

START

FOUNDATIONS

OF

THE

CHRISTIAN

FAITH



OVERVIEW OF START

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“There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man that can be satisfied with no created thing but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.” -Blaise Pascal

We long to know God but very often we are stymied as to where to begin or how to continue. We develop the Christian version of the Peter Pan Syndrome and we never grow up in our faith. When others ask us for a “defense” of our faith, we mumble an unintelligible answer because we really don’t know why we believe what we do. When difficult life circumstances hit (and they will), our faith can begin to crumble because it is built on a shaky foundation.

This is why we created the **START** series. **START** is a fun, interactive way to lay a strong foundation for your faith. It is easily transferable so that you will be able to help others build a strong foundation as well. In fact, you will be encouraged to share what you learn each week with others. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 2:2, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

On your mark, get set. **START!**

*How can a group use **START**?*

Community is a critical component of growing closer to God. This is why **START** will be used by every small group at the Summit during the **START** series. **START** also creates an ideal opportunity to launch a small group with friends, neighbors, co-workers, or others you know who have never been in a church setting before.

The goal of these gatherings is to create, or reinforce, a group of friends you can walk through the **START** experience with. You will bring this guide to each gathering to help you talk through these ideas about knowing God that you've been processing.

The layout of each section:

START leverages four ways we learn to help you process some of the most important things you will ever learn. Growing closer to God requires transformation, not just information, which is why each of these learning styles is so important to **START**:

Review: Go back over an idea you learned the previous week.

Learn: Listen and understand a new idea.

Practice: Work it out with those in your **START** group.

Teach: Learning by showing others.

The best way to think of **START** is to think of it like a learning process instead of just a study guide. But like a diet or exercise regiment, the value you will get in these six sessions is not just reading about the process, but fully engaging yourself in it. In other words, don't just read about the exercises over these next six weeks, do them! As a group, take a moment to commit to one another that you will make every effort to fully participate in **START**.

The Six Weeks:

START is designed to help you know God and relate to him. The six weeks builds on itself by developing the main storyline of the Bible. Each session will develop the story further and will also show you how your own story fits into it.

Week 1: The Gospel

Week 2: God Speaks

Week 3: Knowing God

Week 4: What's Next?

Week 5: God's People

Week 6: God's Gift

START

WEEK ONE: THE GOSPEL

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Review (15 minutes):

Each session will involve a time to review the material from the previous week and to share your experiences teaching the material to others. Because this is the opening week of **START** and you have nothing to review yet, take this opportunity to get to know one another.

Here are two questions you can toss out to begin discussion that everyone can answer:

1. In two sentences, who was the biggest influence on your life growing up and why?
2. What would be a “win” for you to get out of this **START** series?

Learn (20 minutes):

By calling the study **START** we really put a lot on this first week going well, right? While you could start growing closer to God from any number of places, we believe the best place to begin is with the gospel message. John Calvin once wrote, “Without the gospel everything is useless and vain.” By gospel, Calvin is referring to the news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the implications of those events on our lives.

We must start in the gospel because that is where faith and theology intersect. If you want to know God, the Christian message says your best look at him is in the gospel. If you want to know yourself, the gospel unveils your true self better than you can. If you want to know your purpose, the gospel gives you direction. Regardless of why you come into this **START** experience, the gospel is your best starting point.

Key Concept: The Gospel

While the gospel is richer and deeper than we can ever know, there are two core beliefs to understanding it. The first is that your sin has separated you from God. The second is that God loves sinners and has made a way for them to return to him through Jesus Christ.

Read Romans 3:23

“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

Key Questions:

What is sin?

What does it do to our standing with God?

Read Romans 6:23

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

There are several key words in this all-important explanation of the gospel. How would you explain each of the four words below?

Wage:

Gift:

Death:

Eternal Life:

Key Question:

Is the gospel based on something you do or something you receive? Circle your answer.

DO

RECEIVE

Read Romans 10:9

“...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Key Question:

How do you receive the gift of salvation from God?

Have you ever personally confessed belief in the gospel message?

Read Colossians 2:13-14

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”

“Record of debt” is like a list of every crime for which a prisoner had been convicted. When the sentence was served or restitution paid, the authorities removed the list and wrote “paid in full.” The accused used this as proof that he could never be tried for those crimes again. The believer who trusts Christ’s payment for sin can never be tried again. You have full pardon from God.

Key Question:

How can you be sure your salvation is secure in Christ?

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL? *The gospel is the message that Jesus Christ, God in human form, died on the cross as a payment for your sin. He then rose from the grave thereby defeating death. Those who confess belief in the gospel are given salvation and new life in Christ.*

Key Concept: Baptism

“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:4

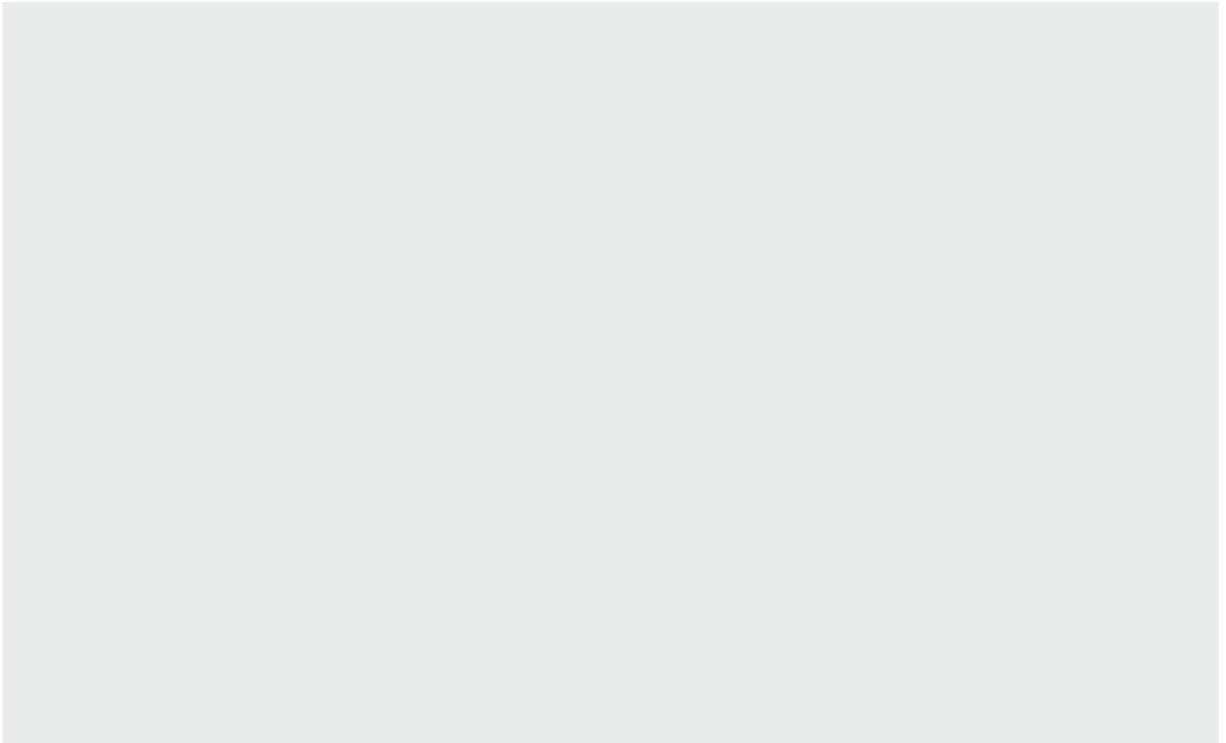
Baptism is one of those words that means different things to different people from different traditions. In the Bible, baptism is the public profession of your belief in the gospel message. It is a step you take after deciding to believe the gospel message. Have you ever been baptized as a profession of your own belief?

Practice (30 minutes):

Write your spiritual story in two paragraphs. Stories are a powerful tool for sharing with others. People are drawn to and affected by personal stories. It takes information from being dry and distant to something that is personal and emotional. Think of the difference in reading an encyclopedia article about a safari in Africa and actually experiencing it with a tour guide and real animals on the savannah. When telling your story, focus on three things:

- What was my life like before God saved me?
- What did Christ do to save me and how did I come to believe it? (Include when you were baptized in this segment.)
- What is my life like now as a follower of Christ (or where am I headed)?

Being able to tell a story that answers these 3 questions in a short and clear way will give you an easy, repeatable, and powerful way to share the gospel. Take a few minutes to write your story in the box below.

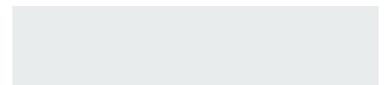
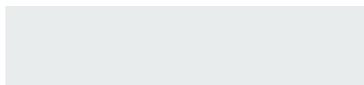
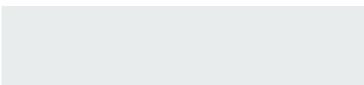


Now divide up into groups of 2-3 and share your stories with one another.

If you have time, practice teaching the LEARN section to one another. Hopefully you will have a chance to teach the LEARN section this week, so practicing it will help you prepare.

Teach:

Teaching others is not just a great learning technique, but it is also how God designed the gospel to be sent around the world. By teaching others you get to participate in God's story he's been writing since the world began. In the spaces below write the names of three people you could potentially share what you've gone through in this session.



Set a goal now to share your story and teach the LEARN part of this session to one of the three people listed above this week. Come ready to share your experience next week.

I'll try: Yes No

Wrap-Up:

The goals from this session were to gain a clear understanding of the gospel message and equip you to teach the gospel message to someone else. Jonah 2:9 says “salvation belongs to the Lord,” reminding us that we are not able to affect spiritual change in someone. That part is up to God. We can only teach them what we have heard and learned. Take a few minutes to pray for one another as you wrap-up.

- Pray God will give your group members an opportunity to teach one of the three people on your lists this week.
- Ask God to make the gospel message new and fresh to you each day this week.