

STUDY GUIDE + STREAMING VIDEO

FIVE SESSIONS

i guess  
i haven't  
learned  
that yet

DISCOVERING NEW WAYS OF LIVING  
WHEN THE OLD WAYS STOP WORKING

shauna niequist

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WHEN THE OLD WAYS STOP WORKING

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WITH ASHLEY WIERSMA

*I Guess I Haven't Learned That Yet Study Guide*

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## a note from shauna

When I was struggling to finish the first draft of *I Guess I Haven't Learned That Yet*, my mom called. When I heard her voice, my eyes filled with tears. No matter how old I get, it seems I can hold it together pretty well until I hear my mom's empathetic voice, and then the floodgates open.

She'd been clearing out some paperwork and books she no longer needed when she came across some old journals of hers. "A few of them made me think of you," she said. "When I was in my mid-forties, I kept writing the same thing over and over again using different words: 'Every single thing that used to work has stopped working, all at the same time.'"

The reason my mom thought of me, I'm sure, is because I am now in my mid-forties. And because recently everything that used to work for me quit working all at once, too.

Just after I turned forty, life as I knew it changed in about a thousand ways. I faced a series of losses—we left our church, our hometown, a circle of relationships that had buoyed me for decades. We moved from the suburbs of Chicago to Manhattan—new friends, new lifestyle, new schools for the kids. Also my body, it seemed, had lost its mind—early menopause, chronic pain and insomnia, long-Covid symptoms. Over and over during the writing process, I told my husband I wanted to throw my laptop into the Hudson—what on earth did I have to say to anyone about anything? I felt like I was barely staying afloat myself. But then I looked around and saw that we all were struggling to stay afloat. Struggling to come back to life after a global pandemic, or to manage the mayhem

of midlife, or to sort out any of a million points of confusion that were leaving us weak at the knees. I kept going, kept writing, determined that while the night was admittedly dark and getting darker, by borrowing each other's companionship, together we'd wait for dawn. I trusted the process, as they say, because I had no other choice.

I have no tidy conclusions to offer you, as you strike off on this five-week journey, you and your beloved people, digging in and going deep. But I do know this: With a daily practice of curiosity, courage, and self-compassion, we'll find our way through.

Xo Shauna

# How to use this guide

We're so glad you've decided to be part of this video group study based on Shauna's latest book, *I Guess I Haven't Learned That Yet: Discovering New Ways of Living When the Old Ways Stop Working*.

The five sessions included in the pages that follow will help you think through the big ideas from the book and personalize Shauna's insights for the season of change you find yourself in right now. You're in for a beautiful, meaningful experience, but before you dive in, peek at the pro tips below. There, you'll find answers to many of the questions you likely have.

## getting ready

To get the most out of this experience, have each group member gather the following materials:

- Everyone will need a copy of this study guide, which includes personal streaming access to all the teaching videos. Instructions for accessing the videos and the personal access code are located on the inside front cover of each study guide. Don't forget to write down your password! You will simply log in each time you want to watch a video or catch up if you miss a group meeting. (DVD is also available.)
- Your favorite Bible (This guide references both the *New International Version* and *The Message*, but any translation will work.)

- A pen, and extra paper or a journal, in case you need more space to log your thoughts
- An open heart and mind! Change changes us, and this experience can help us grow through those changes, if we let it.
- FOR GREATEST EXPERIENCE: A copy of Shauna's book, *I Guess I Haven't Learned That Yet: Discovering New Ways of Living When the Old Ways Stop Working*. Associated chapters to read in the book are noted each week.

## **gathering your group**

To form your group, consider rallying a few friends, family members, neighbors, colleagues, or a mix of people from all of those groups to walk through this experience with you. The best growth happens within your community, and while sharing your burdens aloud in the presence of other living, breathing human beings can feel a little scary at first, the support and strength you'll feel as a result of engaging with others who are also choosing courage and candor will be worth your while in the end.

Once you confirm who's in for this study, choose a time and date to kick things off, and also decide how frequently you will meet. This guide has been arranged into five sessions; divide those across five weeks, if you wish, or another interval that makes sense for your group. Regarding facilitation, feel free to rotate leadership responsibilities, or declare one member the point person for all five sessions. Facilitation cues appear in grayscale at the beginning of each section.

## structuring your sessions

### *“Group Time” Section*

Content for each Group Time assumes a ninety-minute meeting and is laid out in the following six sections [time estimates are in brackets]:

1. **Session Overview ::** A complete description of the session content, intended to be read aloud by one group member [5 min]
2. **What Say You? ::** A non-threatening icebreaker question that gives everyone a chance to contribute something to the discussion before watching the video [10 min]
3. **Video Notes ::** Space for logging key take-aways from the video portion of the meeting [15–20 min]
4. **Talking Points ::** Group discussion questions related to the video. Facilitator should review questions in advance to determine which ones to highlight. [45–50 min]
5. **Worthwhile Reminders ::** Punchy, spoken-word-style takeaways from each session, intended to be read aloud by one group member or in round-robin fashion [5 min]
6. **Setting Your Intention ::** Silent time of personal commitment to act on something learned in each session [5 min]

## “Solo Study” Section

Between sessions (and following the final session), group members are encouraged to complete the three-part “Solo Study” on their own time. This content reinforces what was discussed during group time and invites participants to go a little deeper in their understanding of navigating change effectively. Those three parts include the following:

1. **Honor Your Reality ::** Questions to contemplate where you are today
2. **Allow God’s Truth to Speak ::** Biblical passages to help you make sense of the season of change you’re in
3. **Discover a Brand-New Way ::** Questions to contemplate where you’d like to be going forward

## valuing your people

Dealing with change can be an agonizing and disconcerting experience, so be sure to work to foster an environment of warmth, patience, and grace within your group. As the group’s rhythm gets established, you’ll want to be mindful of *drawing out* those who tend to observe but not participate, and *drawing to a close* those who might be prone to oversharing.

Also, as you come to know those in your group better, you may decide to include overtly spiritual practices that honor all participants—praying together, singing a hymn each time you gather, reciting liturgies, receiving Communion, and so forth—as part of your time together. Your group will know best what will be useful and meaningful to all.

SESSION

1

G · R · O · U · P   T · I · M · E

# When change comes

(and it always does)

We can let go, or we  
can be dragged.

## session overview

*To center your thoughts on this session's topic, have a group member read the following section aloud.*

One of the reasons that change often feels so off-putting and upsetting is because it absolutely *does* knock us off our balance and upset the rhythms we have in place. Change takes in our well-formed paradigms and scoffs. Change looks at our painstakingly-curated preferences and rolls its eyes. Change acknowledges our carefully crafted processes and says, “Pffft. Who needs those?” It demotes us to rookie status, forcing us to begin all over again. And after a certain point in our maturity, who in the world wants that?

When Shauna and her family moved from their well-established lives in the Midwest to the hub of activity that is Manhattan, nothing was as it had been. Her home address changed. Her square footage changed. Her church community changed. Her modes of transportation changed. Things were *different* there. All the expertise she'd spent her adult years cultivating seemingly had no relevance in her new life. Which brought her to a question: *Who am I, here, now?*

While you may not be undergoing change on the same mass scale that Shauna experienced three years ago, things in your life are most likely not as they once were. Your relationships might look different than they used to look. Your job may have radically shifted. Maybe your faith has shifted, too. The question that came to Shauna presents itself to you: Who are you amid these changes? Who are you, here, now?

In this opening session of the five-week experience, we'll look at what it means to become a rookie again, either because we choose to do so or because life puts us onto a path against our will . . . the undeniable downside, and the upside you may never have considered before. Change comes to us all—there are no exceptions to that rule. We can clench our fists and fume against it, or we can learn to become our next selves by facing change, by speaking what's true, by letting what's dead be dead, by surrendering to find our way through.

## what say you?

*As you get going, invite group members to introduce themselves and briefly share their thoughts on the questions below.*

Do you consider yourself to be someone who thrives in change, or someone who wilts and wobbles a little every time change happens?

Would those who know you agree with your response?

## video notes

*Play the Session 1 video, either streaming or using the DVD.  
Invite group members to use the prompts below to take notes.*

- Full-on rookies
- “I guess I haven’t learned that yet”
- A change in posture and perspective
- When old things stop working
- How we make it through
- Summer all the time
- Let go, or be dragged

## talking points

*Read each question aloud to usher in and encourage group discussion.*

1. Shauna says her expertise centers on making restaurant recommendations, packing the perfect Trader Joe's tote, and the ability to scrounge together dinner from a mishmash of random leftovers.

Now it's your turn: What are *you* an expert in?

2. What was your reaction to the content in this session's video? What thoughts or feelings rose to the surface as you took in all Shauna said about becoming a rookie again?



The very real **temptation** during times of massive **change** is to try to **stay** where we're an **expert**, where we know what to **expect**.

—Shauna  
(quote from video)

3. For Shauna and her husband, Aaron, the age when they assumed they would “have it all figured out” was thirty-five. As you came into adulthood, was there an age when you thought you’d possess the requisite wisdom to sort of coast through the rest of the years? What assumptions or experiences do you suppose informed that thinking?
  
4. As you survey the landscape of your life right now, where do you feel like you’re starting all over, as if you’re back to being a beginner, a rookie?
  
5. Based on your own “rookie” experiences, does it make sense to you that Shauna’s sons began to wonder if they were failing or falling behind as they started new schools in New York? Why or why not? Do you also tend to connect the feelings of being new with failing or falling behind?

6. What emotions do you experience as you sit with the phrase, “I guess I haven’t learned that yet”?

Why do you suppose our culture is hesitant to embrace *not knowing*? Why do we tend to elevate—even idolize—expertise?



“I guess I haven’t **learned** that yet.” I wrote that sentence **because** I wanted us to have a **common** language for what it means to be a **learner**, a **beginner**, to be **curious** and make **mistakes** and get back up. To ask **questions** and figure it out as we go.

—Shauna  
(p. 8)

7. In this session's video, Shauna talked about recognizing during her season of full-scale change that the old ways of living life just wouldn't work anymore. How do you relate to the idea that the ways that once served you well just aren't helpful any longer?

Maybe you used to procrastinate until the last minute on critical projects, or stuff feelings down deep and power through your life, or throw caution to the wind with alcohol consumption, or avoid (necessary, useful) confrontation like it was the plague, or . . . or . . . or. You get the idea.

Spend a few minutes thinking on your own and then log your "old ways that are no longer helpful to me" below. Share one of your thoughts with your group and discuss why.

My old ways that are no longer helpful:

- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



The **skills** you **picked up** in previous seasons of **change** will get you through the **tough season** you're in.

—Shauna  
(quote from video)

## worthwhile reminders

*Select a volunteer to read the following passage aloud. Then move directly to the “Setting Your Intention” section.*

Change is always at hand.  
Changing me, changing everything.  
Changing what I thought I knew for sure,  
What I thought I *was* for sure.

It is here now, shining bright light on the old ways I thought  
would last me a lifetime,  
On the patterns and processes that served me so well.  
On the life I loved, the ways I loved, the me that was doing okay.  
I'm changing now, with the change. Still, I am doing okay.

*And so I begin again.*  
That's the posture I'd love to have now.  
Beginner. Rookie. Novice. Newbie. Learner. Seeker. Open to  
all-things-new.  
I'm open to all things new.

I've held it all together for so long.  
 Preserving, never letting it fall apart.  
 Something's falling here, now. Maybe it's *a//* falling—I don't  
 know.  
 I'm ready to fall with it, ready to fall into—and in love with—the  
 next new version of me.



There are things that **remain**, through **lines**  
 I've **held** to like **lifelines** in this season of  
**compounded** change and **chaos**. Our **marriage**, my  
**faith**, my **work** as a writer, and my **love** for the table remain  
**constant**, although even those things have been **refined**—  
 altered as a result of all the other altering. That's how it works. The  
**changes** connect and **cascade**, and the only way through it, it  
 seems to me, . . . is [to] keep moving **forward**, keep putting one foot  
 in front of the other.

—Shauna  
 (p. 11)

## setting your intention

*Read to the group, and allow some time for quiet reflection and response.*

To focus your attention on one objective for this coming week as we wrap up our time together, think about the discussion we just had. Answer the following question and if you feel comfortable,

share your objective with the group and allow them to encourage you with accountability.

What do you hope to learn on the topic of staying open to times of great change? Select something from the list below or come up with your own.

*I want to learn to . . .*

- ☐ be an unashamed, unapologetic rookie, novice, *learner*.
- ☐ embrace change instead of always fighting it.
- ☐ feel at ease telling the truth of where I'm at to a family member or friend.
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## before dismissing

*Encourage all participants to read Introduction and Chapter 5 in the I Guess I Haven't Learned That Yet book and to engage in the "Solo Study" before your next group meeting.*

S E S S I O N

1

S · O · L · O   S · T · U · D · Y

# when change comes

(and it always does)

*Work through the following sections on your own, before you gather with your group for Session 2.*

When we sense that change is afoot in our lives, we have a choice to make: We can either cling to the way things used to be, or embrace whatever's trying to be born. The funny thing is that every good, productive pattern in your life exists only because you embraced a big change. If you enjoy a solid marriage today, it's because you let go of singlehood. If you are confident in your skills at work today, it's because you had a steep learning curve. If you are a person of faith who walks with God, it's because you

surrendered your will to his. But sometimes, when we aren't the ones pursuing change, but rather change is pursuing us, it feels like we're out of control. It feels as if we have no say in the matter. It feels like we're being punished somehow.

The truth is that the same persistence, resilience, confidence, determination, and sheer hope that saw you through the changes you chose can see you through this change now. The skills you need to weather your current season are already inside of you. The things you long for are already at hand.

## **honor your reality**

In *I Guess I Haven't Learned That Yet*, Shauna writes about visiting a church one Sunday, when her family was in the painful process of leaving the church they'd been a part of for many years. A preacher named Zina was teaching on the story of Joseph and his brothers, and on how you never really know the full story when you're in the middle of living it.

She wrote about being in a wilderness of sorts.

About crying in a pew.

About having left behind something that was deeply valuable to her.

About staring at a blank space where the future once was.

About starting over when she thought things were sure.

The world is changing faster than we can keep track of . . . You may, like me, find yourself in midlife—or maybe you're twenty or sixty or eighty—and all of a sudden, the life you planned is gone. And the world you thought you lived in is gone. And the assumptions and beliefs that carried you through up to this moment have dumped you unceremoniously into a foreign land. [p. 20]

In these words, Shauna honestly shares the way things really are. During the video, she said that the only way through agonizing change is to tell the truth as we are experiencing it in our own lives. It's your turn now. With Shauna's level of vulnerability fresh on your mind, how would you put words to the truth of the changes you're walking through, the deeply valuable things you may be being asked to leave behind?

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As you think through the various aspects of any season of change, do you more naturally resonate with whom Shauna called the “clingers” (those who have trouble letting go), or with those who are prone to making a quick exit, those who let go quickly and get on with life?

- ☐ *I’m more of a clinger. I stay too long and hold on too tightly.*
- ☐ *I move easily through and adapt quickly to transition.*

What would you say are the benefits of your given approach? On the flip side, what are the risks? Note your thoughts on the table before moving on.

to let go, or to be dragged

Benefits of My Approach	Risks of My Approach

Whether we're quick to accept the endings that are necessary for new growth or not, things end so that we can begin again.

Given your reality today, what endings would you say should be honored in your life? A perspective that no longer serves you well? A relationship that has run its course? A habit that is causing you to spiral instead of soar? An attitude that pushes away people who deeply matter to you?

To lean into Shauna's seasonal metaphor, which summers need to come to a close? Put pen to paper about a few in the space below.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## allow God's truth to speak

During the video segment Shauna mentioned that while her experience the last few years has been the most tumultuous and taxing season of her life, she also knew that something useful was also growing, that beneficial things also were gained. There was good mixed with the bad. There was beauty alongside the pain.

As you think about this revelation of hers, do you find yourself nodding in agreement or reflexively pushing back? Which of the following two statements is truer for you?

- ☐ *If there's an upside to what I've been walking through, I'm not ready to acknowledge it. And that's if there's an upside at all.*
- ☐ *I do see the benefit of this experience. I see the world differently. I see myself differently. I'm stronger than I thought I was.*



My eyes **see** the world in ways I didn't **before**—  
less **naivete**, more **compassion**, more  
**awareness** of the **suffering** many people have been  
carrying for **years**, even when I was **unaware** . . . I've  
**learned** to live in a **smaller**, quieter world, and I've been  
surprised at how much I like it.

—Shauna  
(pp. 10–11)

In the Old Testament book of Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah wrote to the nation of Israel to explain that God would keep his promises to them. God would return them to the land of their possession. He would make a way where it seemed like there was no way for them to thrive. Isaiah told the people that God would act on their behalf, the same God who “builds a road right through the ocean, who carves a path through pounding waves, the God who summons horses and chariots and armies—they lie down and then can’t get up; they’re snuffed out like so many candles” (Isaiah 43:16–17 MSG).

As you read Isaiah’s specific prophesy, make notes on the lines of the actions God says he will take on his people’s behalf.

*“Forget about what’s happened;  
don’t keep going over old history.  
Be alert, be present. I’m about to do something brand-new.  
It’s bursting out! Don’t you see it?  
There it is! I’m making a road through the desert,  
rivers in the badlands.  
Wild animals will say, ‘Thank you!’  
—the coyotes and the buzzards—  
Because I provided water in the desert,  
rivers through the sunbaked earth,  
Drinking water for the people I chose,  
the people I made especially for myself,  
a people custom-made to praise me.”—Isaiah 43:18–21 MSG*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

God commits to acting on his people's behalf, but he expects them to do something, too. Take another look at the opening verses in the passage above. What four things does God ask the people to do to facilitate their own healing and wholeness and growth?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think it's possible to see the new thing that God is trying to do while still holding on to the old history, the old habits, the old ways? Why or why not?

What makes you nervous about embracing the "new thing," even if it's coming directly from the hand of God?

On the flip side, what realities might a divinely-placed “new thing” usher into your life? How would you hope to feel differently, think differently, and act differently as a result of allowing for something new?

Complete the prompts below as thoughts occur to you.

*I long to feel new feelings, feelings such as . . .*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

*I want to think new thoughts, thoughts such as . . .*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

*I hope to take new actions, actions such as . . .*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## discover a brand-new way

If it's true that we make it through our most tumultuous and taxing seasons of change by telling each other the truth of our situation, then who might you tell the truth to today—the truth regarding what's hard, as well as the truth regarding what you're hopeful for? Who would be on your short list of confidants?

What type of support would you hope to gain from each person on that list? What challenges have they overcome in their own lives that make them well-suited to offer you help?

As names and faces come to mind, fill in the chart. Then, as you make your way through coming sessions, watch for opportunities to share your story with them.



**We** can make it through by **telling**  
each other the **truth.**

—Shauna  
(quote from video)

trusting others with the truth

Name	Connection/Relation	Type of Support I Seek

## notes

This image shows a full page of blank handwriting practice paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced, horizontal blue lines running across the width of the page. The lines are thin and light blue, set against a plain white background. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.