# Study Notes for The Reason

#### A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR:

First of all, thanks. Thanks for taking your relationship with Jesus serious enough to take the time to get to know Him.

Second, good job. As much as this book might "stand alone," it is much better read in the company of friends. Why? Because I believe that often the answers we are looking for are found less in the words we read and more in the conversations we have about them.

Third, it's OK not to ask any of the questions you see in this document. Many times, after reading a chapter, I simply ask: "So what do you think?" And before I know it thirty minutes have gone by.

Questions like—

- "Why?"
- "Tell me more" (which technically isn't a question).
- "What stuck out to you?"
- "What did you like?"
- "What do you disagree with?"

These can get you a long way. Don't be afraid to use them.

Fourth, contact me if you want. If it's possible I'd be happy to call or Skype in! Just Google me (Ned Erickson) and you'll find my info.

Lastly, have fun. The questions I've written are pretty deep. Go there if you want. But feel the freedom to keep it light-hearted as well. Whether you know it or not, just by being together you are accomplishing a lot.

So how would *I* use this book?

It's best if you read through the chapter and questions beforehand.

When you get your small group together, have everyone pull out their copies; or if you only have one, pull out the one.

Next, read the chapter out loud. You can split it up by page or every couple pages or just have one person read it. The chapters are short, and they were written in a conversational tone so reading it out loud won't be hard.

After you finish, ask "so what do you think?" Follow up with "Why's?" and "Tell Me More's." And see what happens.

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Notes Then, I'd go through the questions. Not all of them, just the ones that seem right for your group. If your group likes more tactile, visual stuff, go to the "Try This" section and do one or some of the activities. The goal is to create interaction and community. I'm confident you'll discover it while reading this book together. -Ned Erickson

## Study Notes for The Reason Intro

#### **DISCUSS THIS:**

Ned asks, "What do you think would happen if you knew, right now, the reason God placed you on this earth? Would it change the way you live? Would it influence the decisions you make? Would it influence the path you choose?" Would it really change the way you live or make decisions? How?

Ned mentions that in Hebrews, Jesus is described as the Author and Perfecter of our faith. What does that mean? Think about the relationship an author has with a character in his or her novel. How does that relate to our relationship with God? How is a relationship with God different than an author and a character in a book?

Ned lays out the way to become the person God created you to be, and it begins with getting to know Jesus. Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

Ned writes: "You don't get at life's answers by formula or by going from Point A to Pont B. Instead, we ... 'circle around and spiral down.' We become as we are becoming." What does that mean?

Ned believes that the Jesus you find in Scripture is way more interested in setting people free than giving them rules to follow. If that's true, why do "Christians" seem to focus so much on the rules?

#### TRY THIS:

Define your group. Do you have a name? How often and when do you meet? Do you have rules? What are they? Write these down.

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DISCUSS THIS:	Notes
Ned writes that we all "fake it to make it," that "this world we live in is filled with imposters, and you and I are card-carrying members." Do you agree with him? What does being fake look like in your world? Why is it so easy to fall in the trap of living life as an imposter?	
The woman in Mark 5 had a physical problem, but that physical problem must have led to a ton of mental and emotional pain and shame—and that's something we can all relate to. What are some ways that you or your friends deal with the pain? How do you feel toward God and others when the "bleeding" doesn't seem to stop?	
How many people know your WHOLE STORY? Have you told it to anybody? Have you told it to God? What are the things that keep you from sharing it? How do you think sharing her story "saved" this woman?	
Look back over the story and pay attention to how Jesus handles this whole situation. Now, keep in mind that Jesus is God in the flesh—everything that is true about Him is true about God. What do you see in the way Jesus acts that helps you see God in a new way?	
Ned writes that we are God's treasure. Why or why not is that hard to believe or accept? How would believing it change the way you lived or saw yourself?	
Do you think there is anything significant in the fact that both "daughters" had either lived or experienced suffering for twelve years? What do you think the significance is?	
TRY THIS:	
Listen to Brene Brown's Ted Talk, "The Power of Vulnerability" https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_ vulnerability?language=en	

#### **DISCUSS THIS:** Notes Think through the story in John 4 and talk about all the things Jesus says and does. What can we learn from His words and actions? What does He care about? What does He not care about? What's His personality like? What does this interaction say about Him? Ned writes that this woman had a hard life. Some of the hard was her fault; some of it wasn't. Either way, she went to the well during the middle of the day to avoid having to deal with it. Why is it so tempting to avoid or ignore the hard in our life instead of dealing with it? If everyone has difficulty in his life, why is it so tempting to keep ours hidden? What's freaky about the fact that Jesus knows our deepest, darkest secrets? What's awesome about it? Why do you think it is important for Jesus to bring up the very worst thing about this woman? If you were in her shoes how would it make you feel? Do you think God does the same thing to us? Why or why not? Why would God want to talk with you about the worst things you've ever done? Ned says that God is interested in your heart then uses a quote from John Eldridge. Read that quote and share what you think about it. If your heart is you—the deepest, truest you, what does it mean that Jesus is most interested in your heart? What's the difference between being perfect and being authentic? Which one is harder? Ned writes, "I love how Jesus is comfortable throughout [the conversation]. It's like He could talk to you about anything." Do you really think it is safe to talk to Jesus about anything? Why? Ned writes, "Jesus couldn't really help people unless they were willing to admit they needed it." Later he writes, "Jesus will only be able to transform the REAL YOU when you are real with Him." Is that right? Why is admitting how screwed up you are so important?

Ned also writes, "Without God, you can't change." What does he mean by that? How does God change us? OR what do you have to do

to get God to change you?

Look at the list of differences Brené Brown writes about between Notes belonging and fitting in. Using your own words, how would you differentiate the two? If God wants us to belong and not fit in, why does being "a Christian" seem like there are so many "supposed to's"? Ned points out that the woman's honesty changed a city. What do you think would happen in your city, family, school, etc., if you were willing to be honest about your brokenness? What would happen if "true authentic worship" from the heart occurred in the world you live in? TRY THIS: Take some time to have some real talk with your group. Maybe ask each other about what's "the hard" in your life? If that's too intense, break up into pairs or threes and share "the hard." And if that's too intense, encourage the group to spend some time on their own and share the hard with Jesus. Then, pray about the hard together.

DISCUSS THIS:	Notes
Is it weird to think of Jesus as a hero like Wesley in <i>The Princess Bride</i> ? How about Bryan Mills in the movie <i>Taken</i> ? How does Jesus compare to heroes in some of your favorite movies?	
Ned writes that the only reason Jesus gives for all He does for us is that He loves us. Is that easy or difficult for you to believe? Why?	
He then writes about the importance of receiving. Why is receiving important?	
Ned talks about how he relates to the prodigal son. How do you relate to him? Do you ever feel restless? Do you struggle with the fear of missing out? Why is it so easy to run away from God even when we know He loves us?	
Ned asks: What if your restlessness is actually the Father's voice calling you home? What do you think about that? How does God speak through restlessness?	
How is it possible to do "all the right things" like the elder son and be lost?	
Ned asks a bunch of questions: Do you feel like being a Christian is hard work? Does it make you mad that people don't get what they deserve? Including you? Shouldn't you be rewarded for being such a good person? How do you deal with questions like these? Why do you think God isn't fair? Or is God really fair?	
Ned writes: "If anyone is 'extravagantly wasteful' in this story, it's the father with his love." What does he mean by that? What does it mean that God is wasteful with His love?	
What do you think about the idea of repentance being when the son embraces the father back? Why is that important? How does a person embrace God?	

#### TRY THIS:

Make a list of movies where there is a hero and someone to save. What comparisons between these stories and what you know about Jesus can you come up with?

Pick a movie and watch it with your group. Then afterward, talk about how the story compares to the BIG STORY Jesus is writing in you and in this world.

In a journal, write down your thoughts about this: If your life is a story and Jesus is the hero of it, where are you in the plot? Are you still in trouble? Are you living happily ever after? Where is Jesus in your story? What's He doing?

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DISCUSS THIS:	Notes
In your opinion, what is the power and importance of your name (or anybody's name, for that matter)?	
Ned writes: "One of the most deadly forces in this world is the power of a lie." Do you agree with him? Why? What makes a lie so powerful?	
Ned asks: "What lies have you believed? What lies might you be believing right now?" Spend some time answer those questions.	
It is easy to glance over stuff sometimes—like the fact that JESUS COULD CHANGE THE WEATHER WITH A WORD! Holy moley! What does it mean that Jesus has that kind of power?	
What do you think would have happened to Jesus and the disciples if they had not woken up Jesus? Would they have made it across? If so, what does it say about God that He allowed His Son and the disciples to be put in peril? What might that mean for our lives?	
This crazy strong monster of a man falls down in front of Jesus. What does that say about Jesus' power? Why do folks usually think of Jesus as a "nice guy"? How does this picture of Jesus challenge that idea?	
Ned points out that the demon and Jesus seemed to recognize each other. What does that mean?	
Ned writes: "[Jesus] put His own life on the line to save him. That's crazy. Bus as you get to know Jesus, you discover Jesus does this kind of thing all the time. It's His nature. Jesus hunts people down. I wouldn't be surprised if He's hunting you down this very moment!" What do you think about Jesus' commitment to hunt down this one guy? Look back on your life. How has Jesus hunted you down?	
Ned writes: "Even though you and I are not well acquainted with demons, I have the feeling that they are well acquainted with you and me." What do you think about that statement?	
Ned makes a list of demons: what are they? What do you think about the way he describes these demons? Do you think it is right to call these things demons? How do these demons destroy us from the	

inside out?

What are your demons?	Notes
Jesus took drastic measures to deal with the man's demons. Ned writes: "Demons won't leave us alone if we treat them mildly, if we fight them half-heartedly. But when we let Jesus take control, watch out. All hell breaks loose. And true change can happen."  What would drastic measures look like in your life?	
TRY THIS:	
Go back and actually watch the scene in <i>The Two Towers</i> and talk about it. (It's in the section with the Riders of Rohan.)	
Revisit that question: What are your demons? Spend some time alone with a pen and paper and write them out. Naming them is important as we learned in this story.	
Share the list with a person you really trust. Ask the person to pray for you. Write down what drastic measures God is asking you to take!	

DISCUSS THIS:	Notes
Some scholars think that when Scripture says that God made man in "the image of God" that it meant that man reflects God because humans have the ability to create. What do you think about that?	
What does it say about Jesus that He would insert Himself into one of the darkest times in history?	
Mary and Martha (and Lazarus) were disappointed at Jesus. Did they have a right to be? Have you ever been disappointed with Jesus? How do you deal with being let down by God?	
Ned writes: "Jesus' purpose was to bring the dead back to life." What do you think about that? Was that really His purpose?	
Do you think it is cool that Jesus "shared our humanity," that He truly understands what you and I are going through? How does that impact what you think about Him?	
Ned uses that Greek word <i>splanchnizomai</i> to describe Jesus' emotions. What does that mean that Jesus literally felt our pain? What does that mean to you?	
In your own words, what is the difference between abundant life and fantasy life?	
Ned reminds us of the progression from the Introduction. What is it? What do you think about it? How does getting to know Jesus help us become the person God created us to be and live the life He made us to live?	
Ned writes: "Life gives us things. Whether we see those things as gifts or burdens has a lot to do with what we believe about the Giver. And how we respond to those gifts says a lot about what we believe about ourselves." What do you think about that? How hard is it for you to think about the circumstances of your life as gifts?	
Why do you think that after Jesus raised Lazarus back to life some people wanted to put Him to death?	
Ned writes: "Sometimes Jesus is going to allow things in your life to die—important things, things that matter, things like dreams,	

hopes, and relationships. Jesus is going to let things die in your life

in order to give you back something even greater." What do you think about this? What has Jesus let die in your life? What has He resurrected?	Notes
Ned uses the phrase "saved by grace." What does that mean?	
Ned shares that the Greek word for workmanship is the Greek word poiema. What do you think about the fact that God is writing a poem with your life? Have you ever thought of your life as a story? How could knowing the end of your story change the way you live your life now?	
TRY THIS:	
Get a blank sheet of paper and draw a scene that describes the story of your life. Be creative because God created you in His creative image! After you are done, share your picture with the rest of the group.	
or	
With a pen and paper, write a poem of your life. Remember the poem God is writing about you is a resurrection poem. See if you can tap into the way He sees your life. You can share that with the group as well.	

DISCUSS THIS:	Notes
What do you think about Ned's theory about the disciples' doubt?	
What does it say about Jesus that He trusted the disciples even if they didn't trust themselves?	
Read those verses that begin with, "All authority in heaven" Look at each phrase. What were the things Jesus was asking them to do? What do you think that means for you and your friends? Why is the "I am with you always" part at the end not at the beginning?	
Ned writes: "It's not believing in God, necessarily; it's what you believe about yourself that makes following Him so hard." What do you think about that statement? Where does doubt surface in your life?	
God actually knows more about our junk than we do. And still He hasn't given up on us. Not only that, He wants to use us we are useful to Him. How does a fact like that hit you? What does that say about who God is and how He feels about you?	
What do you think about this: "Jesus came to save the world and every person in it. And there are people only you will be able to reach You can't save them. You can't free them Your job is to make the introduction." Is that scary for you or exciting?	
Ned says that our job is to pay attention to what Jesus is doing and participate in it. How do you do that?	
Here is a quote for you: "After nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world" (Philip Pullman). What do you think about quote? Why do you think stories so important?	
What do you think about Ned's story? How does his relate to yours?	
Ned writes: "God doesn't break us down, He breaks us open." What do you think about that comment? What's the difference between breaking down and breaking open?	
Take some time to reflect on the progression in the last paragraph once again. After reading this book, how has your understanding of	

that progression changed?

## TRY THIS: Notes Take time over the next several weeks to share your stories with each other. Make a list of people you want to introduce to Jesus. Pray for them by name. Ask God to give you the opportunity to share your story with them. Think of another group of people who might benefit from reading through a book like this. What would it look like if you led that group? In a journal or piece of paper you can put in your Bible, write out what you think God's mission for your life is.

#### **MISSION STATEMENT WORKSHEET**

- 1. A mission statement should be short, like one or two sentences.
- 2. A mission statement should be easily understood.
- 3. You should be able to recite it from memory or at gunpoint!

Step 1: What are your roles? - You are a son, a daughter, a brother, a sister, a student, a friend, a leader, etc
List them here:
<del></del>
Step 2: Where is the hurt? - When you look at yourself, where is the hurt in your life? Where have you
been broken and wounded?
- What is your greatest need?
- What would your world look like if your greatest hurt and/or need were
healed/fulfilled?

Step 3: What are your gifts?
- What are your strengths or gifts?,
Step 4: Write it out.  Now take the hurt and think about how God might use your gifts to redeem not only you but the world! You can use the example here if it helps:
As a follower of Jesus, God is helping me create a world of
(frame and Chan 2)
(from my Step 2)
by – or – through
(from my Step 3)