

WHAT'S HERE NOW

BOOK CLUB GUIDE

SMALL GROUP OR BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS
FOR A 5 WEEK STUDY



BY JEANNE STEVENS

A Note from Jeanne

Hi! I am so excited that you have decided to create a book club with your people to walk through *What's Here Now?* When I was writing the book I kept picturing people in coffee shops and family rooms, talking about how they are learning how to live in the here and the now. In the introduction of the book, I share this amazing quote from Father Richard Rohr: "*We do not think ourselves into new ways of living, we live ourselves into new ways of thinking.*"

I am a *big* believer that there is no better way to live than in community and connection with others. I have been a part of lots of small groups and book clubs over the years, and one of the gifts of gathering in a circle with others is that I have learned how to get out of my head and into my life. I have learned how to do exactly what that quote says—learn to live myself into new ways of thinking. My deepest prayer for you during this 5-week experience is that you will develop a group of people that become your practice companions. Being present is not something we perfect; it is something we practice. When I first started to realize that I struggle to be present, I hoped that it would be something I could put on my to-do list and check the box (oh, do I love checking boxes!). But I soon realized that practicing presence is a lifetime journey, and the best adventures in life are always better with others.

Grace and peace as you learn to *be here, be you, and fully belong* to God, yourself, and one another.

STUDY SESSIONS:

Week 1: Location, Location, Location

Week 2: Rehashing the Past

Week 3: Rehearsing the Future

Week 4: Receiving the Present

Week 5: What's Here and What's Next

WEEK ONE: Location, Location, Location

1. The best place to begin a *What's Here Now?* discussion is with a check-in. Share what you are currently sensing in your body, feeling in your heart, and thinking in your mind. (If this practice feels too new or overwhelming for you, use the acronym SASHET from the book: Are you coming to the group feeling Sad, Angry, Scared, Happy, Excited, or Tender?)
2. The subtitle of *What's Here Now?* is *How to Stop Rehashing the Past and Rehearsing the Future—and Start Receiving the Present*. Most people find themselves more prone to spend time in the past or the future. Which is true for you?
3. In the introduction, Jeanne describes her pace of life as “having an expiration date.” Share how you’re feeling about the pace of this season of your life. How do you cope when the pace feels unsustainable?
4. *What's Here Now?* requires some healthy noticing, as we process three questions:
 1. What am I sensing in my body?
 2. What am I feeling in my heart?
 3. What am I thinking in my mind?
5. Which question is easiest for you to notice and answer? Which question is most difficult? Try to create a way to pay attention to the space you are the least aware of (body, emotions, or thoughts). For example, you might put a reminder in your phone or create space to check in at the end of each day, becoming aware of your feelings, thoughts, and how they show up in your body. Report back to the group next week on your progress.

FOR DEEPER SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

Read Psalm 46:1 out loud. The truth is that God is ever-present; we are the ones who forget he's here with us. Take some time to reflect on your typical day and make a note of when you are aware of God's presence and when you tend to forget. What's different about those spaces? How can you experience God's presence more fully throughout your day?

WEEK TWO: Rehashing the Past

1. Last week's homework was to pay closer attention to the What's Here Now? question you might not typically notice (your emotions, your thoughts, or how both show up in your body.) What did you learn as you paid more attention? Did you find a way to better notice all three? Share with the group.
2. Go around and check in, using What's Here Now?: What am I sensing in my body? What am I feeling in my heart? What am I thinking in my mind?
3. The first section of the book walks through the emotions that can transport us to the past in the blink of an eye: blame, shame, grief, bitterness, and guilt. As you read these chapters, which ones are connected with your story? Did one chapter in particular rise to the surface as a conduit for dragging you back into your past? Share with the group.
4. Jeanne says, "The past is a great place to learn from, but it's a terrible place to live." Each chapter includes some advice for trying to let the past—and the emotions that drag you back to it—go. How can you do your own work to kindly and gently move yourself back to the now when you notice yourself rehashing your past?
5. If it's not happening now, it's not happening. What is one moment, story, or experience in your past that is showing up in your present thoughts through blame, shame, grief, bitterness, or guilt? How can you let go of that moment so that you can be in the now moment?

FOR DEEPER SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

Read Genesis 3:6-9 out loud. Let's remember, this is God. He always wins at hide-and-seek, and he knows where we tend to hide and lovingly invites us back into the light. If we read all of Genesis 3, we see shame, blame, grief, bitterness, and guilt. These emotions trap us, and they have since the beginning of time. In some cases, this process might require a healthy naming and noticing and telling yourself some truth. In others, you may want to employ a therapist or counselor. **Remember: the danger of isolation is greater than the risk of intimacy.** How will you release the power of your past so you can more fully experience this present moment?

WEEK THREE: Rehearsing the Future

1. Check in, using What's Here Now?: What am I sensing in my body? What am I feeling in my heart? What am I thinking in my mind today?
2. Last week focused on emotions that can pull us into a mind loop, robbing us of this present moment. Were you able to become more aware when you left the present for the past? What did you notice? What did you learn?
3. There are five emotions that trigger a warp-speed transport to rehearsing the future: worry, denial, pretending, obligation, and control. As you read through Part Two, which chapter(s) most resonated with you? Share with the group.
4. Worry is living in a not yet that is worse than your now. When we tell ourselves that our fictional realities are worse than the factual realities, we have to succumb to worry in our minds. One of the best ways to let go of worry is to practice slowness, silence, and solitude. What worry continues to occupy your mind and which spiritual practice do you want to try this week?
5. This set of emotions is tricky to sort through because, as Jeanne says in chapter 6, they trick you into thinking their presence is necessary in your life ("Shouldn't I plan? Isn't worry necessary? Shouldn't I control what I can?"). While some of these emotions are unavoidable, how can you pay better attention? Try to name some specific steps to stop rehearsing your future.

FOR DEEPER SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

Read Matthew 6:25-34 out loud. Why does Jesus call out birds and flowers? One lives higher and the other lives lower, rising above and below the circumstances of life. Birds and flowers don't hypothesize about worst-case scenarios or live enslaved to obligations. Taking your hands off the spiritual steering wheel can only happen when we practice the power of the present moment. What work do you need to embark upon to surrender?

WEEK FOUR: Receiving the Present

1. Check in, using What's Here Now?: What am I sensing in my body? What am I feeling in my heart? What am I thinking in my mind today? As you check in, also share with the group what you're learning as you more regularly ask What's Here Now?
2. Last week focused on emotions that transport us to the future. Were you able to become more aware of when you left the present? What did you notice? What did you learn?
3. Remaining present to your now requires some healthy awareness in five areas: emotions, thoughts, your body, gratitude, and belonging. Were any of these concepts new to you? What part of practicing presence is easiest for you? Share with the group.
4. Conversely, which of these areas might you suppress—or give too much airtime—without even realizing it? How can you do the healing work to name and trust your emotions, or take control of your thoughts, or be aware of what your body is telling you, or actively practice gratitude, or live into the truth that you are beloved?

FOR DEEPER SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

Read Luke 10:27 out loud. Share how you can better love God with *all of who you are*. Next, read Luke 11:34. How are you learning to open your eyes to the present moment, waking up to his beauty, wonder, and miracles?

WEEK FIVE: Personal Application and Next Steps

1. Check in: What am I sensing in my body? What am I feeling in my heart? What am I thinking in my mind?
2. Jeanne says, "The greatest gift you can give yourself is a willingness to be in the now." After four weeks of asking *What's Here Now?*, what lessons are you learning from living in God's zip code, *The Now?*
3. Jeanne mentions in the introduction that she began checking in with herself through daily reminders that would pop up on her phone. What practices have helped you stop reacting your way through the day? How are you pulling yourself out of the mind loops that transport you to the past and the future? What has been the best part of this journey for you personally?
4. One message through every chapter of *What's Here Now?* is that change is not the result of being our own worst critics. As you've become more aware of your physical body, your thoughts, and your emotions, how can you continue this process with kindness, gentleness, and grace for yourself?
5. The spiritual practice of *What's Here Now?* is a way to start living out new ways of thinking. What are your next steps in receiving the gift of the present?

FOR DEEPER SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

Read Luke 17:11–17. To be grateful for the good things in life is easy, but it's a deeper spiritual practice to be grateful for all of life and the lessons it all teaches us. Do you find you divide your life into "keep" or "discard" piles? How might you begin to reframe your life through the lens of gratitude?

For more from Jeanne and to sign up for her email newsletter, visit

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