NEW HOPE
WINDWARD

EVER WONDER WHY?

ANSWERS TO SOME OF LIFE'S TOUGHEST QUESTIONS

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

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SMALL GROUP TIPS

1. **START & FINISH ON TIME.** Doing this will show your small group you value their time.

2. **BE COMFORTABLE WITH SILENCE.** Uncomfortable silences are bound to happen. It's okay! A long pause during a group discussion can be powerful. A *pause* gives space for quieter people to break into the conversation; silence allows people to figure out exactly what they would like to say.

3. **CONFIDENTIALITY IS IMPORTANT.** Confidentiality is the key to building trust in relationships. Here are a few mottos to remember to be confidential: "What is said in small group, stays in small group." **Nothing, nobody, never**...*"Share nothing, to nobody, never*" outside of the group.

4. **MAKE GROUP A PRIORITY.** Communicate in advance when you will be unable to attend by either calling and/or texting your host or responding to the zoom email invitation by accepting or declining. This will help your host to plan accordingly especially if it is an in person small group gathering.

5. **ALLOW SPACE FOR DOUBT.** Hosts and participants should allow people space and time to process their doubts. Genuine doubt and questions are healthy for spiritual growth and it is important to not discount and/or minimize genuine doubts. James 1:19: "Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry."

6. **ENCOURAGE GROWTH.** Genuine doubt often leads to deeper faith. You are not there to address, "fix" or change the doubts of others. Share your perspective then encourage doubters to continue to pray for answers and to draw closer to God through the trial. Try not to speak in judgement and seek reconciliation/forgiveness for any resentment created through the discussion.

7. **ASK FOR HELP.**
   The Small Group Ministry is here to help. Email **smallgroups@nhww.org** to ask any questions, request training or other assistance for your small group.

TIPS TO A SUCCESSFUL GROUP

- **MAKE GROUP A PRIORITY.** Communicate in advance when you are unable to attend by calling and/or texting your host or responding to the zoom email invitation by accepting or declining. This will help your host to plan accordingly especially if it is an in person small group gathering. Additional tips on page 3.

“Why Can’t I Stop?”

Breaking Free With the Power of Grace

ICEBREAKER

Share a time when you tried to break a habit by sheer willpower. How long did it last? Was it difficult to maintain? (Examples: Trying not to complain or worry, etc.)

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for taking this step to grow deeper in your faith and build authentic relationships. Whether this is your first time in a small group or you're a seasoned member, you're in the right place. Together, we'll explore how God's grace doesn't just save us - it gives us the power to change.

We've all been there - promising ourselves (or God) that we'll never do "that" again, only to fall back into the same patterns days or even hours later. We find ourselves saying “WHY

can't I stop this?" In this session we're going to learn that real change isn't about trying harder. God has some solutions to transform us from the inside out.

NOTE: This series may lead to differing opinions on important matters. Challenging conversations might arise, requiring extra care. As you explore doubts and questions within your group, please be mindful that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, at various stages of our faith journey. Please approach discussions with empathy, respect, and understanding.

READ |

Consider these powerful words about the transforming power of grace:

*"For the **grace of God** has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live **self-controlled, upright and godly lives** in this present age." -Titus 2:11-12 (NIV)*

It's not our willpower that transforms us - it's God's grace that both saves us and also supplies the power to change. The same grace that forgave our past is actively working to change our present, helping us to say "no" to what dishonors God and "yes" to what reflects His character.

How has experiencing God's grace and power help you overcome temptation? Describe a specific experience where you sensed divine strength (grace) working alongside your own efforts.

READ |

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence! -Matthew 23:25-26 (NLT)

The Pharisees were religious leaders who mastered the art of appearing holy on the outside while their hearts remained unchanged - so much so that Jesus called them *"whitewashed tombs" (Matthew 23:27)*. They were experts at following rules and maintaining appearances, but missed the transforming power of God's grace. Religion

focuses on cleaning up our outward behavior, while the grace of God transforms us from the inside out.

Have you ever caught yourself focused more on "looking good" and “saying the right thing” than actually "being changed"? What's the difference between these two approaches?

(Examples: Pretending a relationship is fine while remaining offended, saying “spiritual things” but not living it out, etc.)

READ |

“Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me....For when I am weak, then I am strong.” - 2 Corinthians 12:9-10b (NLT)

When life hits hard, God's power works best through our honesty, not our attempts to look strong. Just like a broken bone needs to be properly set to heal, our weaknesses need to be brought into God's light to experience His strength. Paul discovered this truth when facing his own struggles - the more openly he admitted his need for God, the more of God's power he experienced.

Think of a time when you tried to handle struggles through your own strength. What happened when you finally surrendered them to God?
How has viewing weakness as an opportunity for God's power (rather than something to hide) changed how you face challenges?

READ |

Jesus replied, “If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water.” -John 4:10 (NLT)

There was a Samaritan woman who tried to fill her emptiness with multiple relationships (she had five husbands), yet still came to draw water from a well daily because her deepest thirst remained unquenched.

Jesus told her, *"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst" (John 4:13-14)*. Like her, we often try to satisfy our spiritual thirst with temporary solutions - whether it's through achievements, relationships, entertainment, or other earthly comforts. Just as a bubble bath might bring temporary

peace but can't provide lasting peace, we sometimes confuse momentary relief with real fulfillment. By finding our fulfillment in Jesus, we can gain the power to change any ungodly or sinful habits.

What are some ways you've tried to meet deeper spiritual needs with surface-level solutions? How has experiencing God's presence changed your understanding of what your heart is really searching for?

(Examples: Trying to fill the void by buying things, relying on others to meet our deeper needs, excessive media, etc.)

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

This week, let’s practice living in grace:

- Be honest with at least one trusted person about an area where you're struggling
- Write down moments when you experience God's grace giving you strength
- Replace "try harder" thoughts with "trust more" prayers

ADDITIONAL ACTION STEPS:

- Each week, we encourage you to read additional scriptures and feed your mind, heart and soul with God's word. We have provided SCRIPTURES on the next page for you to do your daily devotions.

CLOSE IN PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank You that Your grace doesn't just save us - it gives us the power to change. Forgive me for the times I've relied on my own strength or focused more on outward appearances than inward change. Help us to stop trying to earn Your approval and start trusting in Your transforming grace. Give us the courage to be honest about our struggles and the wisdom to rely on Your strength rather than our own. May Your grace continue to shape me into the person You created me to be. In Jesus' name, amen.

Make Time to be in God's WORD

Reading God's Word daily re-patterns the way you think & transforms your mind. Doing your daily devotions is an excellent way to record, process, & share what God is teaching you on a personal level. We do this using S.O.A.P.

S - Scripture
O - Observation
A - Application
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Here's an example:

S: *Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "*
--Matthew 4:4 (NIV)

O: Jesus said that we can't live on food alone. Our life is sustained through His Word.

A: Just as food is important to me, God's Word is even more because it will sustain me and give me the strength to live out my life.

P: Jesus, thank You for reminding me that I need Your Word to give me the wisdom & strength to follow You. Help me to make time to spend with You daily. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

SCRIPTURES FOR S.O.A.P.

Day 1:
God is the one who began this good work in you, and I am certain that he won't stop before it is complete on the day that Christ Jesus returns.
--Philippians 1:6 (CEV)

Day 2:
This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!
--2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)

Day 3:
Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.
--Romans 12:2 (NLT)

Day 4:
Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
--Hebrews 4:16 (NIV)

Day 5:
For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.
--Philippians 4:13 (NLT)

TIPS TO A SUCCESSFUL GROUP

- **CONFIDENTIALITY IS IMPORTANT.** Confidentiality is the key to building trust in relationships. Here are a few mottos to remember to be confidential: "What is said in small group, stays in small group." Nothing, nobody, never... "Share nothing, to nobody, never" outside of the group.Additional tips on page 3.

Why Do Some Prayers Seem Unanswered?

ICEBREAKER

Share a time when someone's answer of "no" to your request actually led to something better in your life. What did you learn from that experience? (Examples: In a relationship, a purchase, a job opportunity, etc.)

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever noticed how some prayers seem to get instant results, while others feel like they're hitting a brick wall? You're not alone! But what if I told you there's a secret to prayer that could revolutionize your spiritual life? It's not about finding the right words or twisting God's arm. No, it's about something far more exciting and life-changing. Are you ready to

discover the true purpose of prayer that most people miss? Get ready, because this could be the game-changer you've been waiting for in your walk with God!

READ |

Consider this powerful moment of honest faith from a desperate father:

"'The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him.
Have mercy on us and help us, if you can."
Jesus asked, "What do you mean, 'If I can'? "Anything is possible if a person believes."
The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"
- Mark 9:22-24 (NLT)

Wrestling with doubt doesn't mean our faith is weak - it means we're engaging deeply with God. The key is to bring our doubts to Him rather than pulling away. Like a muscle strengthening through resistance, our faith often grows strongest through seasons of questioning.

Share about a time when you had to pray through your doubts. What helped you hold onto faith even when you couldn't see the answer?

READ |

Think about your best friend. You don't just text them when you need something - you share life together! That's how Jesus wants us to pray. Many of us treat prayer like a drive-thru: place our order and expect instant delivery. But God wants a relationship, not a transaction. Prayer isn't about getting stuff - it's about getting to know God better.

"You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father." - John 14:13 (NLT)

When Jesus said to ask "in His name," He meant asking for things that align with His character and bring glory to God.

When have you caught yourself treating prayer more like a wishlist than a conversation? This week, try spending 5 minutes just talking to God like a friend - no requests, just conversation. How do you think it will feel different?

READ |

Ever try calling someone with bad reception? That's what unforgiveness does to our prayer life. It creates static in our connection with God.

*"When you are praying, **first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against,** so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too." - Mark 11:25 (NLT)*

Sometimes unanswered prayers can be traced back to broken relationships in our lives. Jesus makes a direct connection between forgiving others and our prayer life. Unforgiveness blocks our prayers. When we hold grudges with people, it affects our relationship with God and can lead to unanswered prayers.

Forgiveness isn't a feeling - it's a daily choice that clears the line between you and God. Start with this prayer: *"God, I choose to forgive _____ today. Help me release this hurt and restore my connection with You."*

How does knowing unforgiveness can block prayers change your view of holding onto grudges? Is there anyone you need to forgive (don't share their name). What's keeping you from taking that step today?

READ |

Ever noticed how eagles wait for the right wind currents before soaring? Like the eagle, our strength comes from trusting God's timing, not pushing our own agenda. When we trust God in our waiting seasons, He promises to exchange our weakness for His strength.

But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint." - Isaiah 40:31 (NLT)

God doesn't just promise relief from the wait - He promises strength during it. While you're waiting pray, "Lord, I choose to trust You for new strength today."

What feels harder right now - the waiting or the trusting? What would help you trust God more deeply during this time? (Examples: Praying more, learning or memorizing God's Word, support from others, etc.)

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

This week, let's transform our prayer life by:

- Starting each prayer with conversation & thanksgiving instead of requests.
- Taking steps toward making things right with anyone you need to forgive, and have someone keep you accountable to it.
- Spend 5 minutes just talking to God like a friend - no requests, just conversation. Share with the group how it affected your view of God and prayer.

CLOSE IN PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, Thank You for wanting to have a real relationship with us, not just a one-way conversation. Even when we don't understand what's happening in our lives, help us to trust that You love us and have a good plan. Help us to get closer to You through our prayers. We know that You hear us and care about everything we're going through. Give us patience to wait for Your timing and trust that You know what's best for us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Make Time to be in God's WORD

Reading God's Word daily re-patterns the way you think & transforms your mind. Doing your daily devotions is an excellent way to record, process, & share what God is teaching you on a personal level. We do this using S.O.A.P.

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Here's an example:

S: *Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "*
--Matthew 4:4 (NIV)

O: Jesus said that we can't live on food alone. Our life is sustained through His Word.

A: Just as food is important to me, God's Word is even more because it will sustain me and give me the strength to live out my life.

P: Jesus, thank You for reminding me that I need Your Word to give me the wisdom & strength to follow You. Help me to make time to spend with You daily. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

SCRIPTURES FOR S.O.A.P.

Day 1:
Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.
--Romans 12:12 (NIV)

Day 2:
The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. --James 5:16b (NLT)

Day 3:
He will pray to God, and God will delight in him. That person will see His face with a shout of joy, and God will restore his righteousness to him.
--Job 33:26 (CSB)

Day 4:
Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land. --2 Chronicles 7:14 (NLT)

Day 5:
Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life. --Psalm 139:23-24 (NLT)

TIPS TO A SUCCESSFUL GROUP

- **BE COMFORTABLE WITH SILENCE.** Uncomfortable silences are bound to happen. It's okay! A long pause during a group discussion can be powerful. A pause gives space for quieter people to break into the conversation; silence allows people to figure out exactly what they would like to say. Additional tips on page 3.

When God Feels Far Away

Finding Him in the Silence

ICEBREAKER

What everyday moments tend to make you feel most connected to God? (Examples: watching a sunrise, singing a worship song, Bible-reading, fellowship with other Christians, volunteering in church, etc.)

INTRODUCTION

We all experience times when God feels distant. But just because we can't feel Him doesn't mean He isn't there. God's presence isn't dependent on our feelings. In fact, those moments when He seems distant? They may be an opportunity for you to draw you even

closer to God. Discover the keys to trusting God's presence, even when your feelings are telling you otherwise. This could be the spiritual breakthrough you've been waiting for!

READ |

"Lord, I cry out to you. I will keep on pleading day by day. Lord, why do you reject me? Why do you turn your face from me?" -Psalm 88:13-14 (NLT)

Even spiritual heroes like King David and the Apostle Paul felt distant from God at times. In *Psalm 88:14*, the writer cries out, *"Why, Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me?"* He expressed a feeling many people experience, at one point or another in life, feeling rejected and abandoned by God.

When you're going through times of feeling disconnected from God, remember you're not alone. Many great leaders in the Bible experienced this too. God promises to never leave or forsake us. God is close to the brokenhearted. You can cling to His promises and trust that He is with you. God is there, even when he seems distant.

How does it feel knowing that even these "spiritual giants" of the Bible experienced times of feeling disconnected from God? What promises from God/Scripture help anchor you during these seasons?

READ |

Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. -Hebrews 12:1b (NLT)

Sin in our lives can make us less sensitive to God's presence. Just like bundling up in winter numbs us to the cold, holding onto anger, pride, or resentment builds walls between us and God. Confessing our sins and surrendering our lives to Him removes those barriers so we can feel close to Him again.

In order to feel the presence of God, we need to take the time to *"unbundle*" any sins. Ask Him to show you any attitudes or actions that are getting in the way of your relationship with Him. As you draw near to God, He will draw near to you.

Have you experienced the connection between confessing sin and feeling closer to God? Share with the group. What practical steps can you take this week to "unbundle" and draw near to God?

(Examples: Confessing to a trusted friend, apologizing to someone, asking God to reveal any sins, journaling to process grief or hurt, write a gratitude list, get accountability partner for repetitive sins, etc.)

READ |

God often shows up in everyday moments, not just big, dramatic, life-altering moments. Maybe you felt His presence while enjoying nature, serving others, or spending time with loved ones.

"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" -Psalm 139:7 (NIV)

Have you ever stopped to think about how God's presence is woven into every single moment of your day - from your first morning yawn to your last goodnight? When David wrote *"Where can I go from your Spirit?"* he wasn't just talking about the big moments in life, but about how God is right there in the ordinary Tuesday afternoons, the traffic jams, and even those middle-of-the-night worries. It's like having a best friend who's not just there for the special occasions, but who delights in being part of your everyday routine - from that first cup of coffee to the last load of laundry. We can train ourselves to notice Him in the ordinary by practicing gratitude and staying connected to Him through prayer.

What are some practical ways that you can tune in to God's presence this week?
(Examples: Singing one worship song each morning, have a conversation this someone about what God is doing in your life, enjoy God's creation by going for a walk/run, a hike, or a swim, etc.)

READ |

God has promised repeatedly,

"I will never fail you. I will never abandon you" -Hebrews 13:5 (NLT)

Yet God has *not promised that you will always feel his presence.* In fact, God acknowledges that sometimes *he hides his face from us.*

"Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior." -Isaiah 45:15 (NLT)

A common pitfall Christians face in worship is seeking an experience rather than seeking God himself. They look for a feeling of his presence. If it happens, they conclude that they have worshiped. However, sometimes God removes the feeling of his presence so we don't depend on feelings. Instead, he wants to test and mature our faith to depend on him, not the feeling of his presence.

What's the danger of depending too much on feelings and experiences in our relationship with God? (Examples: judging the quality of church services based on your emotional experience, getting addicted to chasing the next 'spiritual high' rather than walking with God, etc.)

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

This week, create space to recognize God's presence by:

- Looking for God in simple, everyday moments
- Reach out to others when God feels distant, and ask for prayer
- Spend time talking/praying to God daily, for at least an additional 5+ minutes a day this next week. Report back if you sense His presence even more.

ADDITIONAL ACTION STEPS:

- Each week, we encourage you to read additional scriptures and feed your mind, heart and soul with God's word. We have provided SCRIPTURES on the next page for you to do your daily devotions.

CLOSE IN PRAYER:

Father, thank You that You are always with us, whether we feel Your presence or not. Help us to trust Your character over our feelings, and give us eyes to see You in even the ordinary moments of life. Draw us closer to You, especially through the "dry" seasons when You feel far away. In Jesus' name, amen.

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--Matthew 4:4 (NIV)

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P: Jesus, thank You for reminding me that I need Your Word to give me the wisdom & strength to follow You. Help me to make time to spend with You daily. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

SCRIPTURES FOR S.O.A.P.

Day 1:
I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice. My body rests in safety.
--Psalm 16:8-9 (NLT)

Day 2:
If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
--1 John 1:9 (ESV)

Day 3:
So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you. --Deuteronomy 31:6 (NLT)

Day 4:
Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. --James 4:8 (NLT)

Day 5:
You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord.
--Jeremiah 29:13-14b (NIV)

TIPS TO A SUCCESSFUL GROUP

- **ALLOW SPACE FOR DOUBT.** Hosts and participants should allow people space and time to process their doubts. Genuine doubt and questions are healthy for spiritual growth and it is important to not discount and/or minimize genuine doubts. Additional tips on page 3.

What to Do While You're Waiting

ICEBREAKER

Quickly describe an example of when you had to wait much longer than expected for something. How did you react to the time of waiting?

(Examples: Waiting in line, on hold on the phone, waiting for a job offer, etc.)

INTRODUCTION

Discouragement is a common experience that can stem from things like fatigue, frustration, and fear. In our fast-paced world, waiting and facing obstacles can intensify these feelings, leading to a loss of hope or confidence, leaving us questioning *"Why am I still in this difficult season?"*

What strategies can we employ to overcome these challenging emotions? Is it possible to transform periods of waiting or setbacks into opportunities for personal growth and renewal?

READ |

"Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the Lord."
-Psalms 27:14 (NLT)

The bamboo tree grows underground for years before suddenly shooting up - similar to how God often works invisibly before we see visible results. Meanwhile, frustration and discouragement can often tempt us to give up, before seeing it come to fruition.

Share about a time when you almost quit during a waiting season but chose to persevere. What helped you "get back up" when you wanted to give up?

READ |

The Bible promises perfect peace to those who trust God and fix their thoughts on Him. Focusing on God's character and promises can calm our anxious hearts in waiting seasons. Spiritual practices like prayer, listening to and singing worship music, attending church, fellowship and meditating on Scripture help us maintain this posture of trust.

You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!
- Isaiah 26:3 (NLT)

What 'spiritual practices' help you maintain peace while waiting?
Which of these has helped you in your difficult seasons - church, worship, fellowship, volunteering, prayer, scripture?

READ |

“Be still, and know that I am God!" -Psalm 46:10a

Sometimes waiting can feel more like a wrestling match than sitting still! It's like when you're really excited about something but have to wait - your heart wants to rush ahead, but God is asking you to trust His timing.

Being still means intentionally stepping back from your own strategies, worries, and attempts to manage every detail of your life. It's a deliberate act of trust, acknowledging that God is working even when you can't see or understand His plan.

What are some ways you can be still and place your trust in God?

(Examples: Trusting God despite the circumstances, daily quiet time to process, praying before taking action, etc.)

READ |

Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. -Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

We've all been there - trying to handle everything ourselves until we're exhausted. There's a divine exchange that happens when we bring our worries to God first: He offers His peace in return. It's like having a backpack full of heavy rocks - God's inviting us to trade it for His lightweight, perfect peace instead. God doesn't just tell us to stop worrying, but He gives us a clear path to peace. This is why it is crucial to make prayer our first response, not our last resort, especially when we find ourselves asking "why is this happening?"

Tell us about a time when you made prayer your first response, not your last resort. What changed for you?

Discuss with your Small Group if you will continue to meet for the series following "Ever Wonder Why?"

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

This week, turn your 'season of waiting' from a burden into a blessing by:

- Writing down lessons God is teaching you in this season
- Finding someone else to encourage - helping others helps us
- Praying first. Trusting God instead of panicking or trying to force solutions

ADDITIONAL ACTION STEPS:

- Each week, we encourage you to read additional scriptures and feed your mind, heart and soul with God's word. We have provided SCRIPTURES on the next page for you to do your daily devotions.

CLOSE IN PRAYER:

Father, thank You that You are working even when we can't see it. Help us to find strength in the waiting and hope in times of discouragement. Give us wisdom to know when to rest, when to persist, and when to reach out for help. Thank You that Your timing is perfect even when we don't understand it. In Jesus' name, amen.

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P: Jesus, thank You for reminding me that I need Your Word to give me the wisdom & strength to follow You. Help me to make time to spend with You daily. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

SCRIPTURES FOR S.O.A.P.

Day 1:
Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken. —Psalm 62:5-6 (NLT)

Day 2:
However, we hope for something we have not yet seen, and we patiently wait for it.
--Romans 8:25 (CEV)

Day 3:
I wait [patiently] for the LORD, my soul [expectantly] waits, And in His word do I hope. --Psalm 130:5 (AMP)

Day 4:
We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.
--Psalm 33:20-21 (NIV)

Day 5:
Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.
--Isaiah 41:10 (NLT)

TIPS TO A SUCCESSFUL GROUP

- **ENCOURAGE GROWTH.** Genuine doubt often leads to deeper faith. You are not there to address, "fix" or change the doubts of others. Share your perspective then encourage doubters to continue to pray for answers and to draw closer to God through the trial. Try not to speak in judgement and seek reconciliation/forgiveness for any resentment created through the discussion.

Why Did God Let It Happen?

When Life Hurts

ICEBREAKER

What's the most meaningful way someone has encouraged you during a difficult time? How did their support make a difference in your life?

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever noticed how some of the deepest conversations we have with God start with the word "why"? The good news is God can handle our honest questions. We may even go through situations that seem to have no purpose or hope. Here's the beautiful truth: God doesn't waste a single tear, and every challenge you face today is shaping a testimony that will bring hope to someone else tomorrow.

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Contrary to popular belief, the Bible doesn't say *"God won't give you more than you can handle."* Instead, Scripture promises that God provides strength and a way through our challenges. He doesn't expect us to be spiritual superheroes, but invites us to lean on His power when our own strength fails. God's promise isn't that the path will be easy, but that He'll walk it with us and provide exactly what we need.

"The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, ***He will show you a way out*** *so that you can endure." -1 Corinthians 10:13 (NLT)*

When have you experienced God's strength in your weakness? How did that change your perspective on suffering?

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Ever notice how suffering can make us feel isolated? Here's a powerful truth: *Jesus didn't just suffer for us - He suffers with us.* God understands exactly what we're going through.

He was despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.
We turned our backs on him and looked the other way.
He was despised, and we did not care. -Isaiah 53:3 (NLT)

The Creator of the universe chose to experience human heartache, loneliness, and grief firsthand. It's like having a friend who doesn't just say "I'm sorry you're hurting" from a distance, but sits with you in the dark until the light returns. And the most amazing part - He continues to be right there with us in every tear, every disappointment, and every moment when we feel like no one else understands.

What has helped you feel God's presence during your loneliest moments? How can we better support each other when a friend or someone in our small group is hurting?

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Sometimes the greatest ministry comes from our deepest hurts. In the Book of Genesis, Joseph told his brothers...

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. -Genesis 50:20 (NLT)

But in one day, everything changed - God took Joseph from prisoner to second-in-command of Egypt! Every hard step prepared him for this role. God had a purpose for every tear and moment of confusion that would bring hope to countless others. He specializes in turning our pain into purpose. When we let God redeem our pain to help others, it gives our suffering new meaning.

Your pain isn't just part of your story - it might be the chapter that helps write someone else's victory.

How has God used a painful experience in your life to bless someone else?
How does seeing God work through your suffering change your perspective on it?

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“It was hard for me to understand all this! Then I went to your temple, and there I understood what will happen to my enemies." Psalm 73:17 (CEV)

The Psalmist discovered peace in God's presence. Sometimes our breakthrough comes not from finding answers, but from finding God's presence. Just as the Psalmist's perspective shifted in God's sanctuary - from questioning why the wicked prosper to trusting God's plan - our outlook changes when we prioritize time with God and His people.

Think of it like walking into a dark room and finding the light switch - suddenly everything that felt overwhelming in the dark looks manageable in the light. When we make time to sit in God's presence, whether that's in a church building, on on the beach with our Bible, or with our small group, we're giving God space to gently redirect our focus from our problems to His promises.

And remember, your sanctuary isn't just a place - it's anywhere you pause long enough to feel God's presence and seek out His purposes.

What's your "sanctuary" - those places or practices that help you feel close to God when life gets tough? How has your small group become part of your healing journey?

Discuss with your Small Group if you will continue to meet for the series following “Ever Wonder Why?”

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Let’s commit to finding God’s purpose, even in our times of pain:

- Learn to lean on your small group (and other Christian brothers and sisters) to be your strength when you're feeling weak
- Find someone who's struggling with what you've overcome and share your story of hope with them
- Choose three trusted friends as your "hope team" for support and commit to being there for them too

CLOSE IN PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank You for being bigger than our doubts and closer than our fears. When life doesn't make sense, help us remember that You're writing a story bigger than what we can see right now. Give us courage to share our hurts with others, wisdom to support those who are struggling, and faith to believe that You can turn our deepest pain into our greatest purpose. Thank You for walking with us through every valley and celebrating with us on every mountaintop. In Jesus' name, amen.

Make Time to be in God's WORD

Reading God's Word daily re-patterns the way you think & transforms your mind. Doing your daily devotions is an excellent way to record, process, & share what God is teaching you on a personal level. We do this using S.O.A.P.

S - Scripture
O - Observation
A - Application
P - Prayer

Here's an example:

S: *Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "*
--Matthew 4:4 (NIV)

O: Jesus said that we can't live on food alone. Our life is sustained through His Word.

A: Just as food is important to me, God's Word is even more because it will sustain me and give me the strength to live out my life.

P: Jesus, thank You for reminding me that I need Your Word to give me the wisdom & strength to follow You. Help me to make time to spend with You daily. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

SCRIPTURES FOR S.O.A.P.

Day 1:
The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.
--Psalm 34:18 (NLT)

Day 2:
And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. --Romans 8:28 (NIV)

Day 3:
Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. --James 5:16 (NLT)

Day 4:
He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.
--2 Corinthians 1:4 (NLT)

Day 5:
This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.
--Joshua 1:9 (NLT)

NEW HOPE
WINDWARD

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