but I never want you to be afraid to tell our story.

Tell me the story as many times as you want, as often as you can, so you will never forget. Write it on your heart. Share our journey with someone else, so she might feel less alone. Tell her about your questions, your doubts, your dark nights. Tell her how I found you and how it has changed everything.

You don't have to talk perfectly. You don't have to be a poet. You don't have to be eloquent or convincing. You don't have to have all the answers. You don't have to be anything you're not.

Just tell how it all happened. And do it often. On repeat.

Tell about the time the peace came and you knew it was not from you. Tell about the time the hope came, even though nothing about the situation changed. Tell about the time you were comforted, even though the grief was staggering.

Your life shows the story. Your beautiful heart. Your knowing eyes. Your open hands. Continue to let your life be a proclamation of how deeply, endlessly and wildly you have been loved.



My Response

GOSPEL

GREEK

εὐαγγέλιον
(euaggelion)
good news

Occurs in **90** verses in the English Standard Version


LEARN



The Greek word *euaggelion* is a derivation from another Greek word, *euaggelizo*. This word simply means to announce good news or come bearing good news. It comes from two Greek words, *eu* - meaning good - and *aggelos* - meaning a messenger or envoy sent from God (same Greek word for “angel”). Thus, the original word gave the indication of the act of a messenger bringing good news. The word *euaggelion* turns the act of bringing good news into a noun, referring to the good news itself. It is the same Greek word that the English word “evangelism” stems from.

Interestingly, there is no Hebrew word for “gospel” in the Old Testament. While in the Old Testament there were certainly messengers bringing good news, no good news was good enough to be THE Good News. Quite literally, the act of Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection from the grave created an entirely new requisite from what constituted as “good news.”

In the New Testament when Jesus is recorded to have been preaching the Gospel, it is important to remember that the people listening to Jesus had never heard anything like this preached before. Their culture had taught them that if something was wrong in their lives, it was because God was angry with them. They had been taught that they could never measure up to the standard God had set before them, that they had no hope of having a meaningful life. But Jesus taught that with Him, they could have a meaningful and joyful life; that God wasn’t angry with them; and that they had hope. The good news Jesus brought truly was good news - it was absolutely mind-blowing, hope-giving, this-changes-everything kind of news, which is why no other “good news” in the world has ever been called the Gospel.



STUDY

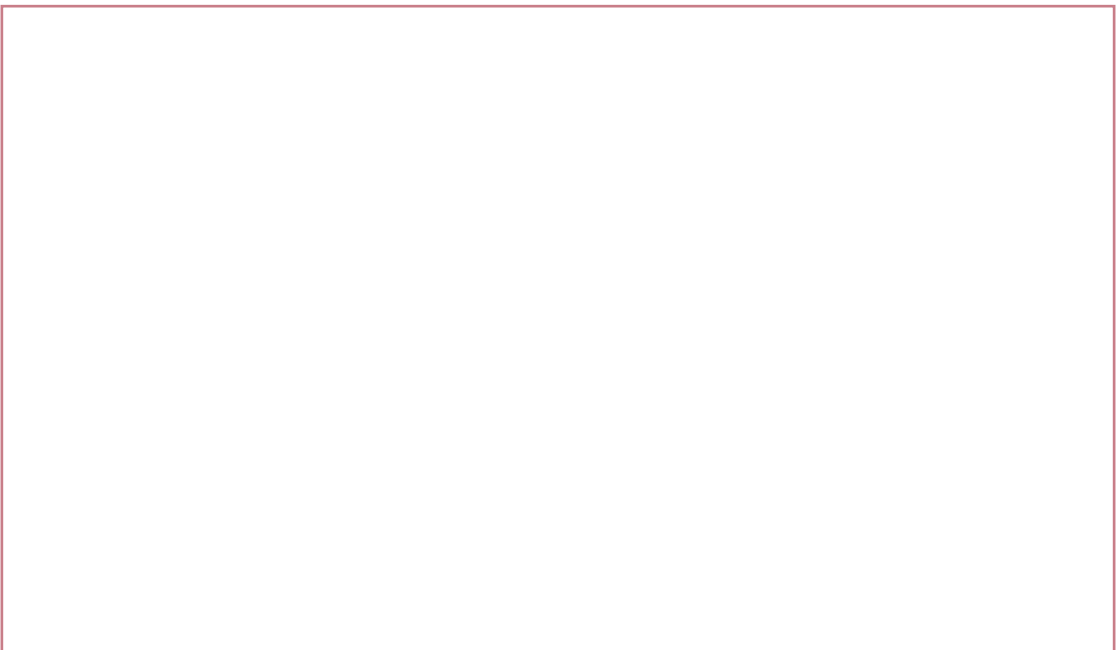
Read 2 Samuel 18.

Why do you think the good news the messenger brings is not actually good news?



Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

Why is the story of Jesus' life THE Good News?



A Good News Story

Kelli Jordan // Leadership Development Manager / leaders.mops.org

When a mom arrives at MOPS, she could be anywhere on her faith journey. Your group might be her first exposure to the incredible news that Jesus loves her, or it might be the first time she sees what that love looks and feels like lived out. You have the opportunity to create a space to introduce Jesus into the life of another woman. Don't be shy about who you are and what inspires you to love her. She needs to hear you are the way you are because of Jesus.

This is the heartbeat of MOPS.

Sometimes you get to share all you know about Jesus with your entire group, but very often, sharing the truth of Jesus' love happens in bits and pieces in a small group, around the table, or one-on-one. It starts when you notice the empty seat next to the woman who rarely joins in the discussion, and you grab two steaming mugs from the food table and sit down and say, "Hi. Do you like coffee?"

It happens when you're sitting shoulder to shoulder with a woman who is sleep-deprived and feeling like what she does every day doesn't matter to anybody. So you share about the days when you felt like your whole life revolved around macaroni and cheese, wiping someone's nose and doing laundry. You didn't like your attitude much so you found a book with positive stories of other moms and kids or you show her the app that you have on your phone that sends you an encouraging thought and Bible verse every day. She shrugs and says, "Well, it can't hurt; tell me the name of that app again?"

Or it happens when a woman at the table hears you talk about how your marriage was in trouble, and you realized you couldn't change your husband so you tried to focus on changing yourself. You took a friend's or counselor's advice and started to say just a simple prayer every day for yourself and your husband, and while your marriage isn't perfect now, it is so much healthier, safer and stronger than it was before. She hears you talk about the change in your marriage and she leans forward and asks, "Wait a minute, Jesus changed your marriage? Maybe He can help mine." Meeting Jesus shaped your future. That's what Jesus does.

Even if her life circumstances are different than yours or her day-to-day is messier or cleaner than yours, you love her because you know Jesus loves her. It isn't your job to transform someone's life, but there might be a mom sitting at the park, walking around your block, or preparing to come to your next meeting who just needs you to tell her what you know. As followers of Jesus whose lives have been transformed by his Good News, we should be so excited that we look for every opportunity to share this Good News with others. You know Jesus, go talk about Him.

Because hearing your story could change her story.

Letter From the Divine

Gospel

My Precious One,

My hand reaches toward you, pulls you up from the void in which you are drowning, and sets you in a wide open place, an expanse.* I will do this over and over and over again. You will never be forgotten.

You are not forgotten when you are small and fragile and vulnerable. You are not forgotten when you are confused and angry and loud. You are not forgotten when you are overwhelmed and exhausted and low. You are not forgotten when you are overlooked and unappreciated and small. You are not forgotten when you question and wonder and wander.

I see it all. I am there through it all. I hold you through it all.

This is the whole story. The only story you ever need to know. You are loved. You are held. You are seen. You are rescued. You are saved.

This is the Good News; this is the Gospel truth: you will never be forgotten. You will need this news over and over again. You will need reminders, nudges, because you will lose track of Me at times, forget the sound of My quiet voice.

Rescue is always happening. Shelter is here, now. I am a breath away. You do not need to be ashamed of your need. Simply fall back into this good news: I would give anything for you, even the most valuable thing in my possession. I would give it all up for you.

So do not let your life be overrun with worry or sadness or fear. Remember the Good News. Repeat the Good News. Revisit the Good News: I make streams in the desert, water flow from the driest drought. I calm raging storms, the kind that toss and tangle your insides. I bring life from death.

This is the Good News. Receive it today. Believe it today.

*Psalm 18:16-19, The Message



My Response

SIN

HEBREW

חַטָּא
(*chātā*)

to miss the mark

GREEK

ἁμαρτία
(*hamartia*)

to miss the mark, to wander
from the path

Occurs in **390** verses in the English Standard Version

LEARN




The word “sin” is an archery term. It refers to the concept of an archer’s arrow missing his intended target – the bullseye. Whether the arrow missed the bullseye by a lot or a little, it was called “sin”. The sin is not determined by the degree to which the archer’s arrow missed the bullseye, but by the very fact that it missed.

In the same way, it doesn’t matter how “big” or “small” our sins are; instead, it’s about the very fact that we missed the mark. In the Bible, “sin” refers to anything we do or say that breaks the commands God has given us. When we sin, we miss the mark of God’s standard for us to live life in perfect community and relationship with Him, ourselves and others.

Given that the bullseye we’re aiming for is perfect life and community with God, anything apart from that leads to death. When we miss the mark, we miss the life God offers to us and we’re separated from Him eternally.

But when we make the decision to follow Jesus, we are immediately covered by His decision to trade His perfect, sinless life for ours. And though we may still miss the mark, we are no longer identified by our mistakes. Though we may still sin, we are no longer sinners.

God does not deal with our sin on a scale ranging from minor to major; all sin is equal in that it indicates that we have missed the mark we were aiming for. Because God does not deal with us more or less severely depending on our sins, we should not treat other people better or worse depending on their sins. No matter what our sins, God offers us forgiveness and restoration through the death and resurrection of Jesus.



STUDY

Read Romans 5.

What do you learn about sin from this chapter?

Read Galatians 5:16-26.

Carefully consider the desires of the flesh Paul outlines in this passage. Where have you missed the mark?

Letter From the Divine

Sin

My Precious One,

At every single turn, shortcuts are offered to you. Ways to get what you think you want by following a different path. My Love, when you hear the ugly word “sin,” simply think of it as a shortcut, an imposter that looks quick-and-easy but never seems to get you where you want to go.

In the garden, I gave the first man and the first woman everything. I gave them everything they needed to thrive. But when they were offered a shortcut, they took it. When they were offered wisdom and knowledge before they had earned it, they consumed it, swallowed the substitute whole. And it did not produce what they were told it would.

Learn from that story, and every story after when a human tried his own path – the one that seemed a sure bet, a get-rich-quick. Never put your faith in the shortcut.

It’s sabotage.

Believe me when I tell you that the long road has gifts that the shortcut never will.

I know you want to feel better.
I know you want to succeed.
I know you want to be loved.
I know you want to be strong.
I know you want to feel like your life matters.
I know you want to be seen.

But don’t let the intensity of those desires – those valid desires – cause you to fulfill them with anything other than the Source.

Let Me comfort you.
Let Me listen to you.
Let Me make a path for you.
Let Me enliven you.
Let Me elevate you.
Let Me embolden you.

When you can’t, when you can’t wait on Me or trust Me or listen for Me, when you just can’t do it any more, I will understand. When the shortcut looks just too promising, I will not reject you. The pilgrimage together is long, narrow, and not for the faint of heart. But when you are ready to join Me again, I will be here waiting, and we will walk on.

My Response



CONFESS

HEBREW

A) **נָגַד** (*nagad*)
to tell, make known, bring into the light

B) **יָדָה** (*yadah*)
to throw, to cast away/out

GREEK

ὁμολογέω
(*homologo*)
to say the same thing as another, agree
with; to not deny; to acknowledge openly

Occurs in **18** verses in the English Standard Version

LEARN

Though there are a few different words used in the Old and New Testaments to convey confession, they each uniquely play a part in how we understand the word today. In the Old Testament, the words *nagad* and *yadah* complement one another in that each gives this idea of confessing/confession as a public, visible demonstration or action. These words give the idea that what was once kept hidden is now revealed; what was once concealed internally is now proclaimed externally. In the New Testament, the word *homologo* is a compound word, made up of the words *homou*, which means “together,” and *logos*, which means “word.” Essentially, then, this New Testament word conveys that what is confessed is understood and agreed upon by multiple people.

What all of these words mean together is that there are a few things that must happen when we confess our sins. The first is that we come into agreement with God about our sin. A lot of times, we feel ashamed and hesitant to approach God about where we’ve made mistakes or messed up. And while it is important to allow the Holy Spirit to work in us through feelings of remorse and guilt, God never intended that we would feel shame around our mistakes that would keep us from approaching Him about those sins. When we approach God to confess our sins, it can be as simple as saying, “God, I agree with you that [insert sin] is harmful to me and to my relationship with you and those around me.”

The second thing that must happen when we confess is we must bring our mistakes into the light, which means we must tell others about our sins. Often, we’re tempted to confess our sins only to God, and ask only His forgiveness. And while His is the only forgiveness that matters on an eternal level, the fact is that very rarely do our sins and mistakes only affect our relationship with God. Most of the time, our mess-ups bring consequences and implications to those around us.

Here’s the good news: everyone has made mistakes and missed the mark. And because of Jesus, everyone is offered forgiveness for their sins. So when it comes to confessing your sins to God or to others, you don’t have to be afraid. God isn’t surprised by your sins, and those around you have likely been where you are. It can be scary, but left in the dark our sins have a way of becoming monsters. Either the shame we feel surrounding our mistakes grows until it consumes us, or we reason that our sins aren’t that bad; we’ve got them under control and no one has to know about them. As uncomfortable – even terrifying – as it may be, bringing our sins into the light both with God and with those around us will actually help us to cast them away for good.

STUDY

Read 2 Samuel 11-12:14, then read Psalm 51.

Looking at the three definitions above, which components of “confess” do you see David using in these chapters?



God sent Nathan to David to help David confess his sin. How has God used someone else to help you confess your sin, or how did God use you to help someone else confess her sin?



Letter From the Divine

Confess

My Precious One,

I know what is there. I can see what you are keeping from everyone else. I know the rooms you want closed, the doors you want locked, the closets you want shut. I know the corners that you will do anything to protect.

I know your secrets. I know your wounds. I know your insecurities. And I know your vulnerabilities. Like a mother who can look into her child's eyes and know the undisclosed immediately, I know you.

And do you know what? Nothing about you scares Me. Nothing about you offends Me. Nothing about you disturbs Me. So, my Love, bring it all into the light. Not for My sake but for yours. I do not want you fragmented, believing you have to cut off parts of yourself, shroud parts of yourself in order to be loved.

Tell Me where it hurts. Tell Me. Tell Me what you have convinced yourself you could never tell. Tell Me what makes you assume you are unlovable. Together, we can walk into the dark rooms, open the locked doors.

You can trust Me with your every shadow.

I am the Keeper of Secrets
The Healer of Souls
The Whisperer of Grace
The Forgiver of All
The Comforter of Regrets
The Holder of Tears

I will never send you away. I will never reject you. I will never hold a grudge.

Take my hand. Let's look into the shadows together. There is no fear in love. Love casts out fear.* So let's bring the shadowed memories, experiences, decisions, regrets into the light. Let's do it together. You will see that, once in the light, the thing you most feared may not be nearly as threatening.

I Am here.

*1 John 4:18



My Response



GRACE

HEBREW

יָן

(*chen*)

to find favor in the eyes of someone,
to be acceptable to him

GREEK

χάρις

(*charis*)

goodwill, loving-kindness, favor

Occurs in **122** verses in the English Standard Version

LEARN



At its most basic, “grace” is the act of receiving acceptance. More than that however, there is an underlying understanding that the acceptance one receives is not deserved or merited. It is not earned favor, and the acceptance extended is often unexpected and unwarranted. Additionally, the Hebrew word *chen* gives the implication that “grace,” though beneficial to the recipient, is more about the giver’s decision to give favor or acceptance.

God’s decision to extend grace to us is not based on anything we do. It’s not based on our performances, our behavior, or our successes or failures on any given day. In fact, should God hold us up against His standard of perfection, we would miserably fall short. Yet, because of the death of Jesus on the cross, when God looks at us, He no longer sees our shortcomings. Instead, He sees the perfection of Jesus, which has been applied to us, and treats us with the love, compassion and forgiveness we don’t deserve.

God’s decision to deem us acceptable to Him is not something we can lose, either. Because grace is not based on us, it is not something that is dependent on us. In his goodness, God chooses to give us favor, treat us with kindness, and accept us as we are. Because the death of Jesus covers all of our sins and shortcomings, we have found favor in the eyes of God.

Grace doesn’t mean, however, that sin is acceptable. God’s grace does not give us an excuse to sweep our sins under the rug; grace is not our proverbial “get out of jail free” card. God’s grace gives us the ability to make mistakes without fear of condemnation AND ALSO covers us as we move from brokenness to wholeness in God. In John 1, the Bible says that Jesus was full of both truth and grace (John 1:14), meaning He both extended grace to broken people while also refusing to let them stay broken. In our call to be imitators of God (Ephesians 5:1), then, we should also extend both truth and grace to those around us. Leaning too far into truth without grace will result in condemnation and legalism; leaning too far into grace without truth results in justification of sin and no true repentance or change of heart and behavior. In our interactions with others, the most loving thing we can do is extend grace when they don’t deserve it AND walk with them to overcome sin.

STUDY

Read John 8:1-11.

Where do you see grace in this story? What does grace not look like?



How does Jesus utilize both grace and truth?



Letter From the Divine

Grace

My Precious One,

Grace shines when things are most dim. When we believe all is lost, it is over, this is where grace begins its glorious work.

Grace says,

Even though you do not feel favorable, you have found favor in My eyes.

Even though you do not feel acceptable, you are accepted by Me.

You will do nothing to earn this kind of radical acceptance. You will also do nothing to lose it. Grace has nothing to do with what you might offer, produce, or come up with. You can't solve your way into grace, think your way there, or talk yourself out of it.

Grace covers you. It is a gift. And it is given to you.

You do not have to be a certain size, a certain smoothness, a certain saint. You do not have to be a certain capacity, a certain aptitude, a certain personality.

You simply fall into what is already there.

I know this idea is foreign to you – that you would not have to earn your way. But you can trust grace. It is not a trap.

Sometimes, though, My grace will come to you in ways that do not feel gracious – an ending, a loss, a wall, a dead end. You will look at it and see it as a punishment, not a possibility. But trust Me. Trust Me. Grace doesn't always look gorgeous at first glance. It takes time to see her for what she truly is.

But every once in a while, you will get a glimpse of the story behind the story. And you will see that grace was there all along. Not what you thought you wanted, but somehow a gift all the same. And, against all odds, there you are holding in your hands what you actually needed after all.

Look back at your life. Do you see where you saw only a thorn? Do you see now that somehow that thorn was actually a tiny shoot of new growth?

This is the business I Am in.



My Response

FLOWERS: A Story About Sin, Confession and Grace

Kelli Jordan // Leadership Development Manager / leaders.mops.org

I lived across the street from a family with two children who were well-known in our neighborhood. They ran over most afternoons to get a Starburst out of my candy jar or Saturday mornings to cheer my husband on while he did yardwork. Usually when they came by, they would run in the door as soon as I opened it. But one spring afternoon they knocked on the door and didn't rush to come in. This brother and sister stood on my front porch, hanging their heads and clutching some dead tulips. I looked over and their mom was standing on their porch with her arms crossed.

The boy looked up at me through his sweaty bangs and said, "Bob." (He called everyone at my house Bob, even though none of us were actually named Bob.) "Bob. We're sorry."

I got down on my knees in front of him and said, "What are you sorry for?"

The girl wouldn't look up, but she whispered, "We wanted some flowers for our mom, so we came and picked some of yours."

The boy confessed, "Stoled. We stoled them."

She held up her fist full of pathetic tulips and said, "They looked half-dead already and we didn't think you would mind." I'm not much of a gardener, so it was a pretty accurate description. "We knew it was wrong right after we did it. We didn't even give mommy the flowers, we just hid them under the bed. We couldn't put them back. It was too late."

They both finally made eye contact with me and with tears on their cheeks said, "We're sorry." We sat down on the porch and I put my arms around them and said, "I forgive you. The next time you want some flowers for your mom, come and tell me. I'll help you get the prettiest flowers we can find."

My little neighbors teach a mighty lesson about sin, confession and grace. They knew what they had done was wrong from the moment they did it. They did what many of us try to do, hide it under the bed and pretend it isn't there. But when confronted with their sin, they confessed. Now there are many times in my life when I have faced someone else's failures ungraciously, but this time it was easy to show them grace. I was so moved by their deeply wounded spirits, their sincere apology, and my great love for them; it was easy for me to forgive.

If I was so moved by these children that were not even mine, how much more moved is our Father in heaven when we openly and contritely acknowledge where we have missed the mark? And how amazing it is that He often has something so much better for us than that thing that drew us away from Him in the first place.

REPENT

HEBREW

שוב

(*shubw*)

to turn around, return to the starting point

GREEK

μετανοέω

(*metanoeo*)

to change one's mind; to rethink

Occurs in **35** verses in the English Standard Version

LEARN




The concept of repentance is slightly different depending on the Old or New Testament usage. In the Hebrew, there is a connotation that repentance is a physical act – literally turning around or returning to where one started. Thus, the Old Testament usage of the word conveys that there is a physical act associated with one’s decision to repent; when one repents, he literally turns around or turns from his sin. In the Greek, the word *metanoeo* is a combination of the words *meta* which means “with, after, behind,” and *noeo* which means “to understand, think upon, ponder, consider.” Essentially, then, what this word implies is that repentance is a time of thinking about something (a sin, a behavioral pattern, etc.) after a person has behaved in a certain way, and then changing one’s mind or rethinking that behavior.

However, the differences in the connotations of these two words do not need to be mutually exclusive. On the contrary, when a person repents, there should be both a mental change and a physical change that occurs. If only one occurs, it may be that a person has not truly and wholeheartedly repented from her sinful behaviors or thoughts.

On the one hand, should a person only change her outward behavior, but not the way she thinks about her sin, then it’s only a matter of time before sin sets in again, whether the same sin as before, or an entirely new sinful behavior. This would be like putting a Band-Aid on a bullet hole. It may stop the bleeding for a moment, and give the appearance that the person is OK, but it’s only a matter of time before the Band-Aid cannot contain what’s happening underneath. The bullet hole is still there. By itself, behavioral change only covers up sin; it doesn’t heal a person or lead her to a better life.

On the other hand, a mental repentance without a physical manifestation of it throws the door wide open for shame and despair to set in. When a person has experienced a mental repentance – he is aware of the devastation his sin is having in his life and has the desire to change – but doesn’t physically turn away from his sin. He may feel ashamed of his inability to physically remove himself from sinful behaviors or despair that he can never truly change.

Thus it takes a person both rethinking and physically turning from her sin to repent. What’s important to remember is that there is a third component of repentance, and that is remembering that it is by the grace and strength of Jesus that we are able to repent at all. We can neither mentally rethink nor physically turn around without Him. In turning away from our sin, we are returning to our starting point: Jesus, and once again allowing Him to be our Way to restoration and life.



STUDY

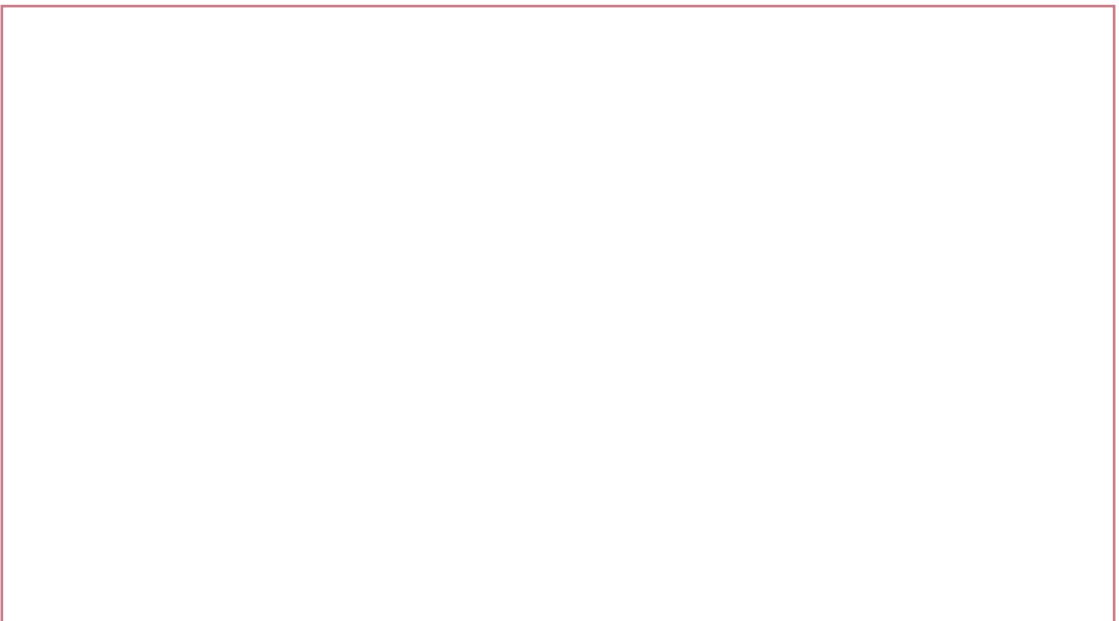
The Sermon on the Mount was the most revolutionary teaching Jesus ever gave because it called people to make a paradigm shift in their thinking and to repent.

Read Matthew 5:21-48, considering these questions as you read:

What is significant about Jesus' new teachings? (Hint: each teaching begins with: "But I tell you ...")



What is the difference between Jesus' teachings and what people had always done?



A MOPS Story

Amanda Lane

Jesus – He was with me all along. An unrelenting love that was pursuing me my whole life; I just needed to look up and see that it was Him. My story starts about 10 years ago, as a young woman entering the unknown journey of motherhood. My life seemed semi-normal: I was in a relationship with the father of my child. I had a good job and a loving support system of friends and family. This new chapter of my life was filled with happiness and new beginnings, but in my heart of hearts I felt like something was lacking.

In the midst of my transition into motherhood, I met another mom in my apartment complex. Her beautiful smile and bubbly personality was nothing short of captivating, and she happened to be in the exact same stage of life as me. Her baby boy was just weeks younger than mine. We had much to talk about, but I never expected that meeting her would change the course of my life forever. She offered me a simple invitation to a MOPS group.

What was MOPS? With exhaustion in my eyes and spit-up on my shirt, my sweet neighbor asked if I would like to join her at MOPS - a group of new moms weathering the same sleepless nights. Without any hesitation, I jumped on board. Each week at MOPS brought me closer to a peaceful sense of self, but as a woman who didn't know Jesus I had so many questions. My heart yearned for answers and with each speaker and meeting, I leaned in a little closer. The women in my group never pushed, but always encouraged me without judgment. (Something I had never experienced before.) *Could knowing Jesus give this much peace over my life?*

During one particular MOPS meeting, I found myself crying in the bathroom. That day, the speaker spoke about her marriage and how God had walked alongside her through some very difficult times. I wondered if God would intervene like that in my life, too, but I just couldn't verbalize my emotions. I broke down. As I stood in the bathroom staring at my tear-stricken face in the mirror, I saw my MOPS mentor peek in. She knew I was struggling. She graciously approached me, gave me a hug and asked what she could do to help. I rambled on about what troubled my heart and the desperate void I felt in my life. But in that moment God made himself known. She said with a tender heart and conviction in her voice: "Would you like to accept Jesus into your heart?"

I looked at her with more confusion and replied, "I think so!" At that moment, I knew with more certainty than anything I'd ever committed to before that I really wanted Jesus. And then she prayed for me. I felt showered with Jesus' unwavering love. My eyes were opened and I knew I would never be the same because of Jesus – the rescuer of my soul.

Today, my family and I are members of a great church where we attend weekly. Also, I am on my MOPS leadership team and I continue to grow in a deeper relationship with Jesus and my community. Although life will never be perfect, knowing Jesus fills my days with great joy by simply living the beautiful life that He's given to me.

{Originally posted on the MOPS blog, November 11, 2019.}

Letter From the Divine

Repent

My Precious One,

I want you to live with your head up and your hands open. I want you to be able to breathe. To rest. To play. I want you to be free. Awake and alive. Present.

I have offered you the path to this real living — the path of freedom, hope, love. Sometimes you choose this path, and sometimes you do not. I understand. You confuse your appetites and your deepest desires. You follow the voice that tells you to hide. You settle for *enough*, but I want to give you *plenty*.

When you leave the way, I will nudge you. I will whisper to you. I will remind you of what's waiting for you on the path of life. But only you can choose to step back. I will not drag you.

Come to me, repent, and let's begin again.

My Love, you may hear the word *repent* and immediately feel the pang of shame, or the fist of judgment, but there is no condemnation in Me. Remember, because of My great love you are not consumed. My mercies are new every morning.* No matter how many times you have made poor choices, how many times you regret what you said or what you did, I Am here. I Am waiting for you, arms open. Come to Me, and we will return to the starting point.

You may be weary of the nagging voice that's telling you you're always doing it wrong. That is not My voice, not My way. My voice is always inviting you back to wholeness, always inviting you back to healing, always inviting you back to surrender.

Remember, nothing will fill you like I can: no solution, no person, no success, no arrival.

I do not grow weary of your winding path. I Am not frustrated with your wandering. So you never have to hide from Me. I know this is your instinct. Come to Me. Let Me hold you and everything you are holding: regret, fear, consequences, frustrations, tears. I can hold it all.

* Lamentations 3:22-23



My Response

ATONE

HEBREW

כָּפַר
(*kaphar*)
to cover over

Occurs in **5** verses in the English Standard Version

FORGIVE

HEBREW

נָשָׂא
(*naśā*)
to take up or lift up

GREEK

ἀφίημι
(*aphiemi*)
to send away

Occurs in **52** verses in the English Standard Version

LEARN

The words “atone” and “forgive” are both used in the Old Testament. The word “atone” does not appear in the New Testament at all, but the word “forgive” does. In Hebrew, the word *kaphar* is the word for atonement, and the word *nasa* is the word for forgiveness. Originally, the word “atone” was used primarily in a secular setting, for it literally meant to cover something with pitch. Over time, the word was used in the religious context of atonement – that is, the act of God covering one’s sins and short-comings so they are no longer visible.

The Hebrew word *nasa*, for forgiveness, though literally translating as “to take up or lift up,” gives the image of lifting away a burden or relieving a heavy load from one’s back. In the New Testament, the word *aphiemi* gives the indication of an authoritative command to leave. In the act of forgiveness, one’s sins are sent away with the imperative command to never return.

In these three words, then, there is a natural progression that occurs when God atones/forgives our sins. First, God covers the sins, removing them from sight. But instead of pitch covering our sins, it is the blood of Jesus that covers our mistakes. When Jesus died on the cross, His blood (a representation of His perfect, sinless life) served as the covering for our sins. Because our sins are completely covered, we no longer need to focus on our mistakes. It is as if those sins never existed. Second, God removes the burden of our sins from our backs; he lifts it away from us. When Jesus died on the cross, the burden of our sins was placed on him to bear. Therefore, when we sin and are forgiven, we no longer need to carry the burden or weight of our sins. Jesus lifted it away from us. Finally, God sends the sin – and the memory of it – away. Hebrews 8:12 says that once God forgives us, he will not remember our sins. This means that, although we’ll still remember the mistakes we made, and of course God will know them because He knows everything, they no longer count against us in life. Quite literally, it is as though they never happened.

It is important to remember that our atonement or forgiveness is not anything we can earn or achieve. While, with God’s help, we are the ones to confess and repent, only God can forgive us for our sins – only He can cover them, lift them off of us, and send them away. As a good God, He has made the decision to forgive us when we ask Him to because of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

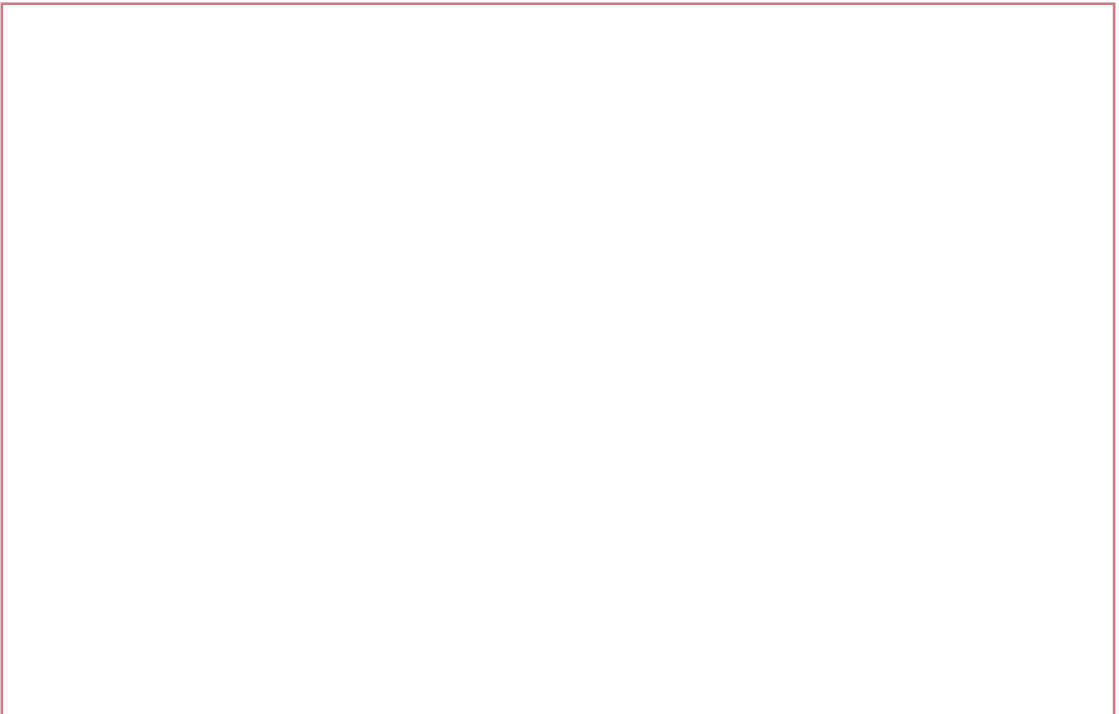
STUDY

Read Luke 15:11-32.

How do you see the boy's father utilizing each of the three components above of forgiveness/atonement?



Which of the three components of forgiveness/atonement does the boy's brother miss?



A MOPS Story

I MOPS because I was a mom with a toddler, a marriage looking at its tomb, and a freshly emptied womb. I was 12-weeks pregnant when I lost my second baby and gained a depression that started on my bathroom floor – birthed a pain and emptiness I didn't know I had laying inside of me. Waiting for friends I didn't have and love I couldn't find – hating myself, my husband ... God. He was no friend of mine.

I reached out to my HOA Facebook page typing into what I didn't know was a prayer:

*Dear Heavenly Father,
Who art in Facebook land, send help. SOS. Lifeline ... Hello? Is it me you're looking for?*

I didn't know it at the time; Jesus answered me by way of Kacie (an angel in Grecian sassy pants) who was the coordinator at the time. She invited me into MOPS. I was nervous, scared. I was pretty sure that Satan LIT UP inside of me ... I wasn't a believer and my family wasn't following that path either. *Would I be welcome, really? Oh well, I came anyway.*

My experience here has been one adventure that I didn't know I needed and I never saw myself going on. It was random porch drops, support through my oldest daughter's sensory processing diagnosis; it was "I didn't see you at church this weekend, we missed the girls," and "How is your husband?" It was "let us love you through fixing my marriage;" it was applause when I was baptized and "walking in the newness of life" with me.

MOPS is "let me pray for you;" it is my daughter teaching me what she learned about Jesus on Sunday morning, because I need to know the stories, too! MOPS is loving my family through my youngest possibly having hearing loss and starting therapy for her own special set of needs and anxieties. MOPS is watching my husband being baptized and loving him through that completely! MOPS is loving my family through trials and errors just where we are and helping us when the growing pains feel too tight and difficult.

MOPS helped change the trajectory of my family! I MOPS because Jesus saw me laying on the floor with a broken heart and he mopped me up, squeezed out the dirt from inside of me, and dipped me in clean water. I MOPS because I want to be the hands that do that for others. I want to give coffee, lend ears and give hugs that maybe last too long because I'm not great at using my words. At least with a hug, you're going to KNOW I love you! With MOPS I realized I want to be a good mother because He is a good father and a gracious God who doesn't waste the pain and mistakes of your past ... but uses them to help fill the buckets of others.

{Thank you to the MOPS mom who shared this story. Originally posted on the MOPS Blog, October 3, 2019}

Letter From the Divine

Forgiveness

My Precious One,

When you give me the stone of your sin, I take it in My hand. We walk together out to the shoreline. Water stirring. Wind whipping. Waves rippling. Birds circling. Sand sinking.

I hold that stone in My hand for a brief second. I look down at it and then we look at each other, right into each other's eyes. You know what I Am going to do. Still, I can see the worry on your face. We've stood here before. And I can see that you are counting back. Wondering if it's been too many times, now. Wondering if you've run out of chances, if you're out of tries.

I look into your eyes a second longer. I want to hold your gaze. I want you to know that I see you and I love you. We're OK, you and Me. I am not here to punish you. I Am here to set you free.

I reach back, like I always do, and I cast that stone out, skipping it along the saltwater. We watch it splash and kick up and splash and kick up, bouncing across the surface, until it finally sinks down, disappears.

And now it's gone. We couldn't find it if we wanted to. It will be carried out into the sea, the endless sea.

You and I are on the shoreline still. I show you that My hands are empty, the stone is gone. As I open My hands, I can see you catching a glimpse of the scars there on My palms. "It's all been paid," I say. "It's all forgiven."

I want you to see that with me you will never run out. There are not so many stones that I cannot take them from you and throw them out into the sea.

My hands are all the proof you need.



My Response

FAITH

HEBREW

אָמַן
(*aman*)

to prop, to stay; to support with
the arm, to carry a child

GREEK

πίστις
(*pistis*)

conviction of truth

Occurs in **257** verses in the English Standard Version

LEARN

A common usage of the word “faith” in the Old Testament is often referring to the break of faith. Though an entirely different Hebrew word is used in this instance, this concept relates well to the overarching concept of faith found throughout the Bible. The concept of a break of faith – or break of trust – aligns with the Hebrew word *aman*. The imagery associated with these two words and how they complement one another is that of a scaffold. If a scaffold is well-built, the builders can have confidence – or faith – that it will support them as they go about their work. Should the scaffold be poorly constructed or have a weak foundation and it collapses, it would be more difficult for the builders to place their faith in the scaffold the next time. A literal break of their faith would have occurred. The Hebrew word *aman* also gives the implication of parents supporting their child. By nature, children are dependent upon their parents for provision and protection. Thus, when leaning on her parents, a child has faith that her parents will support her. Should they fail to do so, the child’s faith in her parents would be broken or collapsed. The Greek word for faith, *pistis*, more closely resembles the way we commonly think – a strong conviction or belief in something as truth.

According to the New Testament, faith is *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*. (Hebrews 11:1) When we, as followers of Jesus, place our faith in Jesus, we are assuming the role of children leaning on our parent for support. Though we may not always know or understand His methods, we can have assurance that the ways we hope God will care for us is how He will actually care for us. We can be convinced that He will care for us even when we can’t see what He’s doing. Put more simply, faith is believing God is who He says He is and will do everything He promised to do.

But more than simply saying it, faith must be put into practice. It does no good for a child to say she trusts her parents, but then constantly works to be her own provider and protector. When we live out our conviction of the truth of God’s love for us, we find ourselves with a safety net below us, which means we can be bold, brave and the truest versions of ourselves without worrying about what might happen to us if we fall. Similarly, we can tell others about our conviction of God’s truth so that they, in turn, can find the support and security that comes through faith in Jesus.

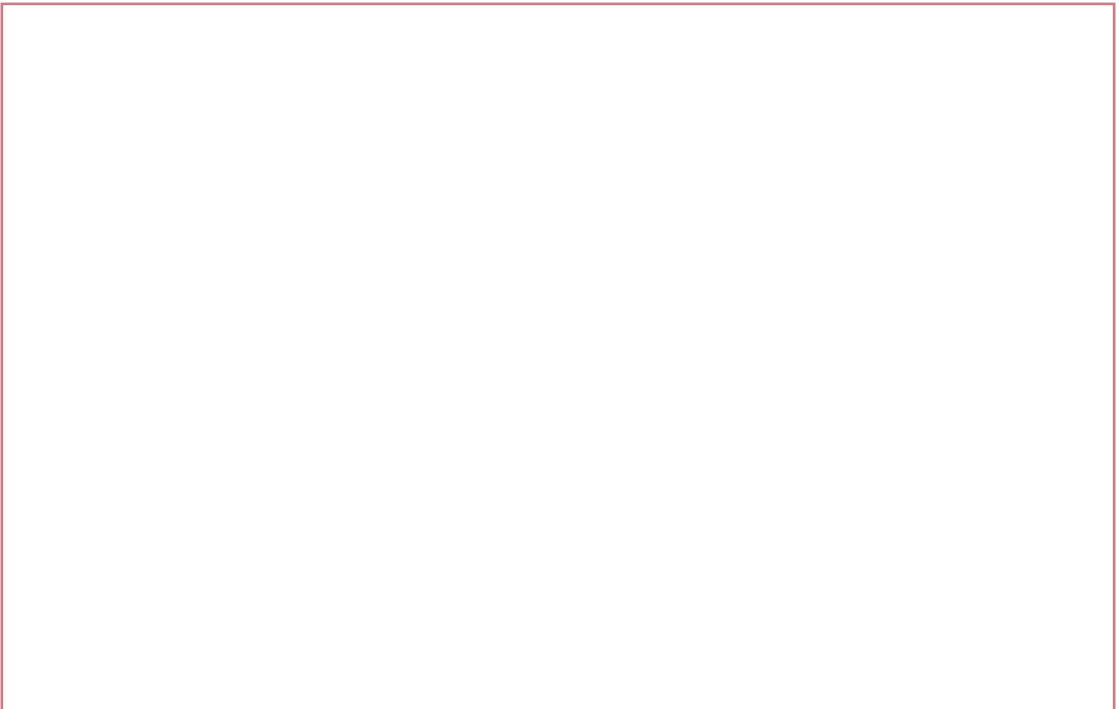
STUDY

Read Romans 4.

Why was faith, not his works, more important to Abraham's righteousness?



Read James 2:14-26. Why is faith without works dead?



A MOPS Story

Audra Dezfulian

I couldn't have imagined how much MOPS would change my life when I joined my group five years ago. Our group was small, 15 moms, which allowed us to grow close rather quickly. As close as this group was, I still did not feel comfortable sharing my whole self: my depression and my anxiety. The struggle was real. There were days I thought I would never stop crying, and to say my marriage was on the rocks would be an understatement. I felt so alone, so helpless and so worthless.

Less than a month before I had led my first MOPS meeting as the coordinator, I was admitted to a psychiatric hospital after becoming suicidal. Stepping into the doors of the "crazy house" (as I called it at the time) I felt like a failure, and I was incredibly ashamed. God worked on my heart, and I left feeling blessed by the people I had met. I was thankful I had the chance to see this disease in a different light. I no longer considered it the "crazy house," but a place where beautiful souls fought tremendous battles in life.

Still, I shared my experience with no one. The stigma (whether real or imagined) attached to what I had experienced, convinced me it was best to keep my private life just that – private. Then, I went to MOMcon. Speakers told their stories of dark times to a packed ballroom of more than 2,000 moms and we raised our hands in solidarity. Depression and anxiety was not something to be ashamed of, and, in that moment, I realized I was not alone.

I finally shared my story with my MOPS group and it was such a relief. They didn't judge me or treat me differently. They embraced me, bought me flowers, and thanked me for my vulnerability. Then, other moms in our group started sharing their stories and the dynamics of our small group discussions dramatically changed. It's amazing what God does for us when we open up and trust Him.

In addition to our MOPS group, we started a small group using the *Fierce Love Collective* from MOPS. Our group of five came from all backgrounds (Christian, Jewish, seekers, skeptics) and all walks of life (new moms, experienced moms, an ESL mom). By the end of the nine weeks, we were saying our goodbyes like summertime besties at the close of camp. One mom shared that this helped her break down walls and trust other women, and everyone told of growing stronger in their faith.

"I've learned that with God I am never alone ... I always have a friend."

"God is fighting for my self-worth, for my family and for my love."

"It's liberating to be able to express that life isn't all gravy. Being a mom is way harder than I ever thought it would be."

My favorite meeting came in the final week when we all got the chance to share how we had seen others grow. The "Fierce Love Warriors" (as we referred to ourselves) cheered, praised and encouraged each other in such real and genuine ways that it was hard to believe we had only spent nine weeks together!

{Originally posted on the MOPS Blog, January 22, 2018}

Letter From the Divine

Faith

My Precious One,

I know sometimes your faith feels fragile. Of course it does. You would not need your people, you would not need Me, you would not need your wise center within if you never questioned, never wavered.

I was in a garden once. I was terrified, about to go to My death. I knew what was coming, and I asked if there was any other way. I asked if the entire experience could just go away. I was having to face the very thing I feared most. I was having to let go of My own life. I had to ask if there was another option. But there was not. Deep down, I already knew.

Deep down, you know too. You don't want to give up your life. You don't want to hand over control. You don't want to surrender. Neither did I. Opening your hands is a terrifying proposition.

So, I prayed and I prayed and I agonizingly prayed ... until finally I could open my hands and say, *not my will, but yours be done.**

This is the essence of faith: opening our hands. Unhanding our own lives. Giving them back to the Source. All because there is a power and a plan that is greater than our own.

The word faith means "to stay," so then I Am asking you to stay. Even when it all seems impossible. Even when you are afraid. Even when you are overwhelmed. Stay. Stay in the garden, stay with your prayers. Stay until you can unclench your fists and open your hands. Stay until you can take one deep breath. Stay until you can drop your shoulders. Stay until you no longer feel as though you will run away. Stay.

Be still. And know.

*Luke 22:42



My Response

DISCIPLE

GREEK

μαθητής
(*mathetes*)

a learner, pupil, disciple

Occurs in **28** verses in the English Standard Version

LEARN

The word “disciple” is only used in the New Testament – specifically in the four Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John which tell the story of Jesus’ life and ministry). It primarily refers to a dedicated follower of Jesus. In the ancient world, a disciple is a follower or adherent of a teacher; it is not the same as being a student in the modern sense. A disciple actively and intentionally imitates both the life and the teaching of the rabbi. For Christians, the rabbi is Jesus. Discipleship is a deliberate and committed apprenticeship which makes the fully-formed disciple a living copy of the rabbi.

Though the word “disciple” does not occur in the Old Testament, the instructions surrounding the instruction and discipleship of young men in ancient Jewish culture is a part of the Mishnah (the written version of Jewish oral laws and instructions). The Mishnah intricately details the process a boy goes through to be disciplined by a rabbi. The final stage of education was to become a talmid (Hebrew word for “disciple”), a student who sought and was granted permission to study with a well-respected or even famous rabbi, often leaving home to travel with him for a lengthy period of time. A talmid didn’t simply desire to pass a class or receive high grades; a talmid had a deep desire to be like the teacher, to become a replication of all the teacher was and believed. Talmidim (disciples) were passionately devoted to their rabbi and noted everything he did or said. Because the rabbi and talmid spent nearly every moment together for several years, they also often had a quite close personal relationship. As the rabbi lived and taught his understanding of the Torah (Old Testament), his disciples (talmidim) listened, watched and imitated to become like him.

A disciple is different from an apostle, which instead means “a messenger.” While a disciple is one who learns and apprentices under a rabbi, an apostle is one sent as a missionary to proclaim the Good News and to establish new communities of believers. As followers of Jesus, we are called to be both: to become disciples in order to deepen our relationship with Jesus, and to become apostles to reach others and disciple them.

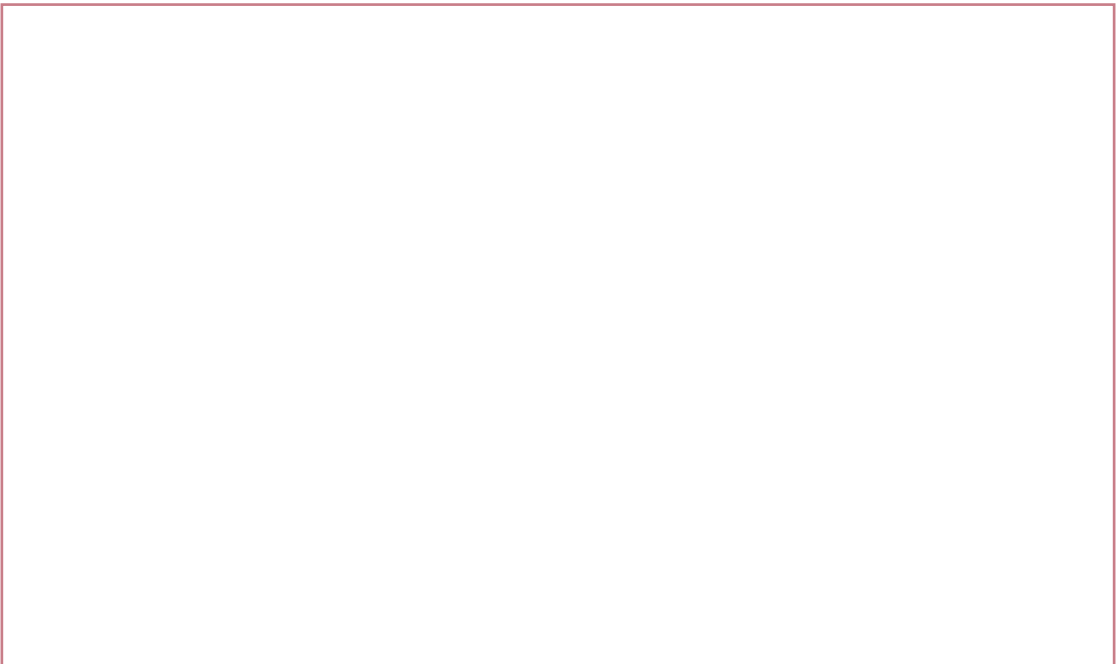
STUDY

Read Ephesians 4:11-16.

Why is discipleship necessary to become an apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and/or teacher?



What does this passage say it means to be children? Why is discipleship necessary for “growing up in every way”?



People-Watching: A MOPS Story About Discipleship

In Jewish times, when a boy committed to learning from a particular rabbi, he didn't just follow during working hours or follow for a few days, he lived life with the rabbi. He sat close by at his feet so that he could see and hear everything he did. When they were walking, the learner stayed very close so he could hear and not be distracted by other things. The learner immersed himself in all the rabbi did and said.

When the rabbi believed that his student was prepared to be like him, he would commission him to become a disciple maker. The teacher's message in this commission was clear: You have learned what you need to know from me. Now go and seek others who will imitate you. Because you are like me, when they imitate you, they too will be like me.

Jesus, the Rabbi of rabbis, followed a similar practice when he gave his disciples the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

While we cannot be like Jesus when it comes to his divine nature or perfect human life, when taught by Him who is empowered and blessed by the Spirit of God, imitating Jesus becomes a possibility. The mission of the disciples (and us) was to seek others who would imitate them and therefore become like Jesus.

MOPS is very often the first step women take with Jesus. After a woman hears about Jesus and decides to follow Him, learning about how Jesus lived and becoming like him comes next. MOPS is the perfect opportunity for followers of Jesus to follow Jesus closer and to encourage others to do the same. One MOPS mom said this,

I have always been a people-watcher. People are so interesting! But the people I've watched that I learn the most from are my friends at MOPS. I didn't know anything about Jesus until I came to MOPS. I accepted Jesus as my Savior after hearing another mom share her story of how her relationship with Jesus saved her marriage. My marriage needed some help, too. After I became a Christian, our mentor encouraged me to start learning everything I could about Jesus. I went to a Bible study at the MOPS church and kept watching and listening to other moms talk about what they were learning about God. Watching them has helped me stop taking things into my own hands and putting more faith in Jesus.

Letter From the Divine

Disciple

My Precious One,

Learning my way means spending time with Me. Your world is loud. I don't have to tell you that. So much is constantly grabbing for your attention. Come away with Me, even for just a few minutes each day. Exit the urgency and the chaos and the constant needs of others so I can pour into you. I can teach you the sound of My voice, the pace of My kind of living.

My way is slower, lighter, quieter. My rhythms are gracious and unforced.*

Stay still long enough for breath to wash over you. Once you're breathing, really breathing, let peace settle into the creases and fibers and folds of your being. Let it find the dark corners. Let it expand the tight places. Let it run through you like the very blood in your veins. Then, and only then, after you have absorbed My rhythms for you, go into your day with your worth secured. Let My breath direct your movement. Let My grace motivate your words. Let My love ground your actions.

Follow Me. I will teach you the truth about who you are. I will teach you the truth about who I Am.

Return to Me. Come back when you lose your way, when your body tightens up and your pulse starts to race and your mind goes frantic and your heart feels numb. Return to the slow breath and the peace and the quiet voice.

I have always brought people close to Me, people who I want to show the way so they can bring a few close to them and show them the way. And so on. This is how it works. This is how word gets out. This is how the message of love spreads.

But the most essential part of the equation is being with Me first and always. What you teach and share and write and say should come from your personal experience of Me. From our intentional rhythm together.

So follow Me, return to Me. I will show you My ways. Ways that will bring you rest and peace, ways that will help you find meaning and significance, ways that will bring you what you have always wanted.

*Matthew 11:28-30, The Message



My Response

JUSTIFICATION

HEBREW

רַצָּדָק
(*tsadaq*)

to be right, straight as in a straight path

GREEK

δίκαιος
(*dikaios*)

revealing that one is as he ought to be

Occurs in **30** verses in the English Standard Version

RIGHTEOUSNESS

HEBREW

רַצָּדָקָה
(*tsedaqah*)

from *tsadaq*, being right

GREEK

δικαιοσύνη
(*dikaiosyne*)

from *dikaios*, the condition acceptable to God

Occurs in **267** verses in the English Standard Version

LEARN

The word “justify” was originally a forensic term, the act of declaring innocence, as opposed to condemnation or guilt. From “justify” came the word “righteous.” Both Hebrew and Greek words for righteousness are derived from the Hebrew and Greek words for justify. Justification is the full pardon of an offense. Righteousness is ongoing acceptance.

As it is used in the context of the Bible, justification is the judicial act of God, by which He pardons all the sins of those who believe in Christ. He accepts them and treats them as righteous when held against the conditional covenant He created with his people in the Old Testament (known as the Law). In addition to pardon for sin, justification declares that all the claims of the law are satisfied; no debt is owed, no requirements are unmet. The concept of justification is not that the law is taken away, but instead that all the requirements of the law are fulfilled. Thus, when Jesus declares that He didn’t come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it in Matthew 5, He is making a declaration of justification of those who follow Him.

Justification is not the forgiveness of someone without righteousness, but instead is a declaration that the person possesses a righteousness which perfectly and forever satisfies the Law. This righteousness is the righteousness we receive from Christ.

Before Jesus lived and died, justification was earned through right behavior and adherence to the Law. But from the moment of Jesus’ death forward, justification became possible only because of God’s decision to see us through the lens of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Because of Jesus’ death on the cross, the required payment for sin was paid: death (Romans 6:23). Though He was without sin, He took the sin of all people upon Him. Therefore, we were made clean because He took our mess upon Himself. As a result, when God looks at us, He no longer sees us as broken, messy or sinful. Instead, He sees the perfection and righteousness of Jesus on us, and declares that we are as we ought to be.

STUDY

Read Genesis 15 and Romans 3:21-24.

Why was Abraham justified and declared righteous?

Read Romans 4:20-22, replacing Abraham's name with yours. In what ways do you have faith that counts you as righteous? In what ways are you lacking faith?

Full Circle Stories

MOPS is more than a meeting, a chat or a women's club. God takes our agenda, video or guest speaker, MOPS Kids program, and even our creative activity time and uses it to draw others to Himself.

MOPS legitimately saved my life. I had severe postpartum depression that was left untreated and I suffered well over a year. I had plans to end my life, but I went to what was supposed to be my last meeting before carrying out my plans and that meeting was just for me. I sought help that night and I am on a healthy path. I'm in my second year as coordinator and know without a shadow of a doubt that Jesus put me in my MOPS group because that was where I needed to be to hear how much He loved me.

At MOPS we are surrounded by friends and mentors who shape our path, without even knowing it. We may not get to see how what we do now impacts the future, but we know it does.

I learned about MOPS at a very young age. When I was in one of my 30 plus foster homes growing up, I was serving in our nursery for the MOPS meetings. I remember the MOPS Kids coordinator saying to me, "Maybe one day you'll drop your kiddos off at your own MOPS group." Many years later, I recall sitting in my church with my firstborn. I was horribly lonely and this new job of motherhood was foreign to me. It was something I knew I was destined for and dreamed of; however, I felt like I was failing at it every day. I was exhausted and I was dropping into a very scary state of depression. I looked around one Sunday and I saw all these mamas rocking their babies in church. I heard their soft cries and it dawned on me that we all needed a MOPS group, like the one I had worked in all those years before. I made an appointment the next day to see our pastor and within weeks, I was the coordinator of the group. That statement the MOPS Kids coordinator made so many years ago came true. It had all come full circle.

MOPS gives women the opportunity to take every experience in their lives - both good and bad, combine it with the gifts God has given them and use it all to advance the Kingdom of God.

I used to serve in women's ministry at my old church and I was hurt pretty badly by my friend and leader. I backed away from all leadership roles and from developing close friendships. Then I attended MOPS. The leaders noticed I had skills that could benefit our group. They asked if I would join the leadership team, but I was hurt before and was reluctant. After being a part of MOPS for two years, I grew more confident and developed meaningful friendships which eventually allowed me to put trust in others again. I'm proud to be a part of a team of women, all different, but with the same mindset and goal ... supporting moms by encouraging, leading and loving them.

Letter From the Divine

Righteousness

My Precious One,

I am calling you, inviting you, into a way of living and being that is clean, right-minded, pure. It's no joke, this kind of life.

It is beautifully subversive.

You won't get even.
You won't return hate with hate.
You won't participate in prejudice.
You won't belittle behind closed doors.
You won't blame shift.
You won't win at the expense of others.
You won't secretly nurture superiority.

Because in this high-road life, you will have to part with the clanging desperation of your ego. You will, instead, embrace something far more radical: losing your life so you can find it.

Slowly, over time, this is what you'll find: When someone comes at you with darkness, you return light. Where you used to mock, you now offer dignity. When the situation calls for aggression, you walk away. When the temptation for pride arrives, you forego the trap. When your anger is justified, you won't choose retribution.

You will stay out of the fray. You will refuse the back-alley brawls. You will keep your distance from the petty and the pretend. You will do all of this with humility, centeredness, calm.

Not because you are perfect, but because you have chosen an entirely new set of rules. You have chosen to be still and let Me fight for you.*

*Exodus 14:14



My Response

SANCTIFY

HEBREW

קִדְּשׁ

(*qadash*)

becoming pure, clean; holy, sacred

GREEK

ἅγιος

(*hagios*)

a holy thing, set apart

Occurs in **16** verses in the English Standard Version

TRANSFORM

GREEK

μεταμορφώω

(*metamorphoo*)

to change into another form or version

Occurs in **3** verses in the English Standard Version

LEARN

Sanctification is part of the process of becoming holy. In ancient Judaism, at any given time, a person fell on a spectrum between holy and unholy. In the middle of that spectrum, a person could be either clean (closer to the holy end of the spectrum) or unclean (closer to the unholy end of the spectrum). To move toward cleanliness and subsequently holiness, a person would perform certain rituals: sacrifices, prayers, etc. One such ritual was sanctification. The process of becoming sanctified – often a special cleansing ceremony – set that person apart as holy, able to be used by God, and different from those around her.

Sanctification can be described as an inward spiritual process whereby God brings about holiness and change in the life of a Christian by means of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification is not salvation, but it is the next step after a person makes the decision to follow Jesus. It is the process of becoming more like Him – more holy.

Once we accept Jesus into our lives, the Holy Spirit enters to start the transformation process: sanctification. He convicts us in areas of our thoughts, opinions, feelings and behaviors that need to be changed to more closely align with the heart of God, and help us grow toward holiness. Through this sanctification/transformation process, our worldly perspective begins to change into God's perspective of the world, people and our personal lives. Our choices are motivated from a position of love, grace, compassion, justice and mercy, rather than selfishness or pride. The transformation process is often painful. Our natural tendency is to resist it because it is uncomfortable or because those around us judge or shame us for changing.


Though sanctification and transformation look different for everyone, the end goal is the same: prevent sin, increase holiness, and produce spiritual growth. Sanctification and transformation are not about trying to be sinless in order to earn the favor of God. Rather, it is about becoming closer with God through a personal relationship, and making the effort to align our hearts more closely with His.

STUDY

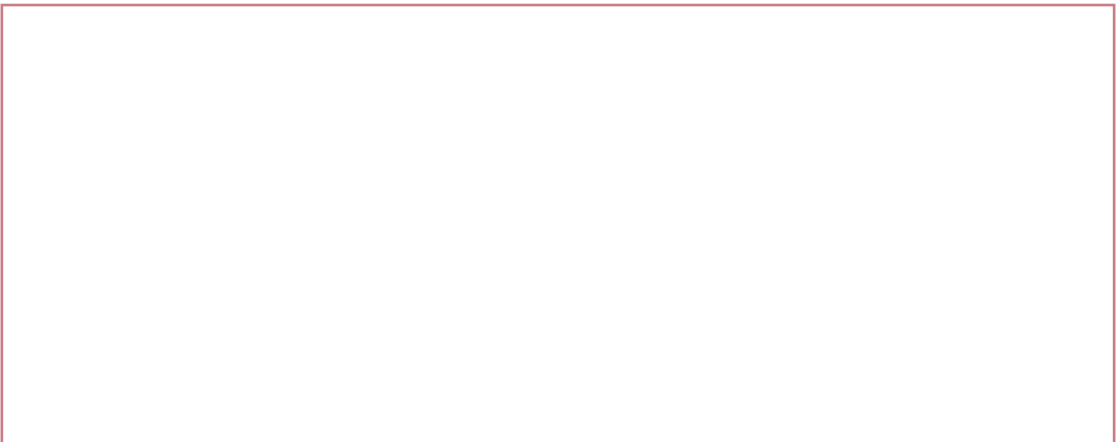
Read Deuteronomy 7:6-8. Why did God set us apart?



Read Leviticus 20:26. Why is sanctification important?



Read Romans 12:2. What is the difference between “conformed” and “transformed”?



A MOPS Story

Lorraine Calbat

I first came to MOPS when my daughter was two. I was a stay-at-home mom and through a friend's consistent prodding, I decided to try it out on the promise that I'd get two hours of kid-free girl time, and I could get hot coffee and homemade food. At that point, I was completely unaware that God was leading me to Him.

I had given up a successful career to stay home and raise babies, and my marriage was struggling. I was in a pretty dark place emotionally, but I was excited to chat with other moms in my stage of life. During my first year at MOPS, I made amazing connections and developed friendships with other women who could relate to the season I was in – raising children and building a family. They got me. The hardships I was experiencing as a new mom and wife no longer felt so uncommon; they now felt manageable because I wasn't alone. I now had mentors and mom friends who were not only experiencing the same issues, but had amazing ideas, advice and words of comfort to help me along.

The following year, I attended MOPS again with such excitement, even though I still felt isolated in my struggling marriage. During one of the meetings, the speakers spoke about marriage. I struggled to ask a question. Afterward, a MOPS mentor approached me and suggested a book to read on marriage and she offered to meet weekly with me. I agreed, and it all began to make so much sense. From there, I purchased a women's study Bible and began studying. One afternoon while my daughter was napping and I was reading, I came across a section that stopped me in my tracks. I knew it was big. I read it; reread it and suddenly it hit me like a bucket of cold water that had been dumped over me. It felt so good. It was as if I had been walking through life wearing blinders and suddenly they were removed. God is with me! He's always been with me! He loves me. No matter what I've done. He doesn't want my marriage to fail. And he wants me to know Him. He has guided me every step of the way and he has brought me to this point. I've given him no attention, no trust, no respect and yet he loves me enough to orchestrate ever so carefully my friend who invited me to MOPS, the speaker, the MOPS mentor, and the study.

I was so beautifully broken in that moment. In that moment, a moment that never could've taken place without MOPS, I realized who I am in Christ: I am loved and saved by his grace alone. Every single minute of my life has been different since.

For generations to come, my family will know God's love.

Letter From the Divine

Sanctify — Transform

My Precious One,

You are chosen.
You are named.
You are invited.
You are included.
You are welcomed.
You are home.

Take your seat at the table, a banquet of belonging. I will reveal to you, with each meal, the ways of becoming who you were always meant to become. I will show you what needs to be left behind, released, sloughed-off. And what needs to be embraced.

I see what you have had to put on in order to survive. And you have survived! Here you are! You made it! You have been strong and resilient and brave!

But you are safe now. In this safety, let's look at your layers. Let's look at what is no longer serving you, no longer necessary, maybe even – now – in the way. What is keeping you from getting closer to me, closer to those you love, closer to your true self? Perhaps you don't have to be as protected, insulated, defended ... any more.

Shedding layers of protection is scary. I know. But I want you to be free. I want you to let go of the garments that are confining you and conforming you. I want you to part with anything and everything that is false so we can begin to see more clearly who you always were.

Before all the hard things happened. Before you had to survive. Before the trauma. There is a you that nothing can ruin, nothing can erase.

You are not meant to spend your life suffering. Let me repeat, you are not meant to spend your life suffering. Pick the most extravagant seat at the table, the one with all your favorite tastes, the prettiest plate, and dig in to abundance.

Taste and see that I Am good. And, wow, do I have so many surprises for you.



My Response

CHALLENGE

PRAY. LEARN. SHARE.

PRAY.

*My tongue will
proclaim your
righteousness, your
praises all day long.*
(Psalm 35:28)

PRAY.

May my voice be
filled with peace
and hope.

PRAY.

Guide me with your
Word. Renew my mind
and transform me.

LEARN.

*How beautiful on the
mountains are the feet
of those who bring good
news, who proclaim
peace, who bring good
tidings, who proclaim
salvation, who say to
Zion, "Your God reigns!"*
(Isaiah 52:7)

LEARN.

*For I am not ashamed
of the gospel, because
it is the power of God
that brings salvation to
everyone who believes ...*
(Romans 1:16)

LEARN.

*For it is by grace you
have been saved, through
faith – and this is not
from yourselves, it is
the gift of God – not by
works, so that no one
can boast.*
(Ephesians 2:8-9)

SHARE.

Call a mentor, pastor
or friend. Be honest
about the state of your
relationship with God.

SHARE.

Have you tried to
find peace in things
other than Jesus?
Talk with someone
about your
experience. If you
are still struggling,
ask for help.

SHARE.

When have you had
the opportunity to
share what you know
about Jesus?

PRAY.

Help me to see others
the way You do.

PRAY.

Give me such a
strong desire to know
You more that I just
can't help but learn
new things.

PRAY.

Give me courage and
confidence to share
stories of how You
have moved in my life.
Give me opportunities
to talk about you.

LEARN.

*If you declare with your
mouth, "Jesus is Lord,"
and you believe in your
heart that God raised
him from the dead, you
will be saved.
(Romans 10:9)*

LEARN.

*For the wages of sin
is death, but the gift of
God is eternal life in
Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 6:23)*

LEARN.

*For all have sinned
and fall short of the
glory of God, and all
are justified freely
by his grace through
the redemption that
came by Christ Jesus.
(Romans 3:23-24)*

SHARE.

What was your life like
before you met Jesus?

SHARE.

How were you
introduced to Jesus?

SHARE.

How is your life
different now that you
know Jesus?

PRAY.

Pray for the woman who is considering coming to your group for the first time. Pray she will have the confidence to walk in the door. Pray for the women in the group that they will welcome her.

PRAY.

Pray for women in the group who already have a relationship with Jesus that they will grow in their faith.

PRAY.

Pray for women in the group who do not have a relationship with Jesus that they may be open to hearing about the grace and gift of life He offers.

LEARN.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
(1 John 1:9)

LEARN.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 8:38-39)

LEARN.

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.
(John 14:6)

SHARE.

How have you experienced the peace of God in your life?

SHARE.

What have you learned about God this week?

SHARE.

I want to proclaim the peace of God by _____.



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