

Five moves. Four children. Two deployments to combat zones. Megan has discovered that this lifestyle takes its toll. She helps military spouses see that we're chosen for this specific time and place. Together, we'll discover what it means to follow Jesus, love people, and live on mission.

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# Contents

Welcome	11
<b>PART ONE: FOLLOW JESUS</b>	<b>19</b>
1. We Signed Up for an Intimate Relationship with Jesus	21
2. We Signed Up for Biblical Marriage	33
3. We Signed Up to Leave a Legacy of Faith	49
<b>PART TWO: LOVE PEOPLE</b>	<b>61</b>
4. We Signed Up to Be Part of a Local Church	63
5. We Signed Up to Serve	73
6. We Signed Up to Live in Community	83
<b>PART THREE: LIVE ON MISSION</b>	<b>91</b>
7. We Signed Up to Be Radically Hospitable	93
8. We Signed Up to Open Our Homes	103
9. We Signed Up to Make Disciples	113
Wrapping Up	125
A Letter from Megan	129
Acknowledgments	135
Notes	139

# We Signed up for an Intimate Relationship with Jesus

**T**he man who made me a military spouse also had no small part in helping me become a follower of Jesus.

Before we met, I was a college dropout trying to live my best life in all the worst ways. In open rebellion, I denied God's very existence, felt extremely disenfranchised with the church, and truly believed this broken life is all we get. About six months after we were married, my husband woke me up after I had spent the previous night partying. "Hey, let's head to church this morning, babe." Laughing half-heartedly, I rolled over and put a pillow over my head to signal I was ignoring him. I said, "Yeah. That's not

## Know What You Signed Up For

happening for you, man.” “Please?” he replied. “I want you to just try. If you don’t try, I will really be disappointed.”

Well, that did the trick. As a newlywed, I didn’t want to deny this very kind man an honest effort for his request. So, dragging myself from the warmth of the fluffy down comforter, I started to get dressed. I threw on an old concert T-shirt from a Bright Eyes show in New Orleans, a flowy hippie skirt I nabbed from a local flea market, and my favorite pair of flip-flops. My hair was not-so-neatly tied into a side bun and I barely washed my face, much less applied makeup. I looked nine ways of crazy. I only share the details of my appearance because it was the early 2000s and this boy took me to a very respectable, very affluent church looking like a bag lady. I’m sure the deacons there thought I needed some sort of financial assistance, and let’s just say I got my fair share of side-glances.

Visibly uncomfortable, I shuffled through the pews to find a spot that didn’t look occupied or reserved. Finally, settling in, I watched a rotund, stately gentleman as he began waddling his way to the pulpit. His three-piece suit was perfectly pressed, and he held this little rag he was wiping his forehead with. My eyes darted around in anticipation as he began to start instructing the congregation, a people he referred to as “Beloved,” to open their Bibles to the book of Ephesians.

On the way out of our apartment that morning, I had grabbed my copy of the Bible. The only Bible I owned was the one obligatory gift Bible people give to high school seniors when they graduate. It was a brand-new, gold-foiled New International Version, and had

indented tabs in the pages. To tell you how unfamiliar I was with this particular gift, I was using it as a doorstep in our second bedroom. I had rarely picked it up, much less opened it, before this particular morning in “big church.” “What’s an ‘Ephesia?’” I asked my husband, whispering. After peering over at a few neighbors and saying to myself, *It’s in the back half*, I thumbed through toward the back of my Bible and found the place.

### **GLAD TO BE WRECKED**

The pastor started in on the task of unpacking the first chapter. Ephesians 1:1–14 is forever burned into my memory and etched upon my soul. As I listened to the words, I was overcome. God has chosen a people for Himself, a people He has blessed and called to holiness. “In love,” the pastor read, “he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons [and daughters] through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:5–6). “Beloved” was Jesus. Now, I had heard the gospel before and had a few emotional responses to a few Christian worship songs, but this time, the gospel wrecked me. All in one moment, I was simultaneously overwhelmed in the conviction of my sin and the joy of knowing that Jesus paid for it all.

After the service, we walked back to our car, and I could barely speak. By the time my husband closed the car doors, I erupted in tears. “Did you know about this? Is this true? For real?” Keith, sounding excited and somewhat surprised, replied, “I have known

## Know What You Signed Up For

this truth since I was five. I am glad now you know it too.” He took me to lunch and walked me through his favorite Scriptures. That day remains the first milestone in my faith walk with the Lord. On that day, I truly submitted my heart to Jesus Christ. This is where the journey for all of us begins.

That’s my story. Do you have your own story of when you first gave your heart to Christ?

### **OF FIRST IMPORTANCE**

The apostle Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament we hold in our hands, is telling God’s people who were assembling at the church in Corinth (and us too) about what truth they should stand upon.

Now I would remind you, brothers [and sisters], of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures . . . (1 Corinthians 15:1–4)

The phrase “as of first importance” is tattooed in my brain. This is the most important information in order to experience salvation and the gift of eternal life. It is the linchpin.

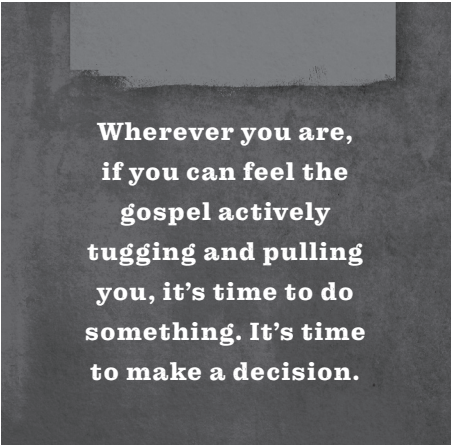
This is the gospel. Whether you're already a believer or you're checking it out, let's review some of the basics. Jesus, the Son of God, died for our sin. He was buried. On the third day, He was raised (1 Corinthians 15:1–5). He offered Himself as a sinless and stainless sacrifice in order to bring us, a sinful people, back into right standing and relationship with God.

What does this mean for you and me? Well, sin can be defined simply as thoughts, speech, or behaviors that are in contradiction with God's com-

mands for us. Essentially, we all are riddled with sin issues. From birth, we are brought into a sinful world with a sinful nature.

How do we know this? Our hearts long for things that will harm us, and we are incapable of removing or abstaining from sin in our own strength. Christ's finished work on the cross accomplished something miraculous. In His sacrifice, He paid the penalty of our sin debt and satisfied the wrath of God. Scripture says that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). This means there is a penalty, or punishment, for the cost of sin. The gospel tells us that Jesus took this punishment, leaving us with the gift of mercy.

Now—and this is truly amazing—when God looks at us, He



**Wherever you are,  
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to make a decision.**

looks at us through the sacrifice of His Son and views us as unblemished, holy people. If you are reading this book in your living room, tucked into the corner of a coffee shop, or wherever you are, and you can feel the gospel actively tugging and pulling you, it's time to do something. It's time to make a decision. It is time to repent and believe.

### **A TRUE CHANGE OF HEART**

The Greek word for “repent” is *metanoia*. (The reason this is important is because the original language the New Testament was written in is Greek.) The word *metanoia* is where we get the word “metamorphosis,” which denotes a transformation. *Metanoia* means to change your mind,<sup>1</sup> which grows into a true heart transformation. You need to change your mind about how you feel about your sin.

Do you love your sin? Do you excuse it? Is your sin something you hide—or worse, boast about? How do you really feel about your sin issues, the places in your life where God has blatantly told you in His Word that you have it wrong?

The Bible, the Christian source of authoritative teaching on who God is, what He is like, and what He wants, defines sin as disobedience of His commands. Spoiler alert: We do not get to define what sin is based on our preferences or our understanding of cultural norms. Repentance means to acknowledge your sin and to be convicted to change your mind about how you feel about them. You can't repent of your sin if you don't think you have sin.



Nor can you be saved from sin if you do not find sinfulness, or the condemnation of it, threatening.

After the act of repentance, the engagement with faith is what follows. The Greek word for faith is *pistis*.<sup>2</sup> Much like *metanoia*, the other Greek term we learned, the definition of *pistis* is more poetic than our English equivalent. It paints a word picture. It means to be persuaded to come to trust. Faith is not limited to an intellectual knowledge but placing trust in something you believe to be true.

What do we believe to be true? First, God is holy and is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Jesus is the Son of God. On the cross, the Son of God laid down His life, He was buried in a tomb, and He was raised again. He died and then conquered death in order to redeem God's people and appease God's wrath against sin. The Holy Spirit, the breath of God, is given to those who place their faith and trust in God through the finished work of Jesus. He acts as a teacher, a comforter, and He empowers us—drawing believers in toward a deeper understanding of our Savior. The Christian life is fleshed out through daily living, remaining connected to Him, repenting as we give in to our sinful desires, growing in our knowledge of Him, living in His holiness, and an enduring faith.

As a side note, repentance and belief should be shared. When you repent and believe, one of the first things I suggest you do is to call someone you know and tell them. Call a friend. Call a pastor. Reach out to another military spouse who you know is a believer and let her celebrate in this moment with you. Surely, the angels in heaven

## Know What You Signed Up For

are rejoicing over you now, just as Jesus said: “There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

### **GROWING INTIMACY**


Furthermore, when repentance and faith are pursued, the desire to intimately know God is present. The natural progression after we have repented our sins and believed in God’s truth is to begin to seek out His wisdom and pursue a *relationship* with Him through spiritual disciplines. As believers, we should constantly be conducting an honest self-inventory and taking an active part in building our faith. The way faith is built is through spiritual disciplines, which are biblical practices used to help us grow in the grace of God, sharpen our faith, and deepen our belief in the good news of the gospel. Basic spiritual disciplines include worship, prayer, Bible study, self-examination, service, and living in Christian community.

After becoming a believer in my early twenties, I was completely starving spiritually, and I longed to know God in deeper, more intimate ways. I heard the phrase, “Have a relationship with God.” Every time I heard someone say this, I would be genuinely confused. What did that mean? How does someone have a relationship with God? Many years later, I discovered having a relationship with God and intimately knowing the person of Jesus meant creating space and habits in my life, habits that visibly and tangibly represented my love of Christ. Think about it this way: As a married woman, what kind of relationship would I have with my spouse if I

only spoke with him for one hour on Sunday morning? How much passion or connection would be fostered if I only made time for a five-minute chat or a passing “hello”? Obviously, the answer is I would not have much of a relationship at all.

Friend, please don't look at this section as a list of more things to do or an impossible stack of activities added to an already overflowing plate. When we submit our lives to the Lord, we “sign up” to surrender it all—our hearts, our calendars, our wallets, and our focus. All of ourselves. This submission to Jesus, saying, “God, all of this life is now for You,” is a decision to ask Him to radically transform us and the way we live. Ask God to help you reprioritize your life—ordering His passions, His pursuits, and His purposes above your own. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you in His worship or the washing of the Word. Beg for a healthy prayer life and a spirit renewed. Seek out practical ways to encounter Him in your everyday routine, petitioning Him to grow you and your faith in love and mercy.

Here's the rub. Nothing else in the rest of this book is possible apart from the love of Christ. Everything following this section is firmly based upon and rooted in a fundamental understanding of the gospel: that Jesus died and rose again.



**Knowing the gospel,  
and submitting to  
it, is the first step  
toward building a  
relationship with  
the Lord.**

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So, what's next? What steps should we take toward growing a relationship with the Lord? We read in John 4 about Jesus' interaction with a Samaritan woman at a well. Maybe you know it. If not, take a quick read of this chapter, focusing in on verses 23–24. These verses read, “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.” Worshiping God “in spirit and truth” means to worship God as one indwelt with His Spirit through the truth that Jesus is the Son of God—given for you. Knowing the gospel, and submitting to it, is the first step toward building a relationship with the Lord.

This process of growing in grace and faith looks like pursuing God with your time, your talents, your money, and your gifts. Try listening to worship music in the morning, starting your day in a heart stance of love and adoration toward God. Join a Bible study or start your day with a devotional reading of the Word. Journal through your thoughts and prayers—or find a way to slow down—sitting still regularly before God. Begin surrounding yourself with like-minded people who love the Lord, who can point you toward Him, and who will encourage you to know more of His character. Blessing others through kindness or praying together fosters a deeply beautiful bond and helps us knit our worship of God together. All these things reorient our heart toward a relationship with a loving God and builds faith that withstands the weight and weariness this military life so often brings.

Take the time to not only know God is real, that He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe . . . but also learn to know Him intimately as Father, provider, protector, peace giver, and friend. AMEN!

## Your Turn

1. Have you made the decision to put your faith in Christ and to live for Him with all you are?
2. Who can you tell about this decision, whether you made it recently or years ago?
3. Which of the spiritual disciplines mentioned are part of your daily routine? Which are more challenging for you to pursue?

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