

Welcome to **NEXT**! We hope that you and your group are excited to spend the next five weeks learning what it means to go from “here” to “there.” Have you ever heard someone talk about all of the things they are going to do “one day?” When a person talks like that, chances are that they are dissatisfied with where they are in life. On the other hand, maybe that person is happy with where they are but they have a nagging feeling they can’t stay there. That’s what **NEXT** is all about.

As long as we are alive, God has a “next” for us. He has a “there” that he wants us to chase after. But first, we need to answer five questions: “Where is here?” “How did we get here?” “Why can’t we stay here?” “Where are we going?” and “How do we get there?” When we reflect on these questions and consider how God wants us to respond, we move closer to what’s next.

During **NEXT** we will be looking at Peter’s story in Luke 5:1-11. This week is all about “here.” When Peter woke up that morning, he was not expecting his life to change. He had a “here,” and he was probably pretty happy with it. He could not have imagined the incredible plans God had in store for him. But for Peter to get “there,” he had to be “here” – right where God wanted him. This week, we are going to reflect on our “here.” Where has God placed us and what should our response be?

SESSION 1: WHERE IS HERE?

SMALL TALK

During each session, we will begin with a question or brief activity designed to get everyone on the same page for the session. Since this is your first time together (at least for this new series), take a few minutes to make sure everyone knows each other's names. You may want to review briefly the Small Group Agreement and Calendar from the Appendix.

1 As you begin, take time to pass around a copy of the Small Group Roster on page ???, and have everyone write down their contact information. Ask someone to make copies or type up a list with everyone's information and email it to the group before the next session.

2 Whether your group is new or ongoing, it's always important to reflect on and review your values together. On pages ???-??? is a Small Group Agreement which lists values that are important for sustaining healthy, balanced groups. We recommend that you choose one or two values—ones you haven't previously focused on or ones that you have room to grow in—to emphasize during this study. Choose ones that will take your group to the next stage of spiritual health.

3 Today we are going to talk about understanding where we are and why God has us "here." Share with the group about a time that you were hopelessly lost. How did you figure out where you were?

TEACHING

During each session in **NEXT**, we will be watching a teaching from Pastor Greg Surratt as he walks us through Luke 5:1-11. In this passage, Peter encounters Jesus and realizes that God has more in store for him than where he is. Their meeting might never have happened if Peter hadn't been right where God wanted him. It can be easy for us to grow restless but this week we want to remind ourselves that God has us where we are for a reason.

REFLECT

In the questions that follow, your group will spend some time reflecting on the teaching you just experienced.

1 Reflect on where God has you right now. How would you describe your “here”?

2 At the beginning of the session, Greg reminded us that wherever we are, God has a plan for us. His first point was, “We are ‘here’ for a reason.” Do you believe that? What can make it hard for us to see meaning in our circumstances?

3 When we look at the story of Joseph, we see a man whose perspective went beyond his present circumstances. He waited patiently for God to act. What can happen when we lose that perspective?

4 Greg said that “What happens here prepares us for what’s next.” Take a moment and reflect. What might God be trying to teach you right now through your circumstances?

RESPOND

Now that we have spent some time reflecting on what God is saying to us, we want to consider some possible next steps.

1 You are “here” for a reason. What can you do to maintain that perspective? Who else in your life needs to hear that reminder this week?

2 As a result of your own personal reflection and the group discussion, what next steps might God be asking you to take during the coming week?

3 Allow everyone to answer this question: “How can we pray for you this week?” Be sure to write prayer requests on your Prayer and Praise Report on page ???.

Close the session in prayer.

GOING DEEPER

You can explore the following Bible passage as a group (if there is time) or on your own between sessions.

Read Esther 3:8-4:17. Esther is the story of a woman who found herself in circumstances she never expected, asked to take on a responsibility she never wanted. In this passage, we learn of a plot against Esther's people that only she can stop. She did not choose her "here," but she was right where God wanted her.

1 What stands out to you in this passage? Where is God drawing your attention?

2 In Esther 4:14, Mordecai points out that whether Esther helps or not, God will deliver his people. In other words, we are a part of God's plan, but his plans do not depend on us. Why is this an important perspective to have?

3 Mordecai also reminded Esther that God may have placed her where she was for this very moment. What if we believed the same thing, that God has a purpose for each moment of our lives? How would that change us?

DAILY REFLECTIONS

These are daily reviews of some key Bible verses that will help you think about and apply the insights from this session. The questions are meant to help you reflect on truths related to each week's topic.

Day 1 – Romans 8:28

God is at Work

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. (NLT)

God is always working things out for good – do you live with this perspective in mind?

Day 2 – John 9:3

For the Glory of God

"It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "He was born blind so the power of God could be seen in him." (NLT)

God will use even our pain to do wonderful things.

Day 3 – Psalm 40:1

Waiting on God

I waited patiently for the Lord to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry. (NLT)

When we wait patiently for God, we can be certain that he will come to us.

Day 4 – Romans 5:3

Learning to Rejoice

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us – they help us learn to endure. (NLT)

Do we see our problems as an opportunity to grow in endurance and trust?

Day 5 – Genesis 50:20

Good Intentions

You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. (NLT)

It doesn't matter what people do to us – God will always use it for good.

MEMORY VERSE

One day as Jesus was preaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, great crowds pressed in on him to listen to the word of God. He noticed two empty boats at the water's edge, for the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets.

—Luke 5:1-2 [NLT]