

# Get in the Game

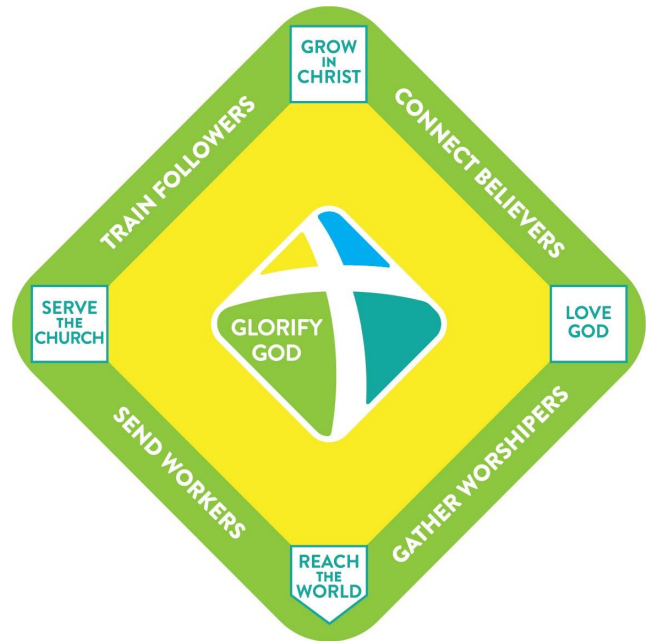
Mark 8:27-38

**One Team Video** Short Version (90 seconds or so)

Check out the full length version of that video on our website ([www.oakwoodfl.org/about](http://www.oakwoodfl.org/about)) or youtube channel. For the next five Sundays we are going to walk through these basic ideas that are captured in our baseball diamond image. This is our mission as a church:

**Our Mission: to transform ordinary people into fully devoted followers of Christ**

We do that by gathering worshipers, connecting believers, training followers and sending out workers. That is **our strategy as a church** - and we work hard on each of those steps, all for the glory of God. **The pathway we invite people to follow is marked on the bases:** love God, grow in Christ, serve the church and reach the world.



**What do you call a baseball player who never gets on base?** That's right - unemployed; a bad baseball player. "That guy who used to play for the Rays." I only played one year of 4th grade T-ball, and I was terrible at it. But I've always loved watching the game. You may not share that love - and that's ok. The point, for our purposes, is just to illustrate what it looks like to follow Jesus.

It means you have to be active. You can't just sit there on the sidelines. **You have to get in the game.** And in the game of following Jesus there are important practices to commit to. Starting next Sunday we'll talk about each base. But today we start at the beginning with an invitation and exhortation to GET IN THE GAME!

**Jesus wants followers, not just fans.** I realize **Kyle Idelman** wrote a book on this - and I've actually met him a couple of times since I spent five years in Louisville and worked with several people from his mega mega church. So I can attest that they put actions to their words. Kyle's church invested a million dollars in a ministry center for African refugees being brought to Louisville. And they have an elaborate strategy to engage the city with the gospel, plus they developed some effective strategic partnerships globally.

One of the stories Kyle tells in that book is about a guy who was a beer salesman for that part of Kentucky. His name is **Tim Hartlage**.

[http://www.southeastoutlook.org/news/features/article\\_92b2b4d0-a716-11e4-aeb1-dfb4bd56eae9.htm](http://www.southeastoutlook.org/news/features/article_92b2b4d0-a716-11e4-aeb1-dfb4bd56eae9.htm)  
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**Tim was raised in a religious home but did not have a personal relationship with Jesus** until he was 35. During those 35 years, by his own admission, Tim was a troublemaker. He grew up in a poor community just southwest of Louisville, Kentucky - a place known, more than anything, for selling heroin and ironically called Lake Dreamland. He and his sisters were severely abused as kids and as soon as he was able to, **he left Lake Dreamland forever (or so he thought).**

He played football through college until he got hurt and couldn't play anymore. Then he went into business and quickly **discovered he was good at making money.** He climbed the ladder all the way to VP of sales and marketing for the largest beer distributor in Kentuckiana. On the side, he threw the biggest parties in town.

God had been tugging at his heart from an early age, but **he ran the other way.** And he ran hard.

**That's what a lot of people do these days.** They sense that there is a God who made them and loves them, but instead of getting to know God and seeking after Him they run the other way. In the baseball analogy, they aren't even in the stadium, they are just running around on the street.

Maybe that's you today. Maybe, like Tim, you come from a tough background. People hurt you when you were young. Maybe you've had some success in certain areas or maybe things haven't worked out for you. But until now God has not had a place in your life - you've been running the other way.

But since you're here (or you're listening online), **something must have gotten your attention.** That's what God does. And the ultimate way He did that was by sending His Son, Jesus. We just heard a passage from Mark 8 - the central moment and turning point of Mark's gospel. For the first seven chapters Mark presents Jesus as a teacher and a healer with remarkable power - authority over illness, demons, even a life-threatening storm. Jesus got people's attention. He was not like any other teacher or healer they had ever seen. He was not like ANYONE they had ever seen.

Has Jesus gotten your attention yet? I have a pastor friend who likes to ask, "How is Jesus messin' with you?" Because he is. God is always trying to get your attention. Listen again to Mark 8:

*"And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they told him, 'John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.'" Mark 8:27-28*

By this point in his over 2 years of ministry, **everyone in the area was talking about Jesus.** Between his miracles and his teaching, the word had spread about him so that Jesus of Nazareth was an

unavoidable topic. In a time when people worshiped many different gods, Jesus asked this question, “Who do people say that I am?”

**For 2,000 years people have been talking about Jesus.** The Bible is far and away the best selling book of all time. And do you know what the most popular answer to the question still is? Who is Jesus? A PROPHET - lots of people say that Jesus was a great moral teacher or even a prophet sent from God.

But Jesus goes beyond general knowledge and makes it personal.

*“And he asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’” Mark 8:29*

This is the ultimate question for everyone on the planet - and for all of us here today. You may have heard about Jesus. You may even have studied his life - his teachings and miracles. But when it comes right down to it, who do you say that He is? **Who is Jesus, to you?**

Have you been out on the streets running away?

Tim Hartlage had heard about Jesus plenty - and chose to run the other way.

**Then one day, he tripped.** Literally, Tim heard a commotion out on the street in Louisville and went to see what was going on. A crowd had gathered around some guy who was carrying something Tim couldn’t quite make out. He worked through the crowd and then lost his footing and came down on that thing the guy was carrying, which turned out to be a large wooden cross.

The man carrying it helped Tim up, then looked him in the eye and said, **“You’ve been running from God for 35 years and it’s time to stop running.”** Tim tried to push him away but felt he had no strength left in him and like the man was protected by some kind of force field. It was like God reached out through this man carrying a cross and spoke to Tim directly - “It’s time to stop running.”



**Then Tim’s whole life fell apart.** His wife left him. He lost his job. His dog died. He looked up and he was living in the garage behind his Aunt’s house and all he could think was, “You’ve been running from God for 35 years and it’s time to stop running.” Then he heard a knock on his door and a man was there saying, **“God sent me.”** That man clearly and respectfully explained the gospel and introduced Tim to Jesus - he led Tim off the street and into the stadium. Tim learned the truth Peter expressed in Mark 8 - Jesus is the Messiah.

### **His Identity - Who is Jesus?**

*“And he asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Christ.’” Mark 8:29*

- The Christ = **The King who Reigns**

Peter had spent over two years with Jesus, listening to him preach and even helping him preach sometimes. In Mark 4, after Jesus calmed the storm, all of the disciples were stunned into asking the question, **“Who is this that even the wind and waves obey him?”** But now, with confidence, Peter proclaims, **“You are the Christ!”**

That meant Jesus was **the long awaited King of Israel** - the promised Savior who would reign on the throne of David and restore peace and blessing to the kingdom. In Mark 8 we'll see answers to FOUR QUESTIONS about Jesus. The first one is here: WHO IS JESUS? Peter was right - he is the Messiah, the King of Israel. But we'll see in a moment that Peter was only just beginning to understand.

And that's how it is for a lot of people - they hear about Jesus and they're curious - so **they come into the stadium to see what Jesus can do**. They listen to his teaching, they hope to see a miracle. Over and over in the gospels Jesus does something powerful and it says, “the people were amazed.” Lots of people saw Jesus' miracles and were amazed - it was just like going to the circus and seeing the trapeze artists - you are amazed at their courage and skill. But then you leave and go home and go right back to your life.

That's how many people are with Jesus. They come to the stadium and hope he'll do something amazing. Whether he does or doesn't, **they walk away and go right back to their own lives**. As Tim Hartlage got to know Jesus he went to a huge Easter pageant, attended church several times and even got stunned by September 11, 2001. He still wasn't committed to Jesus but he was becoming a fan.

As we'll see in this passage, Jesus is not interested in fans - he wants fully devoted followers. The first question gets you off the street and into the stadium, within the sound of Jesus' voice. Who is Jesus? He is the Messiah - the King who reigns.

The second question brings us closer to Jesus: Why did Jesus come?

### **His Mission - Why did Jesus come?**

*“And he began to teach them that **the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.**”* Mark 8:31

- **The Christ = The Suffering Servant who Dies**

Like many Jews in those days, Peter was praying for and expecting a Messiah King who would reign on David's throne. Nobody was expecting the suffering servant prophesied by Isaiah in chapter 53 of his book would be the same Messiah who would reign on David's throne. How could the reigning King suffer and die?

But that is precisely **why Jesus came - to give his life as a ransom for many**. As Isaiah foresaw it 700 years before: *“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our sins - the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed.”* Isaiah 53:5 (NIV)

Peter was right that Jesus was the Christ, the King. **But he did not understand why His King would have to die**. So he rebuked Jesus right there on the spot. Can you imagine Peter's boldness? Your

Rabbi and teacher, whom you have just professed to be THE PROMISED MESSIAH - the KING... shares his plan and you pull him aside to correct him... No, Lord, you must have gotten this wrong. It can't go this way. First we rally the people. Then we overthrow Rome. Some of us may die but you're the King - you can't die!

Jesus turned the rebuke around on Peter and said, "No, Peter, you're the one who doesn't get it. I have to die. ***If I don't die then all of you will have to*** - and all who come after you. You just don't understand the plan yet, but when you do, you'll see how truly beautiful it is."

Now we're not just in the stadium for a show with Jesus the magician. ***Now we are standing face to face with Jesus the man.*** Who is Jesus? He is the Messiah - the King who reigns. Why did he come to earth? He came to die. He came to give up his life for you and for me. Sin had to be paid for and no one else could afford to foot the bill. So Jesus came to suffer and die as the full and final payment for sin - for your sin and mine; for the sin of the whole world. He is Christ the King - and amazingly, he is the kind of King who gives up his life as a sacrifice for his people.

That brings us to the third question. Once you've established who Jesus is and why he came, your toes are on the edge of a thick white line that separates fans from players. Jesus is calling your name - how will you respond? Will you join his team and get in the game? Or will you stay in the stands, cheering for Jesus from a safe distance?

### **His Call - What is Your Response?**

*"Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him **deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.**'"* Mark 8:34

Here is Jesus' invitation: "Trust in me and you can have **YOUR BEST LIFE NOW!**" Is that what he means here? Look at the words! "Deny himself and take up his cross." Do you mean a shiny golden cross I wear around my neck? (Nothing wrong with those, btw - but that's not what Jesus meant.) No! Jesus was talking about the Roman instrument of shameful, agonizing execution. The worst criminals were taken outside the city and nailed to a rough wooden cross as a warning to others not to defy Rome. Jesus' invitation is a call to DIE.

### **His Call - What is Your Response?**

*"Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him **deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.**'"* Mark 8:34

- **Repent - Bring your Life to Jesus so it can Die with Him.**

The first step toward following Jesus is called **REPENTANCE. It means TURN AROUND.** You've been going one direction - away from Jesus. Now, to follow after Jesus you have to turn around and start going a different direction. You have to REPENT. This is why there is no such thing as "your best life now." YOUR LIFE is a mess. If you hold on to it, it will not get better. The only way to REAL LIFE is to let go of your life and find new life in Christ. YOUR BEST LIFE ISN'T **YOUR LIFE AT ALL.**

### **His Call - What is Your Response?**



*“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him **deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.**”* Mark 8:34

- **Repent - Bring your Life to Jesus so it can Die with Him.**
- **Your “Best Life” isn’t Your Life at all**

Here’s the picture: you come to Jesus with your life - everything you are - in your hands like this [palms open, face up]. You hand your life to Him - your sins, your failures, your past, your present, your future, your strengths and weaknesses, your desires and fears - your SELF. You hand that over to Jesus and say, “Please take this away from me.”

Repentance means letting go of your life. You hand yourself over to Jesus so that old life can die. That’s what it means to deny yourself and take up your cross. Paul says it this way in Galatians:

### **His Call - What is Your Response?**

*“I have been crucified with Christ. I is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”* Galatians 2:20

- **Repent - bring your life to Jesus so it can die with Him.**
- **Your Best Life is the Life only Jesus can Give you!**

**Have you done this?** Have you come to Jesus in a full act of repentance? Have you turned your old life over to Him to let that old sin-covered body die with Jesus on the cross - to let it be crucified with Christ? This is why Paul talks in Romans 6 about being **“buried with Christ in baptism.”** Water baptism represents being united with Jesus in his death. That is the first step toward salvation - letting your old life die.

Your best life, apart from Jesus, is a delusion - a dead end. THE BEST LIFE is not YOURS but HIS. Apart from Jesus, there is no best life now or ever. There are only false promises, dust and ashes. Let your old life die. Repent. Turn around. That’s step one toward salvation.

The second step to following Jesus is to BELIEVE.

### **His Call - What is Your Response?**

*“For whoever would save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”* Mark 8:35

- **Repent - bring your life to Jesus so it can die with Him.**
- **Believe - trust Jesus to give you a new life**

**Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin.** You can’t have one without the other. In the same act, you must let your old life die and trust Jesus to give you a new one. If you try to save your own life - if you insist on holding onto control of your life, you will lose the very life you are trying to protect. The only way to save your life is to let it die with Jesus. Then, if you lose your life for Jesus, you will save it - because He will give you a new life. Your old self dies with Jesus on the cross, and is buried with Him in the tomb. And something new - a new person - comes out of the tomb with Jesus on the third day.

Trust Jesus to give you a new life. Look at Romans 6:5

### **His Call - What is Your Response?**

*“If we have been united with him in a death like his we will certainly be **united with him in a resurrection like his.**”* Romans 6:5

- Repent - bring your life to Jesus so it can die with Him.
- **Believe - trust Jesus to give you a new life**

“When Jesus calls a person, he invites you to come and die so that you can truly live” (from Barry Cooper’s *Life Explored* Bible Study). But you have to truly let your old self fall to the ground like a kernel of wheat so that something new can be born and grow from it.

***Harry Potter fans understand this.*** Harry had to die so that he (and everyone else) could truly live. I won’t totally spoil the story if you haven’t read the books. But it is one of the great moments in literature when Harry realizes the path he must follow, not knowing what will happen, but knowing that he has to die to defeat the great enemy, Lord Voldemort. (This is a spoiler.) A part of Voldemort is actually **INSIDE OF HARRY** - and the only way to destroy Voldemort is for Harry to die. Once Harry dies, Voldemort becomes mortal and Harry’s friends are able to finally kill the evil sorcerer and save the world.

***Lord of the Rings fans also understand this.*** Frodo and Sam realize soon after they venture into the vast wasteland of Mordor that they only have food and water to get to Mount Doom - not to get back from it. They know that their mission can only succeed if they die accomplishing it.

Lots of stories have an element of risk and courage involved for the heroes. But ***the most powerful stories illustrate the Gospel. To truly live, to really help others you have to die.*** Gandalf. Han Solo. The Man in Black from *The Princess Bride*. The Count of Monte Cristo. Most of the Avengers (but not the original 5 of course). Incidentally, this is why I’m optimistic for the Avengers who went up in smoke - Spider-Man in particular. They have to come back, somehow, because that’s the Gospel storyline. Only when you willingly die - like Dr Strange (and Sherlock) - can you ever truly live. Lose your life for Jesus if you want to save it. Let your old life die and trust Jesus to give you a new life, a new heart.

### **His Call - What is Your Response?**

*“For whoever would save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”* Mark 8:35

- Repent - bring your life to Jesus so it can die with Him.
- **Believe - trust Jesus to give you a new life (His life)**

What you’ll find when you do, is that ***the new life Jesus gives you is HIS OWN.*** You die when you repent and the new person that comes to life with Christ is united with Christ - one with Him. Your life is no longer your own, it is bound up with Jesus, your Lord. Here is the third step to salvation:

### **His Call - What is Your Response?**

*“For whoever would save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”* Mark 8:35

- Repent - bring your life to Jesus so it can die with Him.
- Believe - trust Jesus to give you a new life (His life)
- **Follow - commit yourself completely to Jesus and His mission**

You lose your life for Jesus **and the Gospel**. That was Jesus' mission - to proclaim the good news and then give His life to fulfill that good news. We follow His example. We proclaim the good news as much as we can - and give our lives to complete the great commission. We surrender ourselves completely to Christ.

That is what it means to be a FOLLOWER of Jesus - not just a fan. **Lots of people are enthusiastic admirers of Jesus**, to quote Kyle Idelman. They come to church and sing some songs, cheering for King Jesus. But they don't actually commit their lives to obey and serve Jesus. They are in the stadium but not on the field - not in the game.

### **His Call - What is Your Response?**

*"For whoever would save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."* Mark 8:35

- **Follow - commit yourself completely to Jesus and His mission**
- **Are you just a Fan of Jesus - an Enthusiastic Admirer?**

Can you honestly say that you have LOST YOUR LIFE for Jesus and the Gospel? Can you say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live"? Are you still playing for Team You or are you truly on Team Jesus?

### **Tim Hartlage knew about Jesus most of his life.**

When he was 35 he finally stopped running and came into the stadium to see who Jesus is. After several months being amazed by Jesus, Tim finally surrendered his life to Jesus. He repented and let his old life die. He believed, trusting in Jesus to give him a new life. And he committed to Jesus and His mission.

I called Tim this week to catch up. Tim continues to serve Jesus with all he's got. When he first responded to the Gospel he went to work for Salem Radio, helping spread the word about Jesus all over the world through broadcasting.

Then in 2011 Tim felt called by the Lord to go **back to his home town of Lake Dreamland**. He fought the calling for a while. "Lord, you want me to go back to THOSE PEOPLE?"

This was a test for Tim and his new wife. Would they follow the Lord's direction when he called them to something hard and uncomfortable, even dangerous? Or would they slip back into the stands and cheer for others who might risk actually being in the game?

Since 2011 Tim has been preaching and serving in Lake Dreamland - devoting himself to Christ and the Gospel, and calling people to truly follow Jesus in radical obedience - not just as fans.

Here is the final question for this morning:



### **His Promise - Where is your Hope?**

*“Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed **when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.**”* Mark 8:38

There are two sides to Jesus’ promise here. The first side is a warning.

### **His Promise - Where is your Hope?**

*“Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, **of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed** when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”* Mark 8:38

- **If you Refuse to follow Jesus, He will Abandon you Forever**

It may not sound like a big deal that the Son of Man would be “ashamed of you.” But if you think about it, it’s the biggest deal of all. It’s the only thing that matters. When you die or Jesus returns one of two things will happen to you.

1. Jesus will come over to you, look up to the Father and say, “This one is with me.” or
2. Jesus will turn his back on you and say, **“I never knew you.”**

How can you know for sure that Jesus will be your advocate in that final judgment? ***Look at your life right now.*** Are you living like someone who is ashamed of Jesus? Or does your whole life belong to Him? Have you let your old life die and trusted in Jesus to give you a new life? Is your whole life consumed with following Jesus and completing His mission - to bring the Gospel to the nations?

Are you TRULY a FOLLOWER of Jesus? Or are you just a fan? In the final analysis, if you refuse to follow Jesus, He will abandon you, he will be ashamed of you, he will turn his back on you - because all of your life you turned your back on him. In the end, everyone gets what they have chosen. If you hold onto your life, you will lose it. The only way to save your soul is to let it die.

If you refuse to follow Jesus, he will be unable to save you. But if you choose to follow Jesus, he will embrace you - you will be HIS forever.

### **His Promise - Where is your Hope?**

*“Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed **when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.**”* Mark 8:38

- **If you Refuse to follow Jesus, He will Abandon you Forever**
- **If you Choose to follow Jesus, He will Embrace you Forever**

Moses stood before the nation of Israel over 3,000 years ago and said, “This day I set before you - on the one hand - life and blessing and on the other hand death and curses. Choose life! Choose to trust in the Lord. Devote your lives to Him!”

If you try to save your life yourself you will lose it. The only way to save your life is to give it to Jesus and let it die with Him. Jesus is calling you to come and die so that you can truly live. Your best life is not YOURS at all. Your only hope for real life and eternal life is to be born again with the life of Jesus inside of you.

Repent. Turn from your old life. Let it go. Believe. Trust Jesus to give you new life. Follow. Commit yourself completely to Jesus and His mission. We are the fellowship of the unashamed. We have been saved from the greatest danger and we serve the greatest Master.

Don't just cheer for Jesus. Follow Him.

Let's pray.