

# FOLLOWING JESUS

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An Exploration of His Calling for Grad Students

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Following Jesus

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# INTRODUCTION

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I want grad students to find true joy.

That's what I tell hundreds of grad students each year in Atlanta, Georgia, when I (Chad) explain to them why I gave up a career as a chemical engineer to become a full-time campus minister. Every August, more than two thousand new grad students arrive at Georgia Tech—my alma mater, where I earned a master's degree in chemical engineering—to begin pursuing their master's and PhD degrees. Many are surprised when I tell them I gave up a lucrative job to become a staff member with Cru, one of the largest missionary organizations in the world. To many international students who've come from the other side of the world to pursue their degrees at great costs, it seems like a waste of a master's degree.

Their expressions of surprise at my career choice offer the perfect opening to share what God is doing in and through the lives of grad students around the country. Our goal is to help students find joy and

purpose during their time in grad school. Our ministry is about helping grad students thrive and not just survive grad school.

In order to thrive, grad students who follow Christ must have two critical disciplines in their lives. They must be closely connected to Jesus on an ongoing basis, and they must be involved in what God is doing around them. Let me demonstrate the importance of these two elements with a story.

I met Matt Gerber four years ago when he and I both arrived at Georgia Tech. After working with undergraduate students for fourteen years, I transitioned to help Cru launch its new graduate student ministry. I felt excited to return to Georgia Tech to start up a ministry. I set up a table at Georgia Tech's GradExpo, an orientation for its two thousand new grad students. Matt, a Christian master's student who had just graduated from Princeton, was one of the first guys I encountered.

Matt joined our first grad Bible study, and the two of us began meeting weekly for spiritual mentorship. One of the first questions I asked Matt was whether he had daily quiet times (a term the church uses nowadays to describe daily prayer and Bible study). He said he did spend time regularly with God but that he would love to have accountability in that area. As I got to know him, he shared with me that an area in which he really needed training was learning how he could share his faith with others. Recently, I asked Matt to describe how sharing his faith brought him joy and made a difference in his life, and this is what he said:

While I've had a personal relationship with God since childhood, God used Cru's graduate student ministry in a big way in my life. Through Cru, I saw the Lord deepen my love for the Gospel, which led to a deep desire to share it with others.

One of the highlights of my time as a grad student was watching God bring a Chinese grad student named Andy Zhou to saving faith in Jesus. At the start of my second semester, God gave me courage one day while I was in the Georgia Tech student center to start a spiritual conversation with Andy, and Chad and I shared the Gospel with him. Over the next several months, Andy consistently came to Bible study, eager to learn more about God. About six months after we met him, Andy began a personal relationship with God!

Meeting Andy that day in the student center is one of my greatest memories with God that I'll always cherish, and Andy is still a good friend of mine years later. I realize now that I wasn't just doing it with Chad or on my own. God was there with us, giving me the courage and a love for Andy. I got to witness God at work firsthand, and that truly is one of my favorite memories from grad school. Looking back, I'm humbled that God decided to use me in some small way to change Andy's heart, and seeing God's power at work in me and in Andy has given me the confidence to continue to share the good news of Jesus with others.

Though he graduated three years ago, Matt and I are still very close. He's happily married to his wonderful wife, Christie, and they both work as engineers here in Atlanta and continue to help minister to students at Georgia Tech. Whenever I hear Matt share about his time as a grad student at Georgia Tech, I'm struck by the joy he finds in following Jesus.

I've worked with many Christian grad students in the four years I've been a campus minister at Georgia Tech, and I can tell you that there's a huge difference in those who follow Jesus while in college and those who don't. The Christian grad students who take the time to be used by God are the ones who enjoy their time the most. That's what it's all about! If we see ourselves as Christians who happen to be grad students (and not as grad students

who happen to be Christians), we'll grow closer to God in the midst of the busyness of grad school and experience true joy.

Whether you're new to studying the Bible or you've been a Christian for a long time, this book was designed to help you follow Jesus while in grad school. The three outcomes we hope you'll gain through this study are the following:

1. Transformation: Letting Scripture transform your mind, your heart, and your will. These passages have been chosen to do that.
2. Community: By going through this study with a group, you'll gain more than you would by studying the Bible yourself. God designed for us to be in community, and His plan is to use His community to help us grow.
3. Mission: To put what you're learning into practice. While you could just do this study independently, we'd encourage you to join or to start what we in Cru's graduate student ministry call a "missional community."

A missional community is a group of three or more grad students who are committed to following Jesus by helping fulfill the Great Commission on campus. Any Christian can share their faith with colleagues and help

fulfill the Great Commission individually, but it's so much better and more effective doing it as a part of a community. The community provides accountability, prayer, and encouragement, as well as ongoing opportunities to connect your Christian friends with your non-Christian friends.

As you can see, this book is divided into three sections that represent critical topics necessary to following Jesus: inviting, investing, and mobilizing. Inviting is simply asking others around you to explore who Jesus is. In Matt Gerber's case mentioned previously, he noticed Andy eating lunch by himself in the Georgia Tech student center. He then initiated a spiritual conversation that led to Andy joining a Bible study and pursuing Jesus.

Investing, as it relates to this book, involves pouring into the spiritual lives of other believers. After Andy placed his faith in Jesus, Matt and I both invested in his spiritual life. We invested in other ways as well, helping provide financially for him when he needed money to attend a conference as well as caring for him as a friend when he did not pass his PhD qualifying exam. Specifically, though, in this book, we will study how Jesus invested spiritually in others' lives and how He calls us to do the same.

Finally, mobilizing involves calling others to help fulfill the Great Commission. Andy eventually graduated with a master's degree from Georgia Tech, but before he

left, I wanted to be sure he knew he was called to be a part of something so much bigger than himself. Just as Jesus gave His Great Commission to His disciples and called them to go and make disciples of all nations, He is giving each of us the same calling today.

As we organized this book, our desire was to help train and equip you to be “doers” and not just “hearers” of God’s Word. In other words, our prayer was that you’d take steps of faith to reach out and influence others for Christ while you were working through this study.

With that in mind, we placed a training resource after every three passages. Each section has six passages, so you’ll find a resource after the first three and then another resource at the end of the section. In all, there are eighteen passages in this book. If you’re a part of a missional community, we’d encourage you to meet together for three weeks to study three passages and then spend the fourth week putting the training resource into practice by reaching out and ministering to others.

### **Finding Joy While in Grad School**

We believe that complete joy and deep satisfaction can be found in grad school when we walk with Jesus and follow Him by sharing Him with others around us. This joy is not only something that can be found during our time in grad school, but it will also follow us for the rest of our lives when we look back with fondness at our days of grad school.

Earlier, I shared the story of Andy and how Matt, a fellow grad student, had the privilege of introducing Andy to Christ. Well, as is the case with all of us when we encounter Jesus, the story didn’t end there for Andy.

A few months after Andy became a believer, his wife, Hua, moved from China to Atlanta so that she and Andy could be together. Hua already had a master’s degree in nursing, and she was interested in applying to the nursing PhD program at Emory University. Andy encouraged her to join the Bible study led by my wife, Elizabeth, which met on Sunday nights at Georgia Tech.

After enjoying meeting the grad women and feeling cared for that first night, Hua told the group that she would be coming every week, and she literally came to every event we hosted that year. She also began going to church with some of the other students. About six months after Hua got involved with our grad ministry, she prayed and asked Jesus to come into her life one evening after Bible study.

And Andy and Hua’s story didn’t end there! Andy graduated this past December, and they moved to the Washington, DC, area, where Andy started working for a software company. About a month ago, Andy and Hua had their first child, a daughter they named Annie. Now think about this. Annie was born into a Christian family to parents who had never even heard of Jesus a few years ago when they first moved to the United States.



Because of a grad student named Matt, who followed Jesus by caring for Andy and stepping out in faith to share the Gospel, Annie will grow up experiencing the love of Christ through her parents and their church family! Not only did it change Matt's life, but it changed Andy's, Hua's, and Annie's lives too.

We all have the opportunity and privilege of being a part of what God is doing around us. Jesus gave us the Great

Commission in Matthew 28:19–20 when He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Well, it's almost time to begin section 1, but before you do that, I'd encourage you to read over this next little section, “How to Study Each Passage.”



# HOW TO STUDY EACH PASSAGE

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If you have used the *Encountering Jesus* or the *One Story* grad Bible studies, then these Bible studies will look really familiar to you. The questions will look a little different because we are focusing on a different theme. Otherwise, the approach and process will be very similar.

These Bible studies—like *Encountering Jesus* and *One Story*—are designed to engage both your head and your heart. The studies encourage a robust analysis of each passage to help you closely observe what the passage is saying, accurately interpret what the passage means, and fully apply it to your life. God cares about and has blessed you with a great mind. It's our prayer that these studies will satisfy the intellectual curiosity God has given you and will renew your mind. He also cares deeply about your heart. So it's also our prayer that these studies will foster new feelings, attitudes, and affections and will transform your heart.

But most importantly, these studies are designed to connect you more intimately to Jesus. Above all else, God, the Father, desires for you to know and wholeheartedly follow His Son, Jesus. All of Scripture is telling one story—the story of Jesus and of our need for Him—including the passages covered in these Bible studies. We can't wait for you to discover how each passage points you to Jesus and thus renews your mind and transforms your heart to live out your life in joyful surrender and obedience to Christ, our Savior and King.

For the passages to unearth these treasures, you need to do the work to understand them thoroughly in their original historical contexts by carefully looking at their grammar, syntax, and background. You will be given the text of the passages that we will study. They are printed with wide margins and generous spacing so you can mark them up. By the time you are done, your passages should be huge

messes of crisscrossed lines; lists of verbs, commands, and promises; and circled highlights. Maybe you'll make a list of things that confuse you or diagram a sentence like you did in grammar school. If you slow down and pick the passages apart, you'll be surprised by what you'll see.

Next are some of the connecting words and relationships to look for when you study the passage. Not everything you notice will be significant, but by observing the flow of the text and making note of connections, relationships, repetitions, and so on, you can get the passage to open itself up to you. Initially, don't worry about drawing conclusions; rather, just learn to look and see what the text says. As you do, pray for the Spirit to lead you; what is important will begin to emerge.

#### CONNECTORS

**Contrast:** but, even though, much more, nevertheless, yet, although, than, otherwise

**Comparison:** too, also, and, as, just as, so also, likewise, like

**Reason:** because, for this purpose, for this reason, for, since

**Result:** so then, therefore, as a result, thus, then, that, so that, in order that

**Time:** now, until, when, before, after, while, since

**Correlatives:** so . . . so also, for . . . as, so . . . as

**Condition:** if, if . . . then

#### RELATIONSHIPS

How does this passage relate to what comes before it (and after it)?

Are there things that are alike/different?

Are there things that are repeated?

Is there a progression?

After each passage, there are two pages of questions separated into four columns. We'd encourage you to fill in one column per day, allowing yourself to reflect on the text throughout the week. If you do this, your week will look something like this:

#### Day One: Profile the Passage

Synthesize the observations you made while marking up the text, and record them in response to the questions in the first column.

#### Day Two: Expose the Needs

Review the passage again, but this time, look deeper to discover and record the needs that the human and divine authors are addressing.

#### Day Three: Explore the Solution

Review the passage one more time. Look for and record how God meets the needs surfaced in the passage. And then look for and record what makes Jesus the best One to point others to for the needs surfaced in the passage.

#### **Day Four: Reflect and Respond**

Consider how this passage matters in your life and how the Spirit may be calling you to respond.

#### **Day Five: Meet with Your Bible Study**

Finally, meet with your Bible study to share and discuss what you discovered, how God is calling you to respond, and what you will need from Him and the others in your study to do so.



## SECTION ONE

# Invite

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*While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him.*

—Matthew 4:18–20

### Introduction

Anna and Ayesha had been running experiments and collecting data. While waiting on test results, Ayesha asked Anna what she was doing that Sunday. Anna shared that she planned to attend church.

“So what do you believe about God?” Ayesha politely asked. Anna knew Ayesha was a devout Muslim, and she could tell that Ayesha genuinely wanted to know.

“I’m a Christian,” Anna answered. She began to feel nervous. If Ayesha probed too much, Anna feared that her lack of Bible knowledge would be exposed. Why hadn’t she spent more time reading the Bible? Why hadn’t she studied more about Islam and prepared herself for a spiritual conversation with a Muslim? Anna braced herself for another question about her faith.

Ayesha shut her laptop computer, turned her chair to face Anna, and said,

You know, I’ve never had a Christian friend with whom I could talk. During my entire life, I’ve never been exposed to the Christian faith or read much about Jesus, other than what’s in the Koran. Now that I’m here in the United States, I marvel at how many Christian churches there are. It seems there’s a church on every street corner! I’ve been taught by my parents that Jesus was a good prophet, nothing more. Yet

there are thousands of people on this campus and in this city who believe that Jesus is God Himself. Could you explain to me why you believe that? I'd love to learn more about the Christian faith and discover why so many people are followers of Christ.

How do you think Anna responded? Perhaps the better question is, How would you respond if a Muslim student initiated a spiritual conversation with you? How would you have felt if you were in Anna's place?

As I shared earlier, I (Chad) am a full-time campus minister to graduate students at Georgia Tech, a university with more than 2,500 Chinese students, 1,400 Indian students, and many others from the Middle East, Africa, and almost every country around the world. My interactions with Muslim grad students occur on a weekly, if not daily, basis, and I consider many of these students to be very good friends of mine. Some of these Muslim students are very devout in their faith, and to be honest with you, the spiritual conversations we have aren't always easy.

I want to encourage you if you've been in Anna's place and were struck with fear that it's OK. I'm not condoning fear, mind you, because God doesn't want us to be fearful but wants us to have faith. What I do want to encourage you with, however, is that you're in good company. Every single Christian (even the disciple Peter, who was Jesus's closest friend and the founder of the early church) has

had to overcome fear, and in this section of this book, we want to help you by giving you some key Bible passages to study.

In Cru, we want to put the Gospel in arm's reach of every grad student. In order to do that, we train and equip grad students to *invite*, *invest*, and *mobilize* other grad students to join in that mission. That mission is not a manmade mission but Jesus's Great Commission, which He gave in Matthew 28:18–20.

In this section, we will study what it looks like to invite others to come to know Jesus. There are six passages for group study along with two resources to equip you to enter into great spiritual conversations with those who don't have a relationship with Christ. As we shared in the introduction to this book, we would envision your group meeting to study each passage for three consecutive weeks. Then the fourth week could be utilized to explore the training resources and put them into practice. In this way, you'll be challenging each other to be "doers" and not just "hearers" of God's Word.

Suppose you're starting your small group the first week of April. If you were to follow our previous suggestion, your group will meet during the first three weeks of April to discuss the first three passages in this section. During the fourth week, you will look at the wondering questions resource (in between the third and fourth passages in this section) and then pair up to go out "exploring" on campus to initiate spiritual conversations.



This wondering questions resource was taken from Doug Pollock's book *God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Naturally Happen*, a great resource we recommend alongside the book *Sent: Living a Life That Invites Others to Jesus* written by Heather and Ashley Holleman.

The book *God Space* focuses on how evangelism shouldn't be awkward. Evangelism isn't about knocking on doors with an agenda or trying to win arguments. In fact, evangelism starts as we play the role of an explorer. It involves asking thoughtful questions and exploring to find out where someone is on his or her spiritual journey. If we don't know where others are on their spiritual journeys, how could we help them move toward God if they desire? If someone doesn't desire to follow Jesus, then our role is to pray for him or her, as God is the only One who can provide that desire.

The book *Sent* reintroduces you to your God-given identity as a sent one to lead others to Jesus. It helps you desire to share your faith and not just see evangelism as an obligation. It invites you into the great adventure of being used by God and watching Him change the lives of your friends and colleagues. Through it all, it shares practical ways to gather and care for those around you; ask good questions; jumpstart spiritual conversations; share personal, transformational stories of God at work; and invite your friends to respond to Jesus.

The second resource in this section (found at the end) is an article on how to share your personal testimony. It's

one of the most important tools you can have in your evangelism toolbox because it's a story no one can refute, the story of how God transformed your life. Someone can argue about the existence of God or whether the Bible is true, but it's pretty difficult to argue the validity of how God changed you personally from the inside out. We'd suggest everyone in your group use the resource to write a draft testimony, have others give feedback, and then take turns sharing your personal testimonies with the group.

Now, before we begin studying the first passage, here is an example of how a grad student, Lauren from Penn State University, led her small group in inviting others to explore Jesus. It's a story that demonstrates the usefulness of both training resources in this section.

Lauren's group hosted a Christmas party and invited their colleagues from their department. Lauren specifically invited two of her labmates, a devout Muslim and another grad student from China. She had been praying for an opportunity to find out what they believed about God, and this was the perfect opportunity!

After dinner, one of the guys facilitated a discussion about the most popular Christmas songs in America and the meaning behind their lyrics. Then another student from the small group shared his personal testimony and read several passages from the Bible regarding the timeline of Jesus's birth. These passages led to more discussion, and the international students who came to

the dinner seemed to love it! This is what Lauren shared afterward:

I think everything went really well, and it was a lot of fun! First of all, being able to welcome people in with food is my personal “sweet spot,” so I was a happy girl just to be able to do that for my friends. One of the grad students in our small group organized the content and led the order of our discussion and did a really great job with that. I was so happy that my labmates from China and the Middle East were so interested in learning and participating in discussion. That was really a gift that they gave us with their time and attention.

Sharing the Christmas story and dinner between two of my labmates as well as the other members of my Cru grad Bible study was a memorable event as each of us continues on our journeys of a relationship with our Heavenly Father. Even before I arrived at Penn State, I felt God calling me to share Christ with the people in my lab group, so the opportunity to have this dinner was an answer to prayer, and living it out was part of my journey in following God’s call on my life.

Lauren and her small group’s party was so simple and natural. Grad students love eating, so they made dinner a central part of their event. In fact, Asian students in

particular love to build relationships and community over meals. If your lab group consists of international students, having a dinner party is a must.

Evangelism should be natural and not awkward, right? Jesus wasn’t a weirdo. At times, He had thousands of people at a time following Him and listening to Him. There are many evangelistic conversations that Jesus had with people around Him that were recorded in the Gospels, and in most of them, Jesus asked them simple questions. Let’s now begin our study of what it looks like to follow Jesus and what a joy it is to invite others to journey along beside us.

### **Questions for Personal Reflection**

1. How would you respond if you were Anna in the opening scenario? What key ideas about the Christian faith or about your spiritual journey would you want to share with Muslim grad students if they were interested?
2. Who are the grad students within your scope of influence on campus? Where are they from? If they’re international students, what American holidays or local places could you introduce them to in order to build relationships with them? In what ways can you reach out to American grad students?



## *Study Passages*

### ACTS 8:26–40

<sup>26</sup> Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place.

<sup>27</sup> And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.

He had come to Jerusalem to worship <sup>28</sup> and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. <sup>29</sup> And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” <sup>30</sup> So Philip ran to

him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

<sup>31</sup> And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. <sup>32</sup> Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.

<sup>33</sup> In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

<sup>34</sup> And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” <sup>35</sup> Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. <sup>36</sup> And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and

the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” <sup>38</sup> And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

<sup>39</sup> And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. <sup>40</sup> But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

What are some key observations?

In this passage:

What needs do the characters in the story experience?

Is there anything unusual, confusing, or surprising?

In the world around me:

Who comes to mind when I think of the needs in this passage?

What's the main plot, argument, or idea?

In this passage:

How does God overcome barriers and meet the needs of the characters in the story?

In light of the needs surfaced in this passage, whom do I want to pray for this week? What will I ask God for? What about Jesus would I want them to know or understand?

In Christ:

What makes Jesus the best One to point others to for the needs surfaced in this passage?

What other step of faith might the Lord be asking me to take in response to the needs surfaced in this passage?