

## Starting Point Leader Guide

### Starting Point Series Objectives:

Build a Biblical foundation and common language for the group around faith in Christ (and allow for everyone to be in process and at different places in their faith journey).

Build towards a Transparent Community (allow the questions from each week to become a way for everyone to hear and share much of their own story and share their current position in their journey).

### Setup for Starting Point Series:

It's often believed that being a mature or "deep" Christ follower is mostly about what you know regarding the Bible and God. The temptation in any "good" small group is to start with learning more Bible Truths.

But for what we know about the Bible or God to have any real meaning in our day-to-day life – it must first be rooted in a trusting relationship that we have with Jesus.

When what we know about God is not rooted in relationship with him – our Bible knowledge easily becomes a false god and the platform from which we judge and measure others and ourselves. We easily forget about relating to Jesus because of all the good "Bible Stuff" we know now.

### At the Core of a Life Group is Relationship!

This means relationship with God and with others. It's from this foundation of relationship that we learn and experience real and lasting growth = becoming a mature Christ follower.

Real maturity shows in how we trust and obey God from a position of grace, not in Bible knowledge. (If you **love me** you will obey my command – If you are **my disciple** you will follow my teaching – both rooted in intimate relationship with Jesus, not simply knowing the commands or teaching.)

It's also from this foundation of relationship that knowledge starts to take its' proper place – knowing Jesus personally and relating to him gives the right context for all that we learn from Him.

This series goes straight to the heart of our relationship with God and how we think of and relate to Jesus. It will also be a great place for us to build relationship with each other as we share what we think of Jesus, how we relate to Jesus, and how we got to the place we are now.

Each week you'll start with a few questions before you watch a video that will help you connect with each other and share some of where you are in the process of relating to God.

(And, by the way, there's no right or wrong in how you relate to God. All of our relationships with Him are different.)

\*Access the videos for this series: <http://www.startingpoint.com/member/welcome> to watch the Starting



Point videos created by North Point Community Church, Andy Stanley.

**Start by reading the following:** Everything has a beginning. Every person, every idea, every journey starts somewhere. Whether it's one small step in a new direction or a major event, from that point forward nothing is ever the same. It's not always comfortable. It's not always easy. But it's a start. Starting Point is an 8-week gathering where your questions about God turn into a conversation about faith. In this Starting Point series, you can discuss your doubts and explore the trickiest topics of faith, free from pressure and judgment.

We are going to have great conversations in the coming weeks. We'll spend about 15 – 20 minutes on a few questions, then watch a 20-minute video, and wrap up with a few more questions.

## Week 1 – START

### PRE---VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Questions Options: 1) Read all three questions first, and then have each person choose just one question to answer (takes less time) **or** 2) Read questions one at a time and everyone answers each question (takes more time).

1. When you think about God's involvement with the world, what are three words that come to mind?
2. What one thing do you most associate with Jesus?
3. What story, person, or experience has influenced the way you look at God?

### (WATCH VIDEO)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**General thoughts from what we just watched, what caught your attention – and why?**

1. How and when did your faith journey get started?
2. How would you currently describe your perspective on faith?
3. How well has your faith held up under the rigors of life?



## Week 2 – PROBLEM

During childhood, you may have been handed a faith framework through which you began to view the world. For a lot of us, that childhood framework didn't survive the rigors of adulthood. It's not enough to say, "The Bible says . . .," in the face of real-life tragedy. Adults often need a new starting point.

But the starting point for Christian faith isn't, "The Bible says . . ." It's better than that. It's Jesus.

### PRE---VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think our culture is uncomfortable with the word "sin"?
2. Do you see evidence of sin in the world around us? If so, where?
3. What kind of reaction does the word "sin" stir in you? What do you associate with it?

### (WATCH VIDEO)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**General thoughts from what we just watched, what caught your attention – and why?**

1. During the message, Andy said, "Jesus' agenda in pointing out our sin was not condemnation but restoration." Is that statement difficult for you to believe? Why or why not?
2. Read Luke 15:11–32. What's most surprising to you about this parable? How does it challenge the way you view God?
3. Do you resist the idea that you are a sinner? Is there something offensive about that? If so, why? If not, why not?



## Week 3 – TRUST

Three major world faith traditions—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—claim the same starting point: a man named Abraham. All three agree that sin made a mess of the world and God started his clean up operation with Abraham. God made a series of promises and Abraham’s response to those promises didn’t just have implications for his personal starting point or the starting points of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. It had implications for your starting point as well. That is what we’ll be talking about tonight – so lets start with a few questions:

### PRE---VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following reflects your view?
  - God accepts me based upon my birth.
  - God accepts me based upon my behavior.
  - God accepts me based upon my belief.
  - God accepts me based upon some combination of the above.
2. Why - how did you come to that view?
3. Have you ever taken a first step in restoring a relationship? If so, what was it like for you?
4. Do you believe adversity is part of God’s plan? Why or why not?

(WATCH VIDEO)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**General thoughts from what we just watched, what caught your attention – and why?**

1. In what area(s) of life do you still lack trust in God? Why?
2. What experiences have you had that have made it difficult to trust God?
3. In what area of your life is God currently calling you to trust him? What is one thing you can do this week to trust him? What can this group do to support you?



## WEEK 4 – RULES

Practically speaking, rules are often the centerpiece of religious life. Many people think the Ten Commandments are rules that make a relationship with God possible. If you follow the rules, God will be happy. If you don't, he won't. But what if a relationship with God doesn't depend on our obedience?

When it comes to your relationship with God, what is the role of rules? That is what we'll be talking about tonight – so let's start with a few questions:

### PRE---VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In general, how do you react to rules? What rules are the hardest for you to keep?
2. What is it about a rule that makes it feel controlling instead of caring?
3. What happens to a relationship when someone breaks a rule?

### (WATCH VIDEO)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**General thoughts from what we just watched, what caught your attention – and why?**

1. Talk about a time when you made rules for someone else. What was the purpose of those rules?
2. Growing up, did you feel like religion was based on the family model, the club model, or the neighborhood association model?
3. How about now? Which model – family, club, HOA – best reflects how you relate to God now?
4. Do you primarily relate to God through the means of faith or have you been trying to behave your way in to the relationship?



### WEEK 5 – JESUS

Guilt is powerful. Shame can be crippling. We all have things in our pasts that haunt us. We have sin. It only takes a word, a picture, or a name to bring it all back. We know we can do better from this point forward, but how are we supposed to fix the past? We can say we're sorry. We can ask for forgiveness.

But some of the things we've done hang over our lives like a cloud. What can wash away our sins? That is what we'll be talking about tonight – so let's start with a few questions:

#### PRE---VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Growing up, did Christianity seem to be about what God wanted from you or what God had done for you? Explain.
2. What are some potential consequences of living with guilt and shame? How have you seen guilt and shame affect your life or the lives of others?
3. Is there anything about Jesus you find difficult or confusing? If so, what?

#### (WATCH VIDEO)

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**General thoughts from what we just watched, what caught your attention – and why?**

1. What are your thoughts on God providing a savior so you can experience a relationship with him?
2. During the message, Andy said, "The sin debt we hold over our own heads has already been canceled. We don't have to forgive ourselves because, through Jesus, God has already forgiven us. Your role is to accept what has been done for you. If God does not condemn you, who are you to condemn you?" If that's true, how might it change the way you live and how might it shape your relationship with God?
3. What is one thing you can do to begin to build new memorials of forgiveness to replace the memorials to your past failures and sin? What can this group do to support you?



### WEEK 6 – GRACE

At some point in your faith journey, you will settle into a bargaining posture with God.

“God, if you will . . . , I promise I will . . . .” We all do it. That’s just part of religion— every religion. In fact, it’s so much a part of human nature that even some atheists and agnostics do it when they find themselves in desperate circumstances. But is that really how God wants us to relate to him? The problem with a bargaining posture is we never keep up our end of the bargain, do we? That is what we’ll be talking about tonight – so lets start with a few questions:

#### PRE---VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Talk about a time when someone let you off the hook or forgave a debt. How did it make you feel?
2. What do you believe God wants from you?
3. Do you see yourself as a person who needs God’s grace? Why or why not?

#### (WATCH VIDEO)

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**General thoughts from what we just watched, what caught your attention – and why?**

1. In the message, Andy said, “God doesn’t negotiate because he doesn’t want something from you. He wants something for you.” Respond to that statement. If it’s true, how would it change the way you view God and your relationship with him?
2. What standard do you most often use to determine your standing before God - Your behavior or God’s grace? What circumstances or situations cause you to move from one to the other?
3. Most people respond to the idea of unconditional grace with, “But what about. . . ?”

What’s your “But what about . . . ?” What’s your push back to unconditional grace?



### WEEK 7 – FAITH

The ability to believe is the most powerful force at mankind's disposal. Everything that has been done, for good or bad, was done because someone believed it could be or should be done. Every problem that has been solved was solved because someone believed it could be or should be solved. We constantly look for evidence to support what we believe is true. In the case of religious belief, that means if you believe deeply enough any religious system becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If that's true, isn't it possible that Christianity is just an example of groupthink on a massive scale? That is what we'll be talking about tonight – so let's start with a few questions:

#### PRE---VISION DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think of a belief you hold—religious, political, economic—that has a major influence on the way you live your life. In what ways do you look for evidence to support that belief? In what ways do you filter out evidence that contradicts that belief?
2. When you think about Jesus, do you tend to focus on his teachings or his death and resurrection?
3. How does that focus influence the way you answer the question, “Who is Jesus?”
4. Read Acts 17:31. Do you agree that the “proof” of Jesus' resurrection is a compelling basis for personal faith? Why or why not?

#### (WATCH VIDEO)

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

##### General thoughts from what we just watched – what caught your attention – why?

1. Did you find parts of this message disturbing? If so, which parts and why?
2. In the message, Andy said, “We don't believe in the resurrection because the Bible says so – that would be easy. We believe because of the eye witness accounts.” How do you respond to that?
3. The gospels record that when Jesus died, his disciples' faith died. But when they finally came out of hiding, their messages weren't, “Believe what Jesus taught.” It was, “You killed him. God raised him. We've seen him. Say you're sorry.” In what ways do the disciples' behavior and message challenge your assumptions about Christianity?
4. In the message, Andy said, “A single event—the resurrection—changed how those closest to Jesus answered the question “Who is Jesus?”. How much does that single event, the resurrection, shape the way you respond to the question “Who is Jesus?”





## WEEK 8 – INVITATION

Jesus predicted that he would start a gathering, a movement . . . what we call church. And that church would spread all over the earth and outlast the Roman Empire. It would change the world. His prediction must have sounded outlandish to even his closest followers. But here we are, two thousand years later, and the Roman Empire exists only in history books, while Jesus' gathering is still going strong. The church is the hope of the world because the church is the vehicle by which God is bringing the solution to mankind's greatest problems: sin, sorrow, and death. That is what we'll be talking about tonight – so let's start with a few questions:

### PRE---VIDEO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you associate with the word “church”?
2. What are some things people think make them unworthy or disqualified from being fully engaged in the mission of the church?

### (WATCH VIDEO)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### General thoughts from what we just watched – what caught your attention – why?

1. How does the description of the original purpose of the church differ from or affirm your personal experience?
2. Before the video we asked “What are some things people think make them unworthy or disqualified from being fully engaged in the mission of the church?”

In light of Paul's story, how might God use those parts of their stories to draw others to him?

3. What are some things you can do to better understand how to use your strengths, weaknesses, and experiences to help draw others toward him?
4. What is your best next step for engaging more fully in the mission of the church? Putting your faith in Christ? Baptism? Serving on a team? Giving? Inviting a friend? How can this group support you as you take that next step?



