

## Start

### Chapter Summary

#### Weekly Win

The win for week one is to get to know your group members and to create a safe environment that makes them want, or at least be willing, to come back next week.

#### Bottom Lines

- Faith has a starting point.
- The starting point for the Christian faith is a question: *Who is Jesus?*
- The Christian faith isn't about what Jesus said before he died. It's about what happened after he died: *he rose from the dead.*

### Before the Meeting

Refer to [Preparing to Lead](#) notes ahead of time. This is essential. Ensure that you have completed the following:

- Met with your co-leaders
- Contacted each of your group members by email and phone
- Prepared the physical environment

Remember what this week will feel like for your group members the first time. Weeks ago, something compelled them to sign up for this opportunity, but for many of them the reality of that decision is beginning to surface. They are about to walk through a door and sit in a circle of strangers and discuss an often difficult and messy topic. How we handle this first week is critical. **Always remember, you may have signed up to lead for eight weeks, but every member of your group has signed up for one. The goal of the first week is to conduct the group in such a way that they come back the next week.**

We've provided an email template to use as you contact your group members each week. You can use [this email template](#) a few days leading up to Week 1. If you haven't sent out the information for your group, consult the group introduction email template found [here](#).

### Start the Conversation

The first week you will feel a tension between developing relationships and getting through the content. While both are important, relationships should take priority for week one. As you go through the sections in the guide, continue to develop the relationships and affirm your group

members in this sharing. It is important that group members feel safe, heard, and encouraged.

## Introduce yourself and other facilitators

Welcome everyone and *briefly* introduce the other facilitators. Express your excitement for the group and your appreciation for the participants' willingness to take such a significant and courageous step. Do not use this time to go into greater depth on who you are as facilitators—you will have a chance to do that in the Story Card section and later when you share your story with the group.

## Give a brief overview of Starting Point

### Guide

Most participants will already have their materials and have gone through the first week of content. Since many have already interacted with the materials, this part should be a high-level overview to explain the eight themes that will guide the discussion for the entire Starting Point experience. They should know they have freedom to ask their questions in the midst of that discussion even if they do not fall neatly under one of the themes.

Remind them that taking the time to read the chapter and answer the questions prior to the group meeting helps to enhance the discussion. However, that is not a requirement. We want them to come even if they do not have time to look at the materials prior to the group. The most important thing is that they are present for the conversation.

### Bible

We will provide an expanding set of online resources to help answer questions about and explain a great deal about the Bible.

For the purpose of your first meeting, the most important things to touch on are:

1. Admit that the Bible is an intimidating, complex collection of documents and that everyone needs help understanding it. They do not need to be embarrassed if they don't feel like they know very much about it. We are glad they are there, and our goal is to help them understand it any way we can.
2. Explain that we chose to use the same Bible in the group so that we can reference page numbers instead of just verse references. Doing so will save the group time in the discussion and prevent people from feeling embarrassed if they do not know their way around the Bible.
3. The best place for them to begin to learn about the Bible is to go to the website and begin their exploration there. Whatever questions they have or discussions they would like to have about what they find can be brought back to you or the group.

[tippy title="Leader Tip!"]Not everyone in a Starting Point group is equally curious about Bible,

its history, how it was formed, etc. By encouraging your group to start their exploration with the website, you will allow those who are curious to begin exploring without consuming a large part of the group discussion with a conversation that might matter only to one person. If you do have an individual who has a strong desire to process his or her thoughts about the Bible or views the website and wants to discuss it more, we encourage you to schedule a meeting outside the group to process through their concerns and possibly direct them to deeper resources. The exception is when you perceive that the Bible is an area for the majority or the entire group. If that is the case, you may need to dedicate a significant portion of the discussion in the group to this subject.[/tippy]

## Weekly Additional Web Support

Every week of the Starting Point experience is supported by a web page that has the Media Message for that week as well as a variety of videos, articles, and other materials for people who desire to learn more on that particular theme.

Group members can access the site by going to [spmembers.com](http://spmembers.com). Encourage them to bookmark this page so they can reference it easily. You may want to pull Chapter 1 up on a computer to show the group members an example and how they can navigate the site.

## Messages

The Media Message connected to each week will be posted at the top of that week's web page. Group members should listen to the message prior to attending that particular week.

Explain that the messages support and enhance the content of the guide. While they will require an additional time investment prior to the meeting, they broaden the discussion and deepen the learning in very valuable ways.

The messages will be available in a variety of forms. You can watch them on the site or download them as an audio message to listen. If you have a group member who desires to listen to a CD, please ask your Starting Point staff member for a copy.

## Final reminder

As a final reminder, let the participants know that all of this material has been designed to help them and support their personal journey. They are free to participate at any level but not required to do any of it. The most important thing is simply that they show up to be a part of the conversation. If they have time, we would love for them to fill out the Conversation Guide and watch the Media Message.

## Meet the group members

During the first group meeting, the goal is to get to know your group members at a rate with which they feel comfortable. Groups will differ on their comfort level. Some groups will go deep

right away, and others will barely scratch the surface. Feel free to respond to your group as creatively as you need to, but be patient. Don't feel pressure to push the discussion far beyond where it is naturally going. We recommend using the Story Cards to get to know your group members, but you can use introductory questions as an alternative method.

### **Story Cards (Available [HERE](#))**

The Story Cards are designed to get people to share in a broader, deeper way than they might by just responding to a question. When people describe the answer to a question using an image, they tend to share far more than they would otherwise. The cards are an introduction; you will have more opportunities later to get to know one another better.

Here is a video demonstration on how to use the Story Cards.

### **Introductory Questions (Alternative to Story Cards)**

In some cases, you may not have access to the Story Cards or you, as the leader, may choose not to use them. As an alternative, you could ask a couple of simple get-to-know-you questions, e.g. name and family members, area of town they live in, occupation, style of music they like, favorite restaurant/type of food, etc.

It is important that you choose a couple of light non-threatening questions that everyone would feel comfortable answering. Depending on the feel of your group, you could introduce something that would reveal where they are on their faith journey. Examples include: What brought you to Starting Point? If you could ask God one thing, what would it be?

## **Discuss Section One**

### **A Starting Point**

#### **Section Win**

The win is for participants to understand that, regardless of where they are on their personal explorations of faith, we could not be more excited to have them in this group.

#### **Section Summary**

Like most things in life, everyone's faith has a starting point. Adult realities often challenge the faith that might have formed in childhood. Likewise, we can have experiences or meet people that reignite our curiosity in faith or ignite it for the first time.

#### **Expanded Leader Notes**

## Questions for Reflection

1. What did your faith look like growing up?
2. Would you say you are currently at a starting, turning, returning, or other point? Why?

## Leading the Discussion

- **Question 1:** This question invites the participants to begin sharing the contexts for their personal faith journeys. It is important for facilitators to listen very closely to what is shared in this discussion. Often you can learn a great deal about potential barriers to faith for specific group members by hearing their backgrounds. When appropriate, don't be afraid to ask follow-up questions to gain greater insight and clarity. However, use discretion. Be careful not to put extra pressure on participants who do not appear ready to share more. This is still week one, and there is plenty of time to gain greater insight.
- **Question 2:** This question allows participants to clarify where they see themselves at this point in their explorations of faith. Their answers may shape the way you approach future discussions. For example, discussions look slightly different for groups made up of all "starters" versus all "returners."

## Discuss Section Two

### Roots of Faith

#### Section Win

The win is for participants to begin to realize that the most important question to answer when exploring the Christian faith is "Who is Jesus?"

#### Section Summary

For some, "because the Bible says," is not enough of a foundation to embrace the Christian faith. Interestingly, the first Christians did not have a New Testament on which to base their belief; their faith was based on a person. We see this in the apostle Paul's presentation of the Christian faith to the Athenian philosophers at Mars Hill (Acts 17).

## Expanded Leader Notes

### Questions for Reflection

1. What do you associate with the Bible?
2. How has your view of God changed during the different seasons of your life?

### Leading the Discussion

- **Question 1:** This discussion allows participants to express their experiences with and perspectives on the Bible. It is still early in the eight weeks, so participants may be reluctant to share any negative experiences or perceptions because they may wonder if it will offend the leaders or other group members. There may be an opportunity here for leaders to model the way by sharing from their own stories. The purpose is not to encourage bashing the Bible, but rather to offer an opportunity to demonstrate how the Starting Point environment is a place where they can share authentically even if that means sharing a less-than-positive view of the Bible or Christianity.
- **Question 2:** This discussion builds off the idea that childhood faith inevitably evolved as we transitioned into adulthood. Participants can share key moments in their adult lives that built up, significantly tested, or dismantled their faith. Leaders should make note of experiences that may need to be revisited in later discussions if those experiences remain barriers to faith.

### Follow-Up Questions

- Where, or to whom, do you take questions about the Bible?

### Additional Resources

- This is a good time to talk about the need to peel back the layers of tradition, legalism, etc.

## Discuss Section Three

### Only One Person

#### Section Win

The win is for participants to communicate what they hope to get out of Starting Point and what, if any, specific questions they would like answered during our time together.

#### Section Summary

Jesus might be the most discussed and debated person in history. However, looking at his life, there are no obvious indicators as to why that is the case. What ultimately sets Jesus apart is not his teaching; it is an event—the resurrection.

### Expanded Leader Notes

## Questions for Reflection

1. What do you hope to get out of your Starting Point experience?
2. What one question do you hope to have answered by the end of our eight weeks together?

## Leading the Discussion

- The questions for Section Three are not specifically tied to the content of that section. The content foreshadows a future discussion regarding the resurrection being the central event in the Christian faith. The questions for this section are designed to allow the participants an opportunity to articulate some of their expectations to the group before the end of the first meeting.
- **Question 1:** This question gives participants a chance to share **their** expectations for the group. Pay close attention to the answers shared. Whatever our hopes and desires are for each participant, they have come with their own expectations and this question helps reveal those.
- **Question 2:** This question gives participants the opportunity to share a specific question or two that they hope to have answered during the group. The Note Card Exercise is one of the best ways to get participants to share the questions that are more difficult to ask publicly.

## Note Card Exercise

- A great way to end the discussion for the first week is to pass out note cards to all participants and ask them to write down their answers to Question 2. Using anonymous note cards will allow them to write tougher questions than they might feel comfortable articulating in a group setting.
- Make sure to communicate that this is an anonymous process and encourage everyone to write something even if it is “nothing at this time” or “I do not know.” The key is to have everyone writing something so that people who do have questions will feel safe writing them down.
- Collect the cards and let the group know that this will help you as you facilitate the conversation over the next eight weeks. Make sure to address the questions when it is most appropriate in the conversation unless someone brings it up sooner.

## Wrap-Up

### Review Bottom Lines

- Faith has a starting point.
- The starting point for the Christian faith is a question: *Who is Jesus?*
- The Christian faith isn't about what Jesus said before he died. It's about what happened after he died: he rose from the dead.

## RESOURCES REMINDER AND PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK

Read and complete questions for Chapter 2. Watch or listen to the Chapter 2 message on the website.

### Social Planning

Discuss the plans for the social gathering. Let the group members know that the purpose of this gathering is to get to know each other better and to provide an opportunity for them to share their life stories. Generally, two hours is a good time frame for this gathering. Make a decision and put a date on the calendar. Clearly state that due to confidentiality, only group members are invited to this specific gathering. Remember to communicate this date and time to group members who are not present.

### Stories

Explain that leaders will tell their life stories the following week, but that by the end of the eight weeks, you want all group members to have shared their stories. Assure them that they won't be called upon without notice. Let the group members know *What's Your Story?* in the Appendix of their guide will help them get started.

### Prayer

Every time you pray in your group, you model the nature of prayer and your relationship with God. So, keep it short and simple, don't use fancy religious words, and be authentic. Also, don't ask for prayer requests in the group setting until you sense that people are comfortable sharing personal matters.