

START **HERE**



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DISCUSSION GUIDE

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GOD STIRRINGS

STORY

How would you describe your thoughts and feelings about God right now, as you are beginning to read *Start Here*? To put it more specifically, what are the words or images that first come to mind when you think about God or Jesus?

Why are you reading this book? What are you hoping to get out of it?

REFLECT/GROW

On page 13 it says “A quality search has to be authentic – no games, no facades.” Think about a time when you felt like someone or something was inauthentic or “playing games”. Describe that situation and what it felt like.

Now, contrast that with what would characterize an “authentic search”.

Start Here emphasizes that Christianity is a relationship with Jesus, rather than a religion of rules and behaviors. How do you feel about this? Has this been your experience with church or Christianity in the past?

Have you ever experienced “God stirrings” in your life? Can you describe one such time?

PRAY

Prayer is conversation with God. As you begin reading *Start Here* what would you like to say to God? Consider writing this down with as much brevity or length as you need.



IT STARTS WITH JESUS

STORY

What aspects of Pete Woods' story resonate with you? Do you have anything in common with Pete?

REFLECT/GROW

In describing God as a relational God, we say "people who are gifted in the art of relationships are often people who ask some of the best questions." Have you ever had a relationship with someone who asked good questions? What was that like? How did you feel in that relationship?

Now consider the idea that God asks good questions. Why do you think God's first question was, "Where are you?" What does this tell you about God?

Which of God's four questions in chapter one is most significant for you:

"Where are you?"

"What do you want?"

"Who do you say I am?"

"Do you believe this?"

PRAY

Pick one of the four questions as if God asking this question to you, and write an honest response. (For further growth, do the same with the other three questions).



CHAPTER TWO

OBSTACLES

STORY

Paige describes a childhood of going to church but then leaving when she got older. Her experience is not uncommon. Why do you think this is so? Do you have any childhood experiences in church? What did you pick up (whether true or not) about God?

REFLECT/GROW

What challenges or obstacles to a relationship with God are in your “*all of this*” pile?

How do the stories about the airline pilot and the ship captain affect your views about Jesus saying He is *the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life? What questions remain after considering these two analogies?

Have you ever experienced a “rough patch” like the cookout, or perhaps something deeper – that set you back in your relationship with Jesus? What happened?

PRAY

The progression of getting to know Jesus is similar to that of any personal relationship: You’ve heard of a person before you met them; then you meet; then you are acquaintances; friends; and so forth. Using this analogy, if Jesus asked you to describe your level of relationship with Him, what would you say? Write this in the form of a prayer.



CHAPTER THREE

RECEIVING JESUS

STORY

Heather says, “Hands down my greatest obstacle to embracing my new found faith was what my friends would think of me.” Can you describe ways that Heather’s concern might resonate with you?

REFLECT/GROW

It’s possible to be a person who “hangs out” with Jesus but never really makes a commitment to Him. At the same time, we may have some expectations of Him-what God should do for us. If you’re honest, what are you expecting from God?

How would you describe the difference between “liking the idea of Jesus” and truly receiving Him as Lord of your life?

How does this chapter affect your view of sin? Can you describe in your own words your understanding of why Jesus had to die on a cross?

PRAY

A deep relationship requires full disclosure from both parties. Sometimes this will mean making sincere apologies and asking for forgiveness. If this resonates with you regarding your relationship with God, write a prayer of full disclosure.



CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

STORY

Dana speaks of struggling to accept God's love. She felt she wasn't worthy of it, of Him. This is often a challenge for people in their Christian life—to accept that God loves you, and even more than that—he likes you! Can you accept the idea that God really likes you?

REFLECT/GROW

Chapter Four introduces us to the understanding that the truest part of us is our soul. Someone once said, “You do not *have* a soul; you *are* a soul. You *have* a body.” What do you think is most important to people today: material things or eternal things? Why do you think that is? How does the idea that *you are a soul* change your perspective?

How does the story of the twins in the womb affect your view of life and of heaven?

When we begin a sincere relationship with Jesus Christ, we are given New Eternity, New Identity, New Family, and New Character – all gifts as a result of God's grace. Which of these do you find most meaningful? Why?

PRAY

Write a prayer to God that expresses your feelings about the four new things listed above. Be honest with your struggles and with your gratitude.



CHAPTER FIVE

WHO IS GOD?

STORY

Katie's experience with God simplified religion for her and it brought her to newfound freedom. The Bible says "where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17). Many people have a hard time understanding that Christianity brings freedom. What do you think? If you woke up tomorrow morning and were completely free, what would you be free from? (worry? insecurity? guilt? doubt?) How would this make the future different for you?

REFLECT/GROW

The idea that all religions are the same is a popular idea. We appreciate that the heart of this sentiment is conciliatory and friendly, but different religions teach very different things. If the idea of different religions leading to different places is uncomfortable to you, discuss. Do you think different religions can lead to the same destination?

Christianity teaches that God is perfect, yet because of our sin, we human beings are not good enough, and cannot make ourselves good enough for God on our own. What do you think of this?

Of the descriptions of God (ETERNAL, RELATIONAL, PERFECT, OMNI) which do you find most helpful, most illuminating? Which do you struggle with most?

PRAY

Write a prayer to God telling Him how your understanding of Him is changing. If there are aspects of Him that are hard for you to grasp, you can tell Him that and ask Him to help you know Him.



WHAT GOD WANTS US TO KNOW

STORY

Rakesh says the people who had a positive impact on him were Christians. Some people might say however, that Christians are not people who've had a positive impact on them. What has your experience been in this regard? It might be helpful to complete this sentence (answer the first thing that comes to your mind!): "Christians are _____" How do you think Jesus would complete that sentence?

REFLECT/GROW

On p. 150 it says, "The real version of Christianity as described in the Bible is a living relationship with Jesus Christ as we walk with Him and follow Him each day – a relationship where He is present with us at all times and in all circumstances, whether happy or hard." What do you think of this statement? Do you find it appealing, new, exciting, hard to understand?

This chapter describes several common "knock-off" versions of Christianity, including: Super-Christians, the Make-Me-Happy god, and the If-Then god. Have you seen versions of these around you, or have you found yourself falling into these ruts yourself? Describe.

How have your understanding of baptism and communion been affected through the descriptions and illustrations in chapter six? Perhaps start with, "I used to think _____," "now I think _____." Is baptism a next step for you? If so, share your feelings with the group and then get in touch with your church to explore further.

PRAY

Now that you have read about baptism and communion, write a prayer to Jesus Christ expressing your feelings about what He has done for you in offering you forgiveness and life with God.



CHAPTER SEVEN

GROWING IN

STORY

Describing a season in his life, Hunter says, “Jesus brought a wrecking ball to my life and my walls fell in. I could sense it. It felt like God was doing this, and it felt right.” It seems like an oxymoron that a wrecking ball felt right – but this can sometimes be the case when Jesus brings us to life. What are your thoughts about times when life feels like it is falling apart? Have you ever experienced anything like it?

REFLECT/GROW

Since Christianity is a relationship, it’s something you are in. We are not ‘*on* a relationship’ or ‘*at* a relationship’ – but *in* it. This means real belief in Jesus means we enter a relationship of trust in Him. If you were to start living “believing *into* Jesus” what would that look like tomorrow? Next month? Next year?

A tree is alive in the ground and a fish is alive in the water. This is how God created the supporting relationship of life for a tree or a fish. And just as a tree is alive in the ground and a fish is alive in water, a human being is alive *in* God. Can you think of other analogies from the world that fit this “in” model? What does the tree, fish, or person need from the thing they are in? Discuss this together.

The Christian life is about never-ending discovery and growth, and real growth always takes effort. *Start Here* suggests 5 core aspects that are important for growth: involvement in a good church, bible reading, prayer, serving, and worship. Of these five, which is a next step for you? Write it down or share it with your group as an expression of commitment.

PRAY

You’ve come to the end of *Start Here*. Go back and read the prayer you wrote in the Introduction section. Now write a new prayer, as long and expressive as you can – that tells God all you are thinking and feeling about Him now.

