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Introduction

A NOTE TO THE READER: You are invited to join in this journey of discipleship and discovery! As a young person at an age of accountability, making your own decisions as you explore questions of faith, as you consider what it means to follow Jesus, I hope that you will find this book to be helpful.

Here is some information to keep in mind as you read this book. In each chapter, you will share in the conversations of three primary characters—Ava, Jamal, and their teacher, Ms. Marsha. Their conversations may be similar to some of the conversations about faith and the church that you may already have or will have with a parent, a teacher, a pastor, or another adult mentor in your life. This book is meant to be a conversation starter for you; it does not include all the aspects of discipleship, nor is it a comprehensive work even on values that make Baptists “Baptist.” This book is a starting point to get you in conversation with others at home or at church, with friends, and online.

Other sections in each chapter will be directed toward you, often with questions or thoughts to ponder, activities, and yes, even homework (I promise there are no grades given—the work is designed to help you grow, to experience and explore aspects of faith in deeper ways). While you might be tempted to skip ahead to the conversations between the characters, I hope you will read and interact with each section as a part of your learning and enrichment.

You may be reading this book on your own or as a participant in a group or class in your church as you consider faith commitments such as baptism or church membership. Whether you are in a group

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of two or twenty, I hope you will share the questions and conversations of this book with at least one adult mentor who can help navigate the journey of faith with you.

You can also continue the journey at www.BaptismAhead.org. This is a safe website for you to share your experiences, ask the author questions, and have virtual conversations about faith and life with youth in a global online community! This website is another way to equip you as you share the journey of faith with friends.

As you are on a journey of discipleship and discovery, this book, along with your Bible, will serve as a sort of compass or GPS to direct your journey. The funny thing about maps and compasses is that it is up to the navigator (*you*) to use them to your advantage. You may notice signs or directions to consider along the way, but ultimately, your adventurous relationship with God is up to you!

God is with us on the journey!