

## Intro to Starting Point

### The Starting Point Story

When North Point Ministries began in 1995, the mission of the church was to attract the unchurched, people who do not attend church on a regular basis. We hoped to create a place that was attractive, engaging, relevant, and helpful. Not only did we want people to like it and return, but we realized we had a very serious responsibility ahead of us. We were called to *lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ*. But what would happen when the unchurched actually came into our auditorium? If they didn't already have that relationship or had difficulties maintaining one, how would they grow?

What we also realized was that potential attendees assumed they needed to “know” everything about faith and church in order to participate. Creating a safe place for them to begin asking the questions they had about God, life, and matters of faith was absolutely crucial.

Starting Point was developed to meet people right where they are, to be a ***conversational environment where people can explore faith and experience community***, and today it continues to be that place.

In order for Starting Point to be a ***conversational environment***, leaders prioritize building relationships with their group members over handing off answers. Rather than the traditional teacher and student format of learning, *group members* journey alongside the *leaders* through a facilitated discussion. They begin to enjoy ***exploring faith*** because the conversation invites them to share their past experience, current beliefs, and future ideals. In this process of being known in a group setting, they recognize they're not alone and get a taste of what it's like to ***experience community*** with other people on a similar journey.

To help clarify the Starting Point audience, we use three different descriptions: *seekers*, *starters*, and *returners*.

- ***Seekers*** do not identify as a Christian but are curious about God, Jesus, the Bible, or Christianity.
- ***Starters*** are new to a relationship with Jesus Christ and are looking to build a solid foundation for their faith.
- ***Returners*** have a church background but have been away for a while.

Starting Point is a place where no question is off limits, conversation is encouraged, and seekers, starters, and returners are empowered to join each other on their faith journey. We understand that a “win” in Starting Point isn't solely a conversion experience but also any individual's step away from darkness toward the light of Christ.

### The Materials

Although this environment is designed to prioritize the conversation, the materials we use to

prepare ourselves and group members for the discussion are extremely important. That's why we created a guide and provide supplemental resources online to help them process the information *before* their group meeting so that they have ample opportunity to digest the topic. Below are the resources available:

## Guide

The Guide has eight chapters. Each chapter's title serves as its anchor word, communicating the dominant theme (e.g., Grace). Each chapter has several components:

- **Section One:** This brief narrative establishes the overall concept of the chapter. It typically calls on a common experience or felt need. Conclusions are not usually drawn; instead, ideas and themes are simply introduced.
- **Section Two:** Passages from the Bible become the focus of study and underline the theme of the chapter. Historical introductions precede each passage to explain the context and "connect the dots" between chapters.
- **Section Three:** In this section, the guide addresses difficulties that often arise in conjunction with the topic under consideration. Be sure to save time for discussion of this section, since it is important to group members and often reveals barriers to faith.
- **Questions for Reflection:** These follow each section for group members to attempt to answer as "homework." Each set of questions is designed to progress from general to personal, from nonreligious to spiritual, or from experiential to biblical. During the group meeting, the goal for you, the facilitator, is not to cover every single question, but to identify where your particular group needs to go and use those questions to help steer in that direction.
- **Bottom Lines:** This brief section represents the most important ideas from each section of the chapter. If you were to string together the Bottom Lines of all eight chapters, you would essentially have the outline for the entire Starting Point conversation. Participants will certainly wrestle with other issues, but ***these are the main ideas that you should have in the back of your mind as you ask questions and gently guide the discussion.*** Reading the Bottom Lines at the end of each group meeting will be helpful, even if some struggle with fully accepting or believing the statements.

## Starting Point Website

The website is integral to the Starting Point experience. For each week, the following resources are available on the Member pages for you and group members to explore further:

- **Media Message:** A message by Andy Stanley to complement the guide discussion.
- **Bottom Lines:** This brief list represents the most important ideas from each section of the chapter.
- **60 Seconds On:** Each video explores different topics that pertain to each week in 60 seconds.

- **Continuing the Story:** Bible verses, articles, videos and books.

Each week you will want to encourage your group members to visit the website to access and listen to the media message for that week. These materials can also be recommended at the leader's discretion.

On the Leader pages, each week's discussion will have additional information to equip you as a leader. Be sure to spend some time reviewing the Leader page of each chapter.

## **Story Cards**

Story Cards, photographs of everyday life, are an important component to the Starting Point experience. Used primarily prior to the Chapter One discussion, group members are asked to choose a picture to express themselves as they share about their lives and spiritual journeys. This helps group members to get past surface level responses in a conversational setting. (If you are using the Story Cards for the first time, please reference how to use them in the Chapter 1 Leader Notes.)