

STUDY GUIDE

FIVE SESSIONS



# WHAT'S NEXT?

THE JOURNEY TO  
KNOW GOD, FIND FREEDOM,  
DISCOVER PURPOSE,  
& MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Chris Hodges

*New York Times* Bestselling Author



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# Introduction

The only guarantee that tomorrow is going to get better is if you are growing today. And the most important growth for you and me is our spiritual growth, our walk with God.

JOHN C. MAXWELL

Forrest Gump once declared that “life is like a box of chocolates . . . you never know what you’re gonna get.” As a pastor, I have encountered many people who seem to navigate their spiritual lives that way. They don’t know where they’re going, what they want to get, or even where they want to go. They know something is missing—and they long for a clearer sense of purpose and direction—but they just can’t seem to find it.

Others I have encountered have been on a spiritual journey at a comfortable pace for most of their lives . . . so comfortable, in fact, they feel caught in a rut, spinning their wheels in a life that feels predictable and even boring. They, too, long for a deeper meaning in life, a deeper joy, a deeper connection to the God they love and

the Savior they are committed to following. But they don't know where to turn or how to step off the treadmill they are on.

Some people are simply exhausted. Perhaps a major detour has left them reeling—a health crisis, divorce, or job loss has rerouted them from the path they once thought their lives would follow. They know God has a plan for them and have caught glimpses of where he wants them to go. But after being sidelined, they're tired and not sure how to get going again.

It may seem like a cliché, but we are all on a journey. At some point, we will all hit hills and valleys, twists and turns, intersections and detours that will cause to ask, “Now what? Which way do I go? *What's next* for my life?” During these crossroads moments, we need to pause and remember our priorities. We need to look beyond what's logical or convenient or advantageous. We need to look to God as our ultimate GPS, our soul's true compass, so we can lead a life that's purposeful, joyful, and significant for eternity.

This is why I wrote *What's Next?* and created this accompanying small-group study. During the course of the next five weeks, we will look at what it takes to get started on our journey with Christ and then take the next steps to *know God, find freedom, discover our purpose*, and ultimately *make a difference in our world*.

Now, this is not to say that I've got it all figured out. But I know the One who does—and you can know him as well. If your faith journey is just beginning, don't worry, because you won't get lost in these pages. If you're a mature believer who has been walking with Christ for a while now, there is still plenty for you. No matter where you are on your journey, this study will serve as a spiritual field guide to help you discover *what's next!*



# How to Use This Guide

## Group Size

The *What's Next?* video-based study is designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or other small-group gathering. If the gathering is large, your leader may split everyone into smaller groups of five or six people to make sure everyone has enough time to participate in discussions.

## Materials Needed

Everyone in your group will need his or her own copy of this study guide, which includes the opening questions you will discuss, notes for the video segments, directions for activities and discussion questions, and personal studies in between sessions. You will also want a copy of the *What's Next?* book, which provides further insights into the material you are covering in this study. (See the note at the end of each week's personal study for specific chapters to read in the book to prepare for the next week's group meeting.)

## Facilitation

Your group will need to appoint a person to serve as a facilitator. This person will be responsible for starting the video and keeping track of time during discussions and activities. Facilitators may also ready questions aloud and monitor discussions, prompting participants to respond and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate. If you have been chosen for this role, note there are additional instructions and resources in the back of this guide to help you lead your group members through the study.

## Personal Studies

During the week, you can maximize the impact of the course with the personal studies provided for each session. You can treat each personal study section like a devotional and use them in whatever way works best for your schedule. You could do one section each day for three days of the week or complete them all in one sitting.





SESSION 1

# START THE JOURNEY

We need to look to God as our ultimate GPS,  
our soul's true compass, if we want to live a life that's  
purposeful, joyful, and significant for eternity.

CHRIS HODGES

## Getting Started

Sometimes, the most difficult part of a journey is the first step. Perhaps you can relate. Maybe there is a place in the world you have been longing to visit. You've thought about how great it would be when you finally made it there. But try as you might, you just can't seem to figure out how to take the next step to make that trip a reality.

Or maybe the issue is you were hit with setbacks when you tried to make plans. You realized that to afford the trip, you wouldn't be able to stay in all the quaint Bed & Breakfasts you envisioned. Or the weather at the time you could travel wasn't ideal. Or a family commitment arose . . . and you couldn't see how to take some time off for a vacation.

We can come up with any number of reasons as to why we can't pursue a goal. The same was true of the people in Jesus' day. The crowds had heard about Jesus' teachings and his miracles, and many wanted to follow him. But not all could find the time or the willingness to step away from their obligations. Luke describes some of these people in his Gospel:

*On the road someone asked if he could go along. "I'll go with you, wherever," he said. Jesus was curt: "Are you ready to rough it? We're not staying in the best inns, you know."*

*Jesus said to another, "Follow me." He said, "Certainly, but first excuse me for a couple of days, please. I have to make arrangements for my father's funeral." Jesus refused. "First things first. Your business is life, not death. And life is urgent: Announce God's kingdom!"*

*Then another said, "I'm ready to follow you, Master, but first excuse me while I get things straightened out at home." Jesus said, "No procrastination. No backward looks. You can't put God's kingdom off till tomorrow. Seize the day" (Luke 9:57-62 MSG).*

As you look at your life, is there something that is keeping you from *seizing the day*? Is there something that is holding you back? If



so, it's time to identify those obstacles in your life. In this first lesson, we will look at some common obstacles that get in the way of our journey with Christ and determine how we can move past them.

## Opening Discussion

For this first session, go around the group and introduce yourselves to one another, and then answer the following questions:

- When was the last time you got lost while on a road trip? How did you end up getting back on track?
- What made you want to be a part of this group? What are you hoping to get out of this study?

## Video Teaching

Play the video segment for session 1. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts, questions, or points that stand out to you.

### Notes

God wants you to know him, find freedom, discover your purpose, and make a difference

Three things you need to move on from include:

*Old history*

*Old habits*

*Old hurts*

Write down this phrase: “*I can’t start \_\_\_\_\_*”

It’s time to *repent*—to change your mind and your direction in these areas:

*It’s time to get closer to God*

*It’s time to get honest with a friend*



*It's time to get in tune with your purpose and passions*

*It's time to get doing something greater than yourself*

If you dedicate your life to something greater than yourself, God will fill your life with passion and adventure

## Group Discussion

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. At a traffic light, you might have to give the car in front of you a “beep beep” to get them moving. How has God done this in your life when he wanted you to move forward?

2. In Luke 9:57–62, many people wanted to follow Jesus, but they had all kinds of excuses why they could not. What are areas where you are prone to procrastinate in your spiritual life?
  
3. Read Isaiah 43:18–19. What does it mean to “forget” the former things in your life? How can being locked in the past prevent you from moving forward?
  
4. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17–18. What are some old habits and old hurts that you need put behind you in order to step into the new life that God has for you?
  
5. What are some things that tend to get in the way of you getting closer to God? Of getting honest with others? Of getting in tune with your passions in life?
  
6. Read Ephesians 2:10. What is the “work” that you feel God is calling you to do? What first step will you take this week to start moving toward that calling?



## Individual Activity

Close out today's session by completing this short activity on your own.

1. Briefly review the video outline and any notes you took.
2. In the space below, write down the most significant point you took away from this session—from the teaching, activities, or discussions.

*What I want to remember from this session is . . .*

## Closing Prayer

Go around the room and share any prayer requests you would like the group to pray about. Conclude your session by praying for these requests together. Ask God to work in each of your hearts throughout the week as you reflect on all you have covered during this first meeting.

## BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY



If you haven't already started reading Chris Hodges's field guide for spiritual growth and transformation in *What's Next?*, now is a great time to begin. This week, read the introduction to the book before doing this study. The questions and exercises provided in this section are designed to help you receive the greatest benefit from reading the book and applying it to your own life. There will be time for you to share your reflections and results at the beginning of the next session.

### Reflect

Most maps and online GPS apps include an indication of your present location. Whether it's "you are here" on the diagram of the amusement park or "present location" on your phone or tablet, these starting points help you get your bearings and prepare for your journey. As you begin this study, consider how you would describe your current location on your journey of faith. Use the following questions to help you think about where you are right now in life and in your relationship with God.

Do you see yourself as being closer to the beginning, middle, or end of your faith journey? Is your answer based on the amount of



time you've known the Lord, the experiences you've encountered, or something else? Explain.

Is your present vantage point from a valley (low point) or from mountain summit (high point)? Or do you feel as though your path has plateaued and you've been on solid ground for a while?

What do you consider the greatest obstacles or biggest challenges to moving forward in your spiritual journey? How have these barriers hindered your progress in the past?

Within the four areas of growth, which one best describes your present focus? Knowing God as your loving Father? Finding freedom from old struggles, habits, and thought patterns? Discovering your purpose as you serve God and advance his kingdom? Making a difference for eternity as you invest your time, treasure, and talents in God's purposes? Explain.



On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “far away” and 10 being “very close,” how would you rate where you are in proximity to God? Why did you choose this score? Where would you *like* to be in your relationship with God?

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God is the only one who can know you at your deepest levels. He made you and knows the purpose for which you were designed. He alone holds the book on your life and knows the number of your days. You can never find fulfillment and true, lasting joy apart from knowing him. You cannot begin to know what step to take next in your life without him. Knowing God is the key to life.

WHAT'S NEXT? PAGES 7–8

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## Dig Deeper

The opening of section 1, “Know God,” in *What’s Next?* includes several verses that focus on what it means to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, welcome his Holy Spirit into your life, and grow in your relationship with God. Read through the following passages and identify what they mean to you about knowing God at this point in your life.

*Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).*

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him (Revelation 3:20 NKJV).*

*If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved (Romans 10:9–10).*

*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).*

*But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12 NLT).*

Can you think of other passages from God’s Word that help you understand your relationship with him? List them below along with a brief indication of how they speak to you.



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[Knowing God] is a recurring process of walking with God throughout your life. It's an ongoing dynamic relationship, a process of continuing to know each other longer and deeper, closer and closer. If you marry someone, your marriage doesn't end after the ceremony or on your first, second, tenth, or golden wedding anniversary. It's an ongoing dynamic relationship, a process of continuing to know each other longer and deeper, closer and closer. Knowing God is quite similar. You can know his voice by praying, talking, and listening to him. You can know his ways by reading, studying, and applying them.

*WHAT'S NEXT?*, PAGE 8

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## Identify

Across the centuries, followers of Jesus have cultivated habits that help them know God at a deeper level. Sometimes called “spiritual disciplines,” these practices can help provide structure and continuity within your daily and weekly schedule so you can make your time with God a practical priority. You may have enjoyed using some of these practices in the past, or you may be discovering them for the first time. Either way, they can enhance the quality of time spent praying, reading the Bible, or serving others.

On the following page is a brief, non-comprehensive list of several spiritual practices. Place a checkmark next to the one that you will commit to pursue between now and when your group next meets . . . and then continue to practice it until your group completes this study. Consider choosing a spiritual practice you have never tried before to see how it helps you know God in a new or different way. If you're not sure, spend a few moments in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.

- ❑ **Praying daily**—for at least ten minutes each day or up to thirty minutes
- ❑ **Taking a prayer walk**—around your neighborhood, through your community, in the beauty of nature, alone or with others
- ❑ **Reading your Bible daily**—on your own or using a Bible study guide
- ❑ **Memorizing Scripture**—a strategic verse or passage that speaks to where you are right now
- ❑ **Meditating on a Bible verse or passage**—asking the Holy Spirit to guide you
- ❑ **Reflecting on a key word or phrase from Scripture**—in silence for at least five minutes
- ❑ **Volunteering to serve others**—at a homeless shelter, food bank, or mentoring program
- ❑ **Volunteering to serve at your church**—two hours a week, or whatever is needed
- ❑ **Preparing a meal for someone in need**—in your neighborhood, church, community, or workplace

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[God is] speaking to your heart, pursuing you, wooing you, gently and persistently knocking on your door and waiting for your response. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him” (Revelation 3:20 NKJV). If you’re already in a relationship with God and have opened your heart to Jesus, then it’s time to find out what’s next on your journey; it’s time to experience the joy, peace, and purpose you can know as you grow in your faith.

WHAT'S NEXT?, PAGE 12

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## Take a Step

As you think back over your first group meeting, as well as how God has spoken to you through your time alone with him this week, consider what you want to get out of this study. Create a map, diagram, flow chart, or mood board that shows where you are right now and where you want to be by the time you complete this study. Have fun and make it your own, with colorful markers, magazine photos, and other materials that inspire you. Keep your focus on illustrating the spiritual journey you would like to make during the next few weeks as you read *What's Next?*, meet with your group, and complete this study. If you'd like, bring it to your group next week and share your vision! Be sure hold on to it until you've completed this study.

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In preparation for session 2, read the opening for section 1, “Know God,” and chapters 1–3 in *What's Next?* Use the space below to note any key points or questions you want to share at the beginning of your next group meeting.