



BEN TRUEBLOOD  
& BRIAN MILLS

**A**  
**DIFFERENT**  
**COLLEGE**  
**EXPERIENCE**

FOLLOWING CHRIST IN COLLEGE



Lifeway Students

## EDITORIAL TEAM

Hamilton Barber  
Writer

Karen Daniel  
Editorial Team Leader

Kyle Wiltshire  
Content Editor

John Paul Basham  
Manager, Student Ministry Publishing

Brooke Hill  
Production Editor

Ben Trueblood  
Director, Student Ministry

Ross Funderburk  
Art Direction

Published by Lifeway Press® • © 2022

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing by the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to LifeWay Press®, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234.

ISBN: 978-1-0877-4777-4

Item: 005833139

Dewey Decimal Classification Number: 248.83

Subject Heading: RELIGION/ CHRISTIAN MINISTRY/ YOUTH

Printed in the United States of America.

Student Ministry Publishing  
Lifeway Resources  
One Lifeway Plaza  
Nashville, Tennessee 37234

We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review Lifeway's doctrinal guideline, please visit [www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline](http://www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline).

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>About the Authors</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>How to Use this Study</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Session 1: Identity</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Session 2: The Church</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Session 3: Relationships</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Session 4: Wisdom</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Leader Guide</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Retreat Guide</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Resources for Leaders</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Resources for College Students</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Resources for High School Seniors</b>	<b>68</b>

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**Ben Trueblood** serves as the Director of Student Ministry for Lifeway Christian Resources and has twenty years of student ministry experience, fourteen of which were spent in the local church as a student pastor. Ben is the author of three books, the host of The Student Ministry Podcast by Lifeway, is involved in training, consulting, and speaking to student ministries across the United States, and invests in youth pastors weekly through Student Ministry That Matters on YouTube. Ben and His wife Kristen have four children: Jonathan, Avery, Josiah, and Adrienne.



**Brian Mills** serves as the senior pastor of Trinity Baptist Church of Yukon, Oklahoma. Previously, he served as college pastor at Cross Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas, which reaches over 1,000 college students and young adults each week. He has authored three books and travels the country as a communicator of the gospel. He has led some of the largest student ministries in the country, along with serving as a teaching pastor since he began full-time ministry in 1999. Brian is happily married to Jennifer and they have two awesome children: McKenna and Parker.



## INTRODUCTION

We wrote this study because we are passionate about high school and college students. Throughout our time in ministry, we've seen a lot of things go wrong in people's lives because of an incorrect view of the college experience. We want you to succeed in your college years and we believe that it can be the best experience of your life so far, but that will require you to make some difficult choices. You won't be able to approach your college experience like many of the people around you.

This study will help you understand more about your faith and help you to know how to make decisions that are built on the Word of God. When you are done with the next four (or more) years of your life, you should be more equipped than ever to embrace the life God has for you. We want to challenge you to take on that life with great wisdom and discernment.

During your college years, you will turn twenty-one, potentially find a spouse, be confronted with the greatest temptation you have ever faced, and have more freedom than you've ever known. Are you ready? The freshman-year mistakes happen because most are not. Don't let the college experience get the best of you; get the best of it. This study will help you do so.

—Ben and Brian



## HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

**A Different College Experience** is a four-session Bible study designed to prepare and equip students for the college experience. It can be used as a companion resource to the 2019 book with the same name published by B&H Books, but it's not required to participate in this study.

The sessions are divided into three main sections—Getting Started, Study, and Next Steps. Each session includes a personal study and journaling pages for further reflection. A leader guide is also provided to prepare those who are walking students through this book in a group setting.

**Getting Started** provides questions that introduce the topic and helps generate discussion.

**Study** explores the session topic, shedding light on God's design for the college experience for students through exploration of His Word and thought-provoking questions.

**Next Steps** challenge students to apply what they've learned and continue the journey in their everyday lives.

**Personal Study** is intended to further illustrate the session topic and help students as they navigate the college experience.

**Journaling Pages** are provided to answer questions from the personal study and for further reflection.

**Leader Guide**, found on pages 56-61 at the back of this book, helps you prepare each week. Use this guide to gain an understanding of the content for each session and learn ways to engage students in life-changing discussion.

**Other Resources** are found at the back of this book to facilitate this material in different environments and for unique audiences.

- **Retreat Guide** (pages 62-63) offers suggestions for how this material may be used in a retreat setting.
- **Resources for Leaders** (pages 64-65) gives leaders other resources they can use as they prepare students for and walk alongside them in their college experience.
- **Resources for College Students** (pages 66-67) guides current college students who want to walk through this study with friends.
- **Resources for High School Seniors** (pages 68-75) provides resources that will be helpful as students prepare for the college experience.

# SESSION ONE

# IDENTITY

# GET STARTED

**What is the most memorable trip you've ever taken?**

**What was it about that trip that stood out to you?**

We've all been there: standing at the beginning of a journey. Our bags are packed. The car is gassed up. The plane tickets are bought. The stage is set, and what lies ahead is a voyage into the unknown. Just the open road or open sky, and a journey and a destination before us.

The Christian life is not much different, but on a much bigger scale. It's the journey of an entire life, the destination—eternity. Right now, you are already somewhere on this journey: some of you have only just begun; others have been on the way for years. Regardless of where you find yourself, let's start at the beginning so that we can run—and finish—our journeys well.

# STUDY

At the beginning of every Christian's journey, and at the center of our very lives, is the gospel: the good news about Jesus.

**In your own words, what do you think the gospel is?**

**How have you seen the gospel affect your life?**

## **READ GENESIS 1:1 AND REVELATION 4:11.**

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

*Our Lord and God,  
you are worthy to receive  
glory and honor and power,  
because you have created all things,  
and by your will  
they exist and were created.*

**Why do you think we should start talking about the gospel by talking about God?**

Any gospel presentation or discussion that doesn't start with God doesn't start at the beginning. The gospel is not about us, it's about our Creator, His faithfulness, and His provision for us even though we are unworthy. He is perfect and holy. The gospel is His work in our lives, not something that we do to earn His favor.

We were created in God's image, but, as we move through what the gospel is, we learn that we veered away from Him.

## **READ JEREMIAH 17:9 AND ROMANS 3:23.**

*The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it?*

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

**What do you think the difference is between being a “good person” and being a sinner?**

## How can we say that “all have sinned”? What does it mean to be a sinner?

You’ve probably heard something like this before: “I’m not perfect, but I’m not all bad.” Scripture tells us the opposite. There is nobody who is righteous on their own (see Rom. 3:10-12).

What’s more, Jesus consistently raised the bar for holiness: “not all bad” isn’t good enough. For example, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that it isn’t good enough not to commit murder; you must also not be angry with your brother or sister (see Matt. 5:21-22). The problem at the root of this isn’t that we’re just not good enough, it’s that our hearts are sick. The best that we can do on our own looks like dirty rags in God’s eyes (see Isa. 64:6).

## READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:20-21.

*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf, “Be reconciled to God.” He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

## Why is the resurrection of Jesus so crucial to the gospel?

## How would you explain Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross to someone who has never heard of it before?

If Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, He wasn’t who He said He was, the penalty we owe for our sin hasn’t been paid, and, quite frankly, we live in hopelessness.

Fortunately for us, Jesus is who He said He is. He **did** rise from the dead. He **did** conquer sin and death on the cross. He rose from the grave, doing exactly what He said He would do, proving Himself to be the only Savior we can put our faith in.

Amazingly, when we see ourselves through the light of the gospel, it not only changes the way we see ourselves, it changes the way we see God.

## What comes into your mind when you think about God?

To some, God is a piece of a puzzle that you drop into place when you can't find anything else to put there. He's a unknowable sky-genie, or just a comforting thought in troubling times.

When God is just another puzzle piece in your life, you're putting Him somewhere He doesn't belong. You are trying to cram Him into a box you've made for Him. God is not a piece of the puzzle; He is the entire frame. He is the lens through which you see everything and everyone. He is the one who makes the other pieces fit; He isn't what you plug in to an otherwise incomplete picture.

Seeing God for who He truly is will take your breath away. Below, there are some Scripture references. Read each and then write a sentence describing what you learn about God through them:

**Isaiah 6:1-8**

**Ephesians 2:1-10**

**Genesis 1**

**Job 38**

Seeing God for who He is doesn't only change the way we see God, it changes the way we view ourselves.

We're surrounded by people telling us who we're supposed to be. They may tell us we have to have a social media following or develop a personal brand. They may tell us we have to acquire new tech or dress in a certain way. Because of these voices, you may feel like your identity is tied to what you can produce.

All of that is a lie. And when we view ourselves in light of the gospel, we take steps toward believing the truth about ourselves: that we are sinners saved by the grace of our Creator.

**What is the difference between the way the world sees us and the way God does?**

**How does that affect the way you go about your everyday life?**

## **READ COLOSSIANS 2:13-14.**

*And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses. He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross.*

**How does the gospel change the way you see yourself?**

**How does this new view of yourself motivate you to live?**

If you are a child of God, you are **forgiven**. You have been made clean. Whenever God looks at you, He doesn't see the one who was dead (see Eph. 2), He sees someone who has been made clean by Jesus's sacrifice. Your sin has been nailed to the cross and He has removed the guilt and shame that goes along with it.

For those of us who have been made new by Jesus, we can rest in the truth that we are valuable because we're created in His image, we're loved because God loved us first, and we have been made clean by Jesus's sacrifice—it was nothing that we did. We have been given everything we need through Jesus to live out this new life right now.

This reality is not just an interesting fact about us; it's everything about who we are. This truth guides us, and it's crucial to us getting the college experience right.



# NEXT STEPS

Living out the holiness we've been called to and given by Jesus is not something we'll know how to do overnight. Becoming the person Jesus is making us into is a lifelong process called sanctification. Sanctification is growth: growth into the kind of life that Jesus calls us to live. And God has given us all the tools we need to continually grow in sanctification.

**What are some steps that you can take to grow into someone like Jesus?**

**What are some practical ways you can live out the gospel in your everyday life?**

# PERSONAL STUDY

Have you ever seen a big word used to describe something that is fairly simple?

Here's a fun one to throw around at parties: **defenestration**. It sounds fancy because it has five syllables full of consonants, but it means something far simpler than it may seem:

*Throwing something out of a window.*

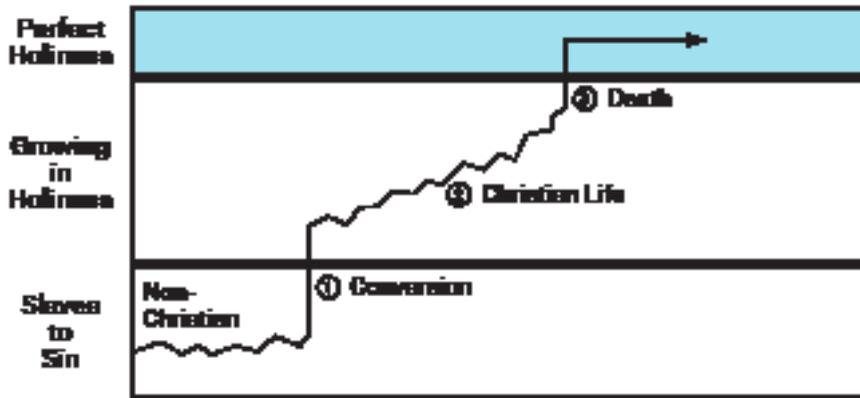
Words are funny like that. It's tricky to capture the essence of an idea in a single word, but that doesn't stop us from trying. The same thing happens with a word that is going to carry us through this study: **sanctification**.

Simply put, sanctification is just growing in obedience to God. But even this definition doesn't perfectly capture it.

Read the following explanation of what sanctification is. Note the graph to help you picture what sanctification looks like in your life.

## **Sanctification: Growing in Obedience**

*The process of learning to obey God and growing in our obedience is something the Bible refers to as "sanctification." There are two sides to this word. The first side is something that happens the moment a person first believes in Jesus. Because of Jesus's perfect life, sacrifice, and resurrection, God declares us not guilty of our sin (also know as justification) and at the same time He also declares us perfect and holy. God sees you as holy because He sees you through His Son. Right now, in terms of standing before God, you as a believer in Jesus are as holy as you will ever be. It's so important to let that truth sink in because it changes everything about the way you approach growing in obedience to God. You don't obey God to acquire more holiness. You don't obey God to make Him happy or to keep Him from being angry with you. He already sees you as holy because of Jesus. Obedience to God has nothing to do with us earning anything; it's all been earned for us by Jesus. This means that the Christian life is not about waking up every day and trying harder or willing yourself to obey God, but instead learning to live out who God has already said you are through Jesus. While the first side of sanctification isn't something you participate in, you do participate in the second side. The sanctification that you experience in this life is the actual process of growing in your obedience to God. It is the process you are on to become more like Jesus, to become more holy throughout your lifetime. Here's what that process looks like visually:<sup>1</sup>*



**The Process of Sanctification**

Nathan Bingham from Ligonier Ministries says it this way: “Sanctification is growth. In regeneration [when you first believe in Jesus], God implants desires that were not there before: desire for God, for holiness, and for glorifying God’s name in the world; desire to pray and worship; desire to love and bring benefit to others.”<sup>2</sup> These are desires that we don’t create or conjure up; they are given to us, “implanted” within us as a gift from God at salvation. As these desires grow, so will your obedience to God, and God has provided the way for these desires to continue growing in you.

On your own, journal through the questions below. You can use the Journaling Pages on 17-19 of this book. Then, this week, meet up with someone who is currently going through this study with you to talk about your answers:

**What stuck out to you while you were reading?**

**Where do you think you are on the graph? Why?**

**What are some practical ways to grow in sanctification?**





