

**MIKE
SLAUGHTER**
Foreword by JIM WALLIS

**CHANGE
WORLD**
the

Recovering
the MESSAGE
and MISSION
of JESUS



7-SESSION STUDY GUIDE

For the Group Leader:

This study guide is intended to guide laypeople in their reading of *Change the World: Rediscovering the Message and Mission of Jesus*, by Mike Slaughter. *Change the World* casts a vision for how Christians today—especially when gathered together as mission-minded church communities—can make a difference for the least, the last, and the lost in our world today. This study helps participants apply those missional principles in their own lives.

This PDF contains two pages for each of the seven sessions. Printed front-and-back, each weekly handout can be contained to one sheet per participant, saving paper and giving participants less to fumble with during the discussion. It is recommended that study participants read the corresponding chapters in the *Change the World* book, but key passages are reprinted on the weekly handout so the group can read and discuss the main idea of each chapter together. (Note: sometimes the book excerpts are abridged or adapted for this study and do not appear exactly as they are in the book.)

Suggestions for the Discussion Leader

1. Prior to the meeting, get comfortable with the material. Read the focus Scripture for the session, the book excerpt on the handout, and the discussion questions.
2. Read the corresponding chapter in *Change the World*, and think of any additional questions or issues your group might enjoy discussing. The handout can be just a jumping-off point for deeper discussions. Don't feel limited by it.
3. For the first couple of sessions, encourage group members to participate as they feel comfortable doing so. Invite quieter members of the group to share their thoughts, but do not pressure them to speak if they are not ready.
4. Read the Scripture passage and book excerpt aloud. Even if participants were asked to do the reading before the session, reading together will refresh memories and enable those who have not read the material already to participate without embarrassment.
5. One way to begin each discussion is to ask participants to voice their initial impression of the Scripture or book excerpt, before asking the questions provided on the handout.
6. Model a style of openness, honesty and warmth. At times, consider being the first to share, particularly when talking about personal experiences, but

remember that as a leader you do not have to know all the answers.

7. Ask the follow-up questions “Why?” or “Why do you believe that?” to help continue a discussion and give it greater depth.
8. Close the session in prayer and be sure everyone knows the time and place of each meeting. Reach out to those that missed the session and invite them to join you next time.

Other *Change the World* resources

Change the World: Rediscovering the Message and Mission of Jesus, by Mike Slaughter
ISBN 9781426702976 \$18.00 . . . \$14.40 with 20% Cokesbury discount

Selections from Change the World (24-page sampler, bundled in packages of 10)
ISBN 9781426711763 \$10.00 for a package of 10

COMING OCTOBER 20-22, 2010

Change the World missional network . . . with Ginghamburg Church

Become part of a new radically missional network that will resource, coach and train churches to become a force of exponential mission in their local communities and throughout the world—regardless of church size, location or resources. The kick-off is October 20-22 on Ginghamburg’s campus in Tipp City, OH. See www.ginghamburg.org/changetheworld.

COMING OCTOBER 2010

Change the World: Study for Leadership Teams (DVD with Leader Guide)

This four-session study is perfect for a church leadership retreat or weekly study. Video segments from Mike Slaughter inspire leaders to make the hard choices about their church’s programs, budget, and overall purpose as they strive to make a real difference in the world by leading people in Christ’s mission.

ISBN 9781426710124 \$39.00 . . . \$31.20 with 20% Cokesbury discount.

COMING FEBRUARY 2011

Change the World: A Study for Small Groups

This six-session study helps small groups grow in mission-mindedness and action. Each session focuses on a gospel story and its modern application to emphasize how Jesus’ mission is now our mission as we seek to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, and heal the sick. DVD features Mike Slaughter and profiles of missional ventures locally and globally to inspire the group in planning their own mission project.

Products will include Participant’s Book, and DVD with Leader Guide.

Session 1: Hearing Christ's Call

Based on Ch. 1, "Missional v. Attractional" pages 1-19

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Luke 4:18-19, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2

More and more people today are deciding that they can pursue God and be a good person outside the church. Despite the church's prominence in American culture and most American towns, misconceptions about and aversion to Christianity run rampant. The church models of the last few decades are no longer adequate to address the questions and needs of younger generations. Many of those who are disenchanted with the church actually have a positive image of Jesus. Their experience and understanding of the church, however, are counter to the Jesus they expect to meet there. We in the church are often perceived as being very unlike Jesus in our priorities, attitudes, politics, and lifestyles. We have neglected Jesus' emphasis on the kingdom of God and its redemptive influence in the world.

The church described in the book of Acts was continually moving beyond all institutional walls and doctrines to faithfully demonstrate the good news of the kingdom. Those early believers embraced a countercultural lifestyle that caused those outside the church to pay serious attention. They shared all they had so that no one would go hungry. They were a visible expression of God's right-side-up values in an upside-down-world.

Read Acts 2:44-47.
Why do you think
this early group
grew so rapidly?

Being the Kingdom Today

Today, the gap between rich and poor is growing ever-wider. The global economic crisis that began in 2008 has only accelerated the erosion of the middle class. In my hometown of Dayton, Ohio, the median income dropped 10.5 percent in one decade. Nearly half of the world's children are living in poverty. What an opportunity for the church to rebuild, restore, and renew in devastated places! This is not a time for retreat but for engagement.

Christians must make a major paradigm shift from attraction evangelism to mission evangelism. We must stop focusing on getting the world into the church, and focus on getting the church into the world! Attractional evangelism parallels the marketing strategy of a vacation cruise line. A cruise ship is a self-contained fortress of programming for every age and interest. You can select from a seemingly endless menu of activities and a 24-hour gourmet buffet. You expect to be served, not to serve.

Mission evangelism, on the other hand, has the priorities and focus of a mission outpost in a challenging place of great human need. Participants in the missional church will be activists for justice and living demonstrations of God's mercy.

1. How would you describe the Christian faith to an unchurched friend?
2. Compare the church as described in Acts 2:44-47 to the church today. How are they similar? How are they different?
3. Would you describe your church or the Christian faith in general as "countercultural"? Why or why not?
4. How is your church like a cruise ship? How is it like a mission outpost?
5. How can you and your church better live out Jesus' stated mission "to proclaim good news to the poor"?

CHALLENGE

Invite someone to come serve with you at a homeless shelter, food pantry, or community clean-up day. Some people that are hesitant to attend worship will gladly participate in helping others.

Session 2: Loving God's People

Based on Ch. 2, "Inclusive v. Exclusive" pages 21-37

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

Matthew 5:43-45

The Christian church has long been divided in the understanding of biblical interpretation. Like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, sometimes we know the letter of the law but miss the spirit of God's intent. Given the exclusivity with which many Christians interpret Christ's message, you can begin to understand why there is such indifference and even hostility toward the gospel by those outside the church.

In our quest to rediscover and reclaim the biblical interpretation of Jesus, it is important to remember that even he was at odds with the schools of biblical orthodoxy during his earthly ministry. He was considered a blasphemer and violator of the Law of Moses. Like many reformers through the centuries, he was executed for the crime of heresy.

All Scripture must be interpreted through and in the spirit of Jesus. When you read any passage, you must ask yourself, *How is this like God who is revealed in Jesus?* When I read troublesome passages that portray God telling people to kill every living thing—"men and women, young and old," including children—I can't accept this as God who is revealed in Jesus. Is it inspired? It is inspired in the sense that it is descriptive of people who are doing their best (and sometimes less) in pursuit of faith and God's promise. These passages describe a people whose sense of God is distorted by the tint of their cultural lenses, which tend to focus on differences, separation, and superiority.

The way of Jesus is a higher way. He expressed the moral character of God when he commanded us to love everyone, including our enemies, and to not resist or retaliate against those who hurt us. God truly is "Our Father," the father of all nations, tribes, and peoples on the earth. If you are a parent, you can understand to some small degree the love and acceptance that God feels toward us. Even as an imperfect, human father, I can't think of any failure so great that it would cause me to banish my children from my life or my home. They could choose on their own to walk away from my love and provision, but I would not give up on or forsake them in their failure. If God is the ultimate loving father, then how can the church be unloving, mean-spirited, internally focused, and exclusive?

Jesus warned of the deadly danger of self-righteousness. Self-righteousness is a form of spiritual blindness that makes us oblivious to our own brokenness and magnifies the failures of others. When we judge other people, we demean the redemptive work of

Jesus and make it our own. Jesus warned us against trying to separate the wheat from the weeds ourselves, “because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest” (Matt. 13:29-30). This is not an affirmation for “anything goes” immoral behavior. In our human brokenness, we are just not qualified to sort it out. God calls us not to judge and exclude, but to love and serve.

1. Do you have close relationships with anyone of another religion, race, or sexual orientation? What have you learned from those relationships?
2. How would you respond if your child, parent, or a close friend or sibling did something that you sincerely disapproved of? How do you think God would respond if it were you that had done that thing?
3. What does it mean to “let both [the wheat and the weeds] grow together until the harvest”? How do we practice that in real life?
4. Read the familiar stories of The Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) and The Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32). What do they tell us about how to treat those who are different from us or who make decisions we disapprove of?

How would you respond to this person?

“I used to call myself a Christian. Yet over the last 4-5 years, I am leaning toward renouncing my Christianity. It all started with the 2004 election and I was disgusted by the way the “evangelicals” turned that election into a battle of “family values.” I teach at a local university in the engineering department. I work with so many people from different cultures, religions, and backgrounds, and many of them I have found to be beautiful people. One of them is a Muslim, yet so many fault me for accepting this person because of his religion. We share the human experience! A person may be gay, Jewish, Muslim, Atheist, etc. I search to know that person by their heart. The more I experience “Christianity” these days the more I want to run far and fast from Christians.”

CHALLENGE

Ask a friend outside the church what his or her experience has been with Christians. Seek to understand and show love, rather than to defend.

Session 3: Becoming a Disciple

Based on Ch. 3, "Disciples v. Decisions" pages 39-53

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2:44-47

The early Christian church was an unofficial movement that existed in tension with the established religious institution and the Roman state. It was driven by a passionate belief that a revolutionary leader had come to establish a countercultural kingdom on earth. For these first Christians the kingdom of God was not a disembodied heaven after death but a new way of living on earth. They were committed to being Christ's body of transformation for a hurting, needy world.

Jesus' first disciples learned as they traveled and ministered alongside Jesus. Discipleship occurs in the active process of doing. Commitment to Christ is measured not in belief but in action. Many people believe in God, but don't trust God enough to step out in faith and live like followers of Christ. Jesus put it out there plainly: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Luke 11:28). We are not what we want to say; we are what we do.

Disciple has the same root as the word discipline, and it is by practicing the five classic disciplines of the Christian faith that we grow in our likeness of Christ.

1. daily scripture reading
2. prayer and meditation
3. life in community
4. service
5. stewardship

How disciplined are you in other areas of life, such as fitness or work?

The Challenge of Discipleship

Jesus' encounter with the rich young entrepreneur (Luke 18:18-29) provides insight into the commitment that Christ requires of those who would follow him. The young man came to Jesus asking a serious question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He was a seeker, caught between the world of success and the kingdom of significance. Jesus began by listing biblical commandments: "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony,

honor your father and mother.” The man enthusiastically declared his commitment to biblical morality, but stopped short of commitment to discipleship.

Jesus made it clear to him that the call to discipleship goes beyond moralistic principles to a commitment of lifestyle change: “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” Following Jesus calls for a radical reordering of priorities—of exchanging the world’s materialistic value system for Jesus’ self-sacrificial values.

Many people profess Jesus but bring him into their own worldview instead of being converted to Jesus’ worldview of the kingdom of God. Discipleship is the ongoing, focused process of being moved from believer to follower, from donation to sacrifice, from moralistic principles to lifestyles of self-denial, from the pursuit of success to true significance. Disciples learn to drop everything they have into the hands of Jesus to be directed by God’s purpose.

1. What do you envision when you hear the phrase “kingdom of God”? What would it mean to bring the kingdom to earth?
2. Do you measure faith in belief or action? How can belief lead to action? How can action lead to belief?
3. Which of the five disciplines listed above do you do most regularly? Which do you need to do more? How do each of these help you grow as a disciple?
4. How do you feel when you read Jesus’ admonition to “sell everything you have and give to the poor”?
5. Discipleship is a lifelong journey, not a one-time decision. Is your journey smooth and steady, rocky and winding, or are you still at the starting gate?

CHALLENGE

Focus on one of the five disciplines that you do not currently do regularly. Commit to practicing that discipline every day for one week. Take note of how it affects your relationships with God and other people.

Session 4: Living Simply

Based on Ch. 4, "Micro v. Macro" pages 55-67

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others."

Mark 12: 41-43

Early in our marriage, my wife Carolyn and I moved to Wilmore, Kentucky, to pursue our graduate degrees. We moved into a three-room cinder block duplex that had been built right after World War II in conjunction with the GI bill. When I say cinder block, I mean there was no insulation or drywall. When it was hot outside, it was an oven inside. In the frozen tundra of January there was frost on the walls on the inside. We had little money, but Carolyn was masterful at making a \$20-a-week grocery budget work in the 1970s. It is amazing how many variations there are on tuna casserole! The floor was 1946 linoleum, which we covered with remnants of orange shag carpeting. We painted crates that served as end tables and bookcases orange to match. My grandparents gave us a table that had been in their cellar, and we bought directors' chairs for living room furniture. Despite our shabby abode, Carolyn and I look back at those times as a reminder that full and abundant life consists not of the things we possess, but of the relationships in which we invest.

The recent global recession is likewise teaching Americans that bigger isn't always better and less can be more. More people are using public transportation. We are driving less and keeping our cars longer. Mortgage-strapped families are finding ways to downsize homes. Layoffs and salary freezes are forcing the majority of us to downsize our lifestyles and simplify our lives. "Simplicity" and "back to basics" are values that are being reemphasized.

Read Luke 12:14-21.
Can you relate to the man's problem of abundance?

Research shows that more people are seeking ways to simplify and reduce clutter, and also to influence the world around them. Eighty-six percent describe themselves as "caring deeply about social injustice," and 84 percent report the desire to "live a simple life." These are the priorities the church should be emphasizing anyway!

Returning to basics—aiming for the "micro" over the "macro"—means valuing simple pleasures, enjoying a family game night rather than going out to the movies,

going hiking and camping rather than taking an expensive vacation, and cooking pasta together rather than dining out. It also means giving generously to those in need. Even if money is tight, continuing to give of what we have reminds us that there are people in much more desperate situations than us and keeps our focus on others, rather than on ourselves.

We can all benefit from a renewed focus on people rather than material things. Life has gotten so complicated as schedules are too crowded for intentional conversation and connection. From soccer to swimming, art class to dance class, the seamless movement from activity to activity keeps the neighborhood car pool in perpetual motion. And you can even answer e-mails as you cheer your children from the stands.

What our souls are truly seeking is an authentic sense of community and meaning that too often gets lost in the din of consumerism and constant busyness. Sometimes less really is more.

1. Do you recall a time when you lived on very little? How have recent economic factors affected your lifestyle and values?
2. When money is tight, do you decrease your giving? What insight does the story of the “widow’s mite” (Mark 12:41-43) bring to that situation?
3. What areas of your life need simplifying? Your home, your schedule, your commitments? How can you clear out some of the clutter, literally or metaphorically?
4. Do your daily activities improve or diminish your quality of life? Does church ever feel like just another activity to squeeze into your schedule?
5. Do you have a community of people with whom you can truly be yourself and share your deepest thoughts and concerns? If so, do you make time with that group a priority? If not, how can you find or develop such a community?

CHALLENGE

Think of one way you could decrease your spending while increasing your quality time with family or friends at the same time. Tackle a home repair project as a group rather than paying to have it done, or discontinue your cable subscription and interact more as a family rather than watching T.V.

Session 5: Branching Out

Based on Chapter 5, "Multiply v. Expand" pages 69-84

He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. . . He and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.' When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Luke 5:3-6, 9-11

Healthy living things grow. In our bigger-is-better culture, people can use this fact of nature to justify ever-expanding church buildings and programs, but that is not the way nature works. "Normal growth comes by the division of cells," says Howard Snyder. "The growth of individual cells beyond a certain point without division is pathological." My infant granddaughter, Ellie, started out as a single cell, but she did not pop out of her mother as one big, eight pound cell! Rather, that single fertilized egg cell divided again and again, reproducing itself in various specialized forms, until there were billions of cells. Likewise, healthy, growing church communities will not keep expanding their original gathering, but will reproduce themselves in other people in other places.

While church growth in recent decades has tended to focus on expansion, the model of the New Testament church was a multiplying ministry. The Jesus Movement spread rapidly through the multiplication of small congregations. Even though the number of converts grew to the thousands in many cities, the New Testament often refers to "the church that meets in your/their house"—small, family-like communities meeting in multiple locations.

Do you prefer small, intimate social gatherings, or large parties with lots of people?

The evangelist Luke gave an insightful account of Jesus' call to his first disciples. Jesus was teaching the crowds on the bank of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus enlisted some fishermen's assistance and used Simon Peter's boat for a better vantage point in addressing the amassing crowds. The fishermen hadn't had much luck that day, but Jesus told them to let down their nets one more time. He asked them to try again, in a different way—to act out of the box of their traditional experience. Try new things. Fish in new places.

When asked why they don't share their faith more often or invite more people to church, many Christians say that they don't know anyone who isn't a Christian, or that everyone they know already goes to church somewhere. This is actually quite unlikely, given the declining influence of the church in today's culture and the increasing number of people who say they have no religious affiliation. But if it does feel like everyone you come into contact with is already a Christian, try a different "fishing spot." Venture outside of your typical group of friends or the places you typically go. Be open to new people and new experiences. Strike up a conversation with a stranger, or raise new, deeper topics of conversation with people you have known a long time. They may go to church but still yearn for a deeper sense of meaning and mission.

People are often more comfortable joining something new than trying to integrate themselves into a long-established group with its own history and unspoken rules. This is part of why new churches tend to grow more rapidly than older congregations. If your small group or congregation hasn't received many new people lately, try sending a few people out to start a new gathering. By multiplying your group's DNA, rather than expanding, you can open the door for new people to experience God and grow in discipleship.

1. Has your congregation or small group ministry been growing a lot lately, or does it seem to have stagnated? Why do you think this is?
2. Have any new worship or study gatherings been started recently? What gaps do you see in the way your church reaches out to the community?
3. Do you spend most of your time with other Christians? Is this intentional? Does it make you uncomfortable to talk about your faith with non-Christians?
4. In what new ways or new places could you, your group, or your church start "fishing"?
5. What does it mean to you when Jesus says "from now on you will be catching people," or to be a "fisher of people"?

CHALLENGE

Venture out into a new place to minister in a new way. Start a new Bible study in your home or invite some new acquaintances over for dinner. Invite some new friends to serve with you in a ministry you haven't participated in yet.

Session 6: Investing Wisely

Based on Chapter 6, "Mission v. Mortar" pages 85-103

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6: 19-21

In the book of Acts, Timothy, Paul, and Silas "went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia." They made several other attempts that were blocked by the Spirit, and then late one night Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia pleading with him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." The mission team immediately set out for Macedonia (just north of Greece) "being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them" (Acts 16:6-10).

Our church board has made three serious attempts to initiate a building program that would complete the master plan developed in 1993. We have traveled to church campuses around the country and enlisted the services of consultants and architects. We have prayed and fasted, done feasibility studies, and spent days in planning retreats. Each time the Spirit has put in our hearts a yield sign saying, "That is not where I am going, but follow me to..."

In 2004 the "follow me to" became Darfur. I had a vision of a child standing and pleading, "Come over to Darfur and help us." The establishment of the Sudan Project (www.thesudanproject.org) became the latest alternative to a building campaign. Ginghamburg Church and our partners have invested almost \$5 million in the Sudan Project as of Christmas 2009, developing sustainable agriculture, safe water, and children's protection programs. If we had followed our own strategic plan and gone ahead with the capital campaign as planned, we would not have had the mobility to respond so rapidly to what the United Nations has deemed the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Listening to the voice of the Spirit allowed us to move with God in speed and to have significant impact in scope.

Jesus warned us that how we spend our money is an excellent barometer for our values. "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," he said. Every year, I challenge the people at Ginghamburg to spend less on Christmas presents and festivities for their own families, and give an equal amount to the Sudan Project.

Christmas is Jesus' birthday, not our own, and by sacrificing some of our own luxuries in order to serve those in need, we serve Jesus himself.

Will you invest your financial and material resources in buildings and other trappings that limit your ability to respond to others in need? Or will you allocate your resources so that life transformation, relationships, and mission are prioritized? We must find ways both as individuals and as faith communities to live more simply so that others may simply live.

How do you respond to the word "sacrifice"? Is it a positive or negative reaction?

1. Have you ever felt trapped by your finances? By overwhelming debt or overwhelming "stuff"?
2. How is God calling you to serve him with your resources? Do you feel hesitant to respond? What would help you feel freer to respond?
3. Think about your family's budget. If a stranger were to examine where your "treasure" lies, what would he or she conclude about your "heart"?
4. Where do your priorities conflict with your budget? What changes could you make to help them line up more accurately?
5. If you had a million dollars with which to help others, what would you do? How can you start pursuing that missional dream with the money you have now?

CHALLENGE

Strive to cut a major expense in half and give the money you save to the poor. You might choose to dine out less, take a simpler vacation much closer to home, or cut your fuel expenses by taking public transportation.

Session 7: Serving Courageously

Based on Chapter 7, "Courage v. Compliance" pages 105-118

Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go.

Joshua 1:6-7

Life is brief and fleeting. There is a cemetery behind my house where I regularly take contemplative walks with my dog. I look at the tombstones and wonder about the lives and stories of the people whose lifetimes are simply marked by the years of birth and death. My walks through the cemetery are reminders of both the gift and brevity of life, and bring the realization that life is really defined by the dash between the two dates. Your life is a gift from God. It is what you do in the dash that becomes your gift back to God. Fear and anxiety can neutralize your opportunity to finish the unique role that you have been created to fulfill in your lifetime. We are all here to serve a purpose in God's redemptive mission. Don't waste that gift.

God calls his people to act courageously in times of chaos, to not allow the paralysis of fear to hinder the purposes of God. The first words from the lips of our resurrected Lord on Easter morning were, "Do not be afraid." Faith is not the absence of fear. Faith is feeling the fear and then acting on the promises and purposes of God anyway. Faith is when every cell in your body is screaming "Run!" while you continue to follow forward in obedience, praying, "Not my will, Lord, but your will be done!" Faith is responding to God in spite of those feelings and uncertainties.

What is the most afraid you have ever been?
How did you get through it?

Don't let fear determine your actions. When Jesus told the women not to fear, he was saying in effect, "Don't allow irrational emotion to determine your course of action; rather, act on the promise of God." God is the God of abundance, love, life, and provision. Not even death can deny God's redemptive plan. No circumstance can change the promise or purposes of God! Life is a choice. God said, "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live" (Deut 30:19). To experience life, you must take risks.

One of my favorite biblical stories is about Peter when he stepped out of the boat and attempted to walk on water. There wasn't anything about the act that made

sense. Others saw it as rash and impulsive. When he began to sink, I'm sure there were plenty of "I told you so's" and "I knew the fool was crazy." Why did Peter do it? Peter stepped out of the boat because he heard Jesus say, "Come!" Like the eleven disciples who stayed in the boat, most will miss the wonder of a miraculous life mission because they will never act beyond the confines of the lifeboat or outside the expectations of those traveling with them.

Why do people stay in destructive, abusive relationships? Why do people stay in jobs they hate instead of taking the risks to pursue a lifelong passion? Why don't people stand up and speak out and act in the face of injustice? It all comes down to one word—*fear*. That is why the first words out of Jesus' mouth after the resurrection were, "Do not be afraid!" There is no circumstance, world leader, or even church board that can derail the righteous purpose of God. The purpose of God might be delayed, but it will not be denied. You and I are called to be part of a world-changing, Spirit-empowered community of action. The outcome will not be determined by your brains or your brawn or the abundance of your resources—only your willingness to leave the safety of your life raft and the compliance of those who remain on it. Have courage, Saints—for God is in this place and the gates of hell cannot prevail against us.

1. What is the most courageous action you have ever personally witnessed?
2. Have you ever heard God calling you to "step out of the boat" and take a certain courageous action? Did you respond like Peter, or like the disciples?
3. What fears or anxieties are standing in the way of your acting out in faith?
4. When is the last time you said "Someone should do something about that!"? Could that "someone" be you? Why or why not?
5. In what way do you dream of changing the world? How are you working toward that goal today?

CHALLENGE

Write your own eulogy. What do you want people to be able to say about you and what you did with your time on earth? Life is short—act now to make the biggest difference you can for God.