As soon as I saw you, I knew an adventure was going to happen.

- Winnie the Pooh
The signature hike in Yosemite, one of America’s most popular national parks, is the Mist Trail. The name is inviting, but the description given by the park is even better: “While many of Yosemite’s trails are popular due to having a single spectacular destination, the Mist Trail has fabulous views scattered all along it,” winding you through “two unforgettable waterfalls that fall a combined 900 feet, and ending with perhaps the most striking of all: the view of Nevada Fall, Liberty Cap, and the back of Half Dome.” If that isn’t intriguing enough, type “Mist Trail” into Google Images, and you’ll have the next item on your bucket list.

Great trails are worth getting out of the comfort and safety of your car. They help you experience something not easily experienced—a journey through a beautiful forest, past a scenic panoramic view, or to a secluded crystal clear lake. Great trails are worth energy and effort because you’re seeing something spectacular.

The problem with hiking, however, is the start isn’t all that inspiring. Most trailheads are in the parking lot! So, right at the start, a trail needs to paint a pretty compelling picture of where you’re going to go, why it’s worth it, and how you’ll get there. And, let’s face it, if the “how” means a ten-mile walk, the “why” better be amazing! You want to know the journey will be worth the time and effort.

You might be wondering the same thing about Established. As you sit holding this book, you may be thinking, “Is this path worth leaving the comfort and safety of my car?” We know starting down this trail is a significant step of faith. So, as you sit at the trailhead, we’d love to share with you the “why” of Established—why we think it can help you get to where you want to go. Then, we’ll get into how Established works—the structure and format.

**The “Why”**

There is something within all of us that longs for something more in our relationships with one another, God, the church, our purpose, and life. We often hope for something more in these areas, but it can be hard to know where to begin. Or, if we’ve been journeying awhile, it can be hard to find fresh inspiration.
Something powerful happens when we take a season to journey in an intentional way with others to explore things that matter most. *Established* is meant to help you do that. And, as you go on this journey, we believe you will:

1. **Gain more confidence in what you believe.**

   Can you think of a moment where you wished for more confidence? Maybe it was a time where you wanted to jump off the high dive for the first time, ask someone out, request a promotion at work, or held your newborn in your arms for the first time.

   Or maybe it had something to do with faith and God. All of us, no matter our background or how long we’ve been in church, have had moments where our confidence was shaken—times where we asked if God is really there, if the Bible is really true, or if our lives really mattered.

   While this culture has a way of making us feel on edge and off-balance, this wasn’t the way God intended for us to live. He wants us to have confidence in him—that he is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do. And he wants us to live confidently through him. This journey aims to help you with both.

2. **Get more deeply connected with others.**

   We live in a world full of connections—neighbors, co-workers, classmates, and Facebook friends. But most of us still feel disconnected. It’s hard today to develop deep relationships, where people know how to love us well. Good friendships need to simmer—they take time and safety to develop. Sometimes it takes a few miles on a hike for us to feel connected.

   *Established* is designed to help you form some great relationships that will last. By the end of this journey, we hope you’ll feel deeply connected to others here at the church.

   Sometimes a compelling “why” needs a great picture. Googling pictures of the Mist Trail and seeing images of Half Dome is a lot more impressive than reading about it. So, here’s a compelling image that pictures the heart of *Established.*

   *But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.* *Jeremiah 17:7-8*

   Who wouldn’t want to be more like that tree? It is deeply connected and constantly refreshed. And it stands confident in an often-chaotic world. Maybe we know someone who resembles that tree—a person of integrity, strength, and conviction, even during difficult circumstances.
Whether we've been journeying with God for a long time or not at all, all of us wish we were a bit more confident and connected. All of our trees could stand to dig our roots down a bit deeper. So, as you think of the image of that tree, ask yourself: What if this was a big season of gaining confidence in what I believe and developing deeper relationships with others? How would that change my life? Wouldn’t that “why” be worth it?

**How Established Works**

Before we embark on any trail, we want to know specifics about it—how long it is and what to expect along the way. So, how is *Established* structured and designed?

*The Big Picture*

*Established* is a ten-week group experience that will take you on a journey of growth—a growing confidence in areas of faith, Jesus, God, prayer, and the Bible and a deepening connection with others.

What does this growth look like? Well, on a tree, like the one described by Jeremiah, it looks like a bunch of rings. As a tree grows, it gains a ring for each season, which gives it more stability. *Established* is designed to resemble that tree. Think of each week as a new ring that will help you grow more confident and connected. Each of these weekly “rings” builds off the last one. We’ll start our journey by looking broadly at our world—what in the forest would point us to something more? Why even believe God exists? We’ll then build on that by encountering a compelling teacher named Jesus who offered to quench thirsty souls and claimed to answer life’s biggest questions. Then, we’ll examine if the stories about him were actually true; because if they are true, it changes everything about how we approach God, read the Bible, see ourselves, and relate to others.

*The Main Components*

Like Yosemite’s Mist Trail, *Established* is less about a singular destination and more about different sights and experiences you’ll discover along the way. There are planned experiences, articles, reflection opportunities, and some inspiring surprises, too. All of these are found in two big elements of *Established*.

**Daily Personal Reflections:** Each week, there are five days of individual exercises, such as reading, journaling, engaging in a creative element, or completing an activity. These are not meant to be overwhelming; each day’s activity takes about 15-30 minutes to complete. They will help you dive into a specific area around that week’s theme.

**Weekly Group Gatherings:** Every week, you will meet with a group of others to discuss what you’ve discovered and to process what is confusing. These weekly gatherings will take about an hour and a half. While discussions make up the majority of the time, there are a few special experiences along the way.
The Core Values

Hiking alone isn’t a great idea. One, it’s unsafe—it’s easy to get lost. And two, we don’t tend to push ourselves to new heights or depths without the encouragement of others. The same applies to this journey. Established is a group experience—it is not designed to be read alone (if you do not have a group, contact the church so they can find you some fellow hikers). There are three core values we ask all Established groups share together.

Commitment: “We’re all in this together!”

Doing anything significant, whether it’s at the gym, school, work, or home, takes time and intentionality. The same is true with God and this group. Committing to this journey starts with making your group a priority. It means saying to one another, “We’re in this together!” Understandably, over the course of ten weeks, a conflict or two may pop up that causes you to miss group. Overall, though, doing Established means you’re committed to doing what you can to be at group as much as you can. Others are depending on you—they need your voice, perspective, and encouragement. Committing also means making the daily reflections a priority. However, one important note: If you don’t finish all of the week’s reflections, still go to group! You can certainly still contribute, and your presence is what is most important.

Openness: “Let’s stretch ourselves a bit!”

Growth happens most when we step out of our comfort zones in pursuit of something great. New muscles only develop when we stretch them out in new ways. New rings only grow by digging our roots down a bit deeper and branching out further. We all need to be open to growing. All of us are works-in-progress, and none of us has all the answers. So, no one should be preaching from the pulpit or lecturing others—we are all learners. Being open means we’re willing to engage with activities, articles, or experiences that are out of our comfort zone. Some of the topics we cover may not initially strike you as interesting. That’s okay! The next ten weeks will expose you to a lot of different concepts and learning styles. But be open to engaging with things that are unfamiliar—you might be surprised at what winds up being fascinating or life-changing.

Confidentiality: “What is said here, stays here!”

The depth of your conversations is directly related to the level of authenticity and trust in your group. Digging below the surface in areas of faith or our story requires trust—it is a privilege to hear the stories and questions of others. So, make your group a trustworthy place by saying, “What is said here, stays here.”

As others have experienced before, these next ten weeks can serve as a significant ring of growth in your story. By the end of this journey, we hope you will have many memories and “ah-ha!” moments. Thanks for being willing to step out of the comfort of your car to hike this trail with others.
Note: Established is a group experience. If you do not have a group, please contact the church.

Getting Started
Welcome to the first meeting of Established! Don’t worry—no prep work is needed for today. This time is all about getting set for the journey ahead as we get to know each other, share what we’re hoping to get out of this experience, and get on the same page about the format and feel of Established. To get started, let’s do an activity to help us get to know one another.

The Two-Minute Interview
Break up into pairs and have each person share 3-4 facts about themselves. If your group already knows one another, share surprising or little-known facts. Come back together and have each pair introduce (or share a surprising fact) about the other. Keep the introductions brief—hence, the “two-minute” interview!

Discuss Together
- What do you hope to get out of your Established experience? Is there a particular area in faith in which you would like to grow more confident? Is there a particular way you would like to grow in connection with the church? Take a moment to share a hope/dream you have for the next ten weeks.

You may have noticed at the beginning of your Established book, there is a section called, “Before We Begin.” This provides some great information about what this experience is all about. For your group time, ask someone to read the last part of this introduction called “How Established Works” on pp. 5-6.

- The introduction talked about having three core values: 1) We’re all in this together; 2) Let’s stretch ourselves a bit; and 3) What is said here, stays here. Do any of these values particularly resonate with you? Why or why not?

- Describe a time where you stepped out of your comfort zone in order to grow somewhere—like at the gym, school, work, or someplace else. What motivated you to take that step? What happened as a result?
• What has been your past experiences with groups at church? Have you ever done something like this before, or is this completely new to you?

• Are there any questions about the format of Established?

Look Ahead
Next week, we’re starting with the first official day of the reading. These readings aren’t meant to take a lot of time; typically, they’re about 15-20 minutes long. All of the readings build around a theme.

• Ask someone to read the introduction to Week 1, found on p. 11.

• Take a moment to pray together. Ask God to meet you in this journey over the next ten weeks.

Finally, there is a useful tool on the next page to help the group stay connected. Before you leave, fill it out together. You may decide to pass your book around and have everyone print his or her name. And list out the dates for your meetings so you can put them on your calendars. You’ll notice there is a space to check a meeting where different people can sign up to bring a small refreshment. Something salty or sweet is always nice!
# My Group

## Names

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## Meeting Dates

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Which Meeting I’m Bringing Refreshments:

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