

FBG Vision Series Small Groups

Over the course of four sessions, you will walk through what it looks like to love God, love people and help others do the same as a small group. We believe these pieces are critical to each person growing toward Christ and for the church family to become all the Lord desires us to become.

This guide will help you navigate the journey over the course of your time together. What do you need for every great adventure? A good map. You will see the vision of FBG is laid out like a map and you will work through this map together. Each session has some key components we want you to be familiar with before you get started:

Location: When you look at a map, there are two primary locations you definitely need to know. The first is where you are and the second is where you are going. Each session will begin with pointing out where you are and locating where you are going during that session.

Leg of the journey: A good team looks at the map and identifies the different elements and challenges of that particular leg of the journey. Your group will talk about what those challenges and key elements are and how you can navigate them.

Gear: Anybody who has done much adventuring knows that the gear you carry can make all the difference. If you have the right gear it can make a difficult journey enjoyable. If you have the wrong gear, it can make even the easiest journey painful. We want to help you identify the right gear for the journey ahead.

Team role: The good news is that God didn't design you to make this journey alone. He has provided the church family (and smaller groups within that family) to specifically help each other along the way. A good team knows each other's strengths and weaknesses and learns how to work together to help each person on the team play a significant role in getting to the goal. You'll work through some ways your smaller team within the FBG family can help each other move forward together.

It is an exciting journey ahead! These sessions are building blocks for how you can walk together as a small group and as a part of the FBG family. So please make the most of your time together by being honest and seeking to engage in a way that allows every person who would like to share to have that opportunity. Enjoy the adventure!

We look forward to seeing you on the trail!

Session 1



Location: When you get to the beginning of a trail and look at the map next to the trailhead there is typically a clearly marked location on the map that says “You are here.” You take a moment to look at where you are and think about what trails you can take to go different directions. Once you figure out where you want to go, you take off down the trail for your big adventure.

This starting point is simple enough on the map, but in reality each person in the room is starting from a little bit different place spiritually. One person came to know Jesus at a young age and has spent their life trying to pursue the Lord. Another rebelled against what they were taught about Jesus until recently. Someone else never talked about Jesus at all. A fourth person has been playing a game of “let me look like a good Christian” on the outside while on the inside, sin is wasting them away and nobody knows.

So start by asking the group what seems to be a basic question:

What is your spiritual starting point?

(The facilitator should go first and give a bit more than a generic “I follow Jesus” answer. Model honesty. Know your group. If this is the first time to meet, give some options of honest answers that don’t try to force too much from anyone. For example, you might give them some options: growing in Christ, new to following Christ, struggling to follow Christ, curious about Christ, etc. This gives them an opportunity to respond and help the group know a little bit without someone feeling forced to share too much right out of the gate. If your group has been together for a while then go deeper.)

The beauty is that the Lord takes each of us right where we are, but He has no intentions of leaving us there. God’s plan is not for you to spiritually stay in the same place on the map. You don’t really want to stay there either. Because regardless of where you are specifically, there is a truth about where we want to go that we all have in common: *We want our lives to have significance.*

This is the excitement you feel at the trailhead before you start; the feeling that there is something significant out there on the trail and you want to be a part of it.

Leg of the journey: Before you can get out on the trail, you have to take an honest look at yourself and see how prepared you are for the trip. So this leg of the journey is focused on identifying where you are. If you've never been on a hike before you don't want to start with a three-day, 25-mile hike. You need to make an honest assessment so you can determine how best to move forward.

The good news is that God has intentionally placed each of you right where you are, right when you are.

Acts 17:26-27: From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us (NIV).

God does not make mistakes and He is always at work. This verse says God has literally appointed your time in history and has marked out where you would live. So *where* you are and *when* you are is directed by the plans of God. He has placed you where you are, when you are so you can seek Him and find Him.

Questions:

- Where has the Lord placed you right now (neighborhood, work, family, friends)? Take some time to discuss where the Lord has placed you.
- How have you seen the Lord at work in where He has you?
- How does knowing God has you right where you are, right when you are, change your perspective on the way you live?

Even though it may feel like random circumstances have moved you to where you are, be thankful that God has been in control the whole time. God has always seen and been invested in your "You are here" mark on the map and He cares deeply about you.

Gear: Figuring out what gear to take on any trip can prove to be a large undertaking. Before the trip we often lay everything out and try to work through what would be best to have on the trip. Then we stuff it in our pack hoping we can get the pack closed and zipped up.

Our lives are no different. When we think about what we should use to help us make decisions along the journey or who should we trust, it can be difficult to figure out. For every voice we listen to, there's another one we can't. For every resource we use to help provide guidance, there is another resource we don't have the time for. So figuring out what gear to put in the pack is critical. Thankfully we've been provided with some clear guidance on what we need for our spiritual journey.

Piece of gear #1 – Recognize and know the Guide: A guide knows the trail better than anyone else and knows what lies ahead. They are prepared to help you navigate the terrain of what's to come and be able to help you get to the destination. The right guide knows about perils all along the path you didn't even know existed. Sometimes we don't even think we need a guide until we start walking the trail and they start pointing out all the things we were missing along the way (benefits and threats). Throughout the time on the trail it becomes increasingly apparent how important the guide has been. A great guide leaves you with a deep sense of gratitude and humility that you had the guide with you all along the journey.

A bad guide can get you lost and headed down the wrong trail. Good guides have a list of credentials that show you they have the experience and the knowledge to help you navigate the trail. The world will offer many guides, but there is only one Guide who truly knows the trail, can see the whole path at one time and has the credentials that are worth entrusting our lives to.

Questions:

- What are some other “guides” we often turn to besides the Lord?
- How have you seen these “guides” lead you the wrong direction?
- What has happened when you try to walk through life as your own guide?
- What are some credentials the Lord has that no other guide does?

Here are a few of God's credentials to be our Guide:

- **He made all of creation and has complete authority over it:** We know there is nothing that has been made that he did not make. He has literally created the path we walk along. Is there any other guide that has done this?

Acts 17:24-25: The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else (NIV).

Nehemiah 9:6: You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you (NIV).

- **He has always been and always will be:** His presence is stable. He is not a guide that wavers. He was around before the path was created and He will be around long after it's gone. There is great comfort in having a consistent and stable Guide.

Revelation 1:8: “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty (NIV).

Psalm 145:13: Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does (NIV).

- **He cares about the travelers:** The Lord cares so greatly about each traveler that He sacrificed His own Son so the travelers might know Him. Our Guide intentionally sent His Son to be a sacrifice so we could travel the path that was previously blocked to us by our sin. No other guide the world offers has made such a sacrifice with the same authority.

John 3:16-17: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (NIV).

Ephesians 2:4-5: But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved (NIV).

We could list numerous credentials the Lord has that make Him the only true Guide worth following.

Piece of gear #2 – Make a travel plan: When you go on a trip you typically make a plan. How many days will you be gone? Where exactly will you spend the night? What will you do each day? It is important that you make a plan for how you are going to travel the path ahead. Otherwise you will unintentionally get off the right path and end up where you never intended to go.

We tend to think making a plan for our lives means we need to map out the specifics of our future and be in control. If we feel like we're in control then we must actually be in control. Here's the problem. The feeling of control is an illusion. We think we understand how to navigate the trail and then we find ourselves in a completely different place than we intended to go. None of us are able to navigate the trail on our own. Every time we try; we fail miserably.

So the goal in navigating the trail of life is not to try and figure out how to get better at navigating on our own. The goal is to seek to stay as close to the Guide as possible. If we will focus on the Guide rather than our own navigation ability, the journey will be soul-satisfying no matter where the trail goes. Not because of where we are, but because of who we are with – the Guide.

We should not look at where we are, when we are, to find our significance. We can be just as significant (even more so) in a quiet job, living in a regular house, going about the normal patterns of life as we would be in a public job with a huge spotlight on us and the world

watching. Why? Because it is not our location or circumstance that determines our usefulness for God's kingdom. It is about whether or not we are staying close to the Guide, because He gives significance and purpose anywhere along the trail.

The beauty is that even if you have gotten yourself lost in the deep forest, way off the trail, the Guide is always present and He is always able to lead you to the destination. No matter the place, the Guide can meet you there and lead you where He wants you to be. In fact, the location you are in right now is the best place for God to work in your life if you will trust Him. Trust Him right where you are, right when you are. The location is not as important as the presence of the Guide.

Questions:

- Share a time you tried to be in control and got yourself way off track. How did you see the Lord meet you right where you were and lovingly draw you back?
- Why do we tend to focus on trying to map our own way down the path rather than staying close to the Guide?
- How would your life look different if you focused on staying close to the Guide instead of focusing on improving your navigation skills?

Team role: Your faith was never intended to be lived out in isolation. When you look throughout the Bible, you will find that faith was intended to be lived out in community. Salvation occurs individually, but living out one's faith happens communally. So let's take a look at a couple of important roles the small group family can play from the beginning.

1. **Point the family back to the Guide:** The most important role your small group family can play is to help each other keep your eyes fixed on the Guide (Hebrews 12:2). It can be easy to focus on seeking to map the trail together and trying to guide each other. The problem is that none of us are good guides. All of our navigation skills are broken. But we can always turn to the Guide. So how do we encourage one another because clearly the Lord wants us to learn from each other? Look at what Paul says:

1 Corinthians 11:1: Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (NIV).

Paul doesn't say, I have the answers for you so listen to what I have to say. He simply says follow me as I follow Christ. To put it in our context – follow me as I follow the Guide. The best way we can encourage each other is to follow the Guide ourselves and to help one another follow the Guide together.

Questions:

- What are some practical ways your small group family can be intentional to help each other focus on following the Guide rather than simply following each other (the group's opinions)?
- How can you encourage each other with what God has done in your life while still being focused on pointing to the Guide?

2. **Regularly talk about the truth that where you are and when you are is the best place for you to move toward the Lord.** The Lord wants to work in your life right where you are right now. You do not have to clean everything up and get “fixed” before He can work. You do not need to get your circumstances more in order. You do not need to wait until this or that is settled. God knows right where you are and He has a plan for right where you are. You simply need to trust Him and His plan and run to Him.

Questions:

- How can your small group family be intentional about looking at where the Lord has your group and seeking Him right where you are? Serving Him right where you are?
- What patterns can your group set that can help each other be intentional right where you are?

Wrap-up: It is so comforting to know the Lord takes us right where we are and that is the best place for us to be able to know Him and grow in Him. This shows the Lord's grace as He patiently draws us to Himself. There is an incredible journey ahead for each of you and your small group family. Embrace your starting place and trust the one Guide who is worthy to be followed.

Spend some time praying for each other and for the Lord to show you how to implement these things into your own lives and the life of your small group family.

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