



The Journey

STAGE ONE: *Biblical Foundations*

The Journey
Stage 1: Biblical Foundations

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VANTAGEPOINT³,
its process and its materials, contact:

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*Helping you discover who God is, who you are,
and what God wants to do through you.*

A
VANTAGEPOINT³
PROCESS

THE JOURNEY

Stage 1: Biblical Foundations

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PROCESS

THE JOURNEY: STAGE ONE

Table of Contents

<i>ii</i>	Preface
1	Session 1: An Invitation to Discover
11	Session 2: Developing a Biblical Foundation
29	Session 3: Participating in God's General Call
45	Session 4: Understanding God's Specific Call
65	Session 5: Paying Attention to Character
85	Session 6: Exploring Our Values
103	Session 7: Developing a Personal Biblical Mandate
117	Appendix
121	Endnotes
127	Bible Reading & Journaling Pages

Preface

At its core, VantagePoint³'s *The Journey* seeks to invite you, along with a group of fellow travelers, into a personal exploration of three primary questions in your life: *Who is God? Who am I? What does God desire to do through me?* These are questions we never grow out of along the way of following Jesus—in reality, we grow *into* them.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

Stage 1: Biblical Foundations will guide us into an understanding and appreciation of the foundational role of the Scriptures for a lifetime of growth and service. Understanding God's mission as revealed in the Scriptures—that is, what is God up to in the world?—provides a backdrop from which to understand our full participation in God's salvation story. We will pay attention to the critical importance of personal calling and growing character for participation in God's mission. (Seven sessions)

Stage 2: Personal Foundations will continue to lead us into an exploration of God's sovereign, shaping work in the world, paying particular attention to the stories of our own lives. In essence, we will be using our lives as case studies for discerning and trusting God's gracious work. Emphasis will be placed upon the group cultivating a holy and safe place for developing and sharing our spiritual narratives with one another. (Seven sessions—this stage may require additional sessions for the sharing of narratives.)

Stage 3: Relational Foundations will explore the necessity of spiritual community in Jesus' way of forming us into persons of integrity and influence. In particular, we will pay attention to the role various mentoring relationships play in discovering and cooperating with God's already present activity in our lives. *Stage 3* will also prompt reflection upon our roles as spiritual mentors and wise friends in our communities. (Eight sessions)

BIBLE READING & JOURNALING

Throughout *The Journey* we will be assigning a passage of Scripture that the group will read each week in preparation for the next session. In Stage 1: *Biblical Foundations* we will begin to read Luke's gospel. In Stage 2: *Personal Foundations* we will read selected chapters from the Psalms. And in Stage 3: *Relational*

Foundations we will return to finish up Luke's gospel. There are *Bible Reading & Journaling* pages found at the end of each manual. Our journaling of the Bible reading may include an exploration of a thought that develops, a new insight that comes to us from the passage, some questions that arise within us, truths that God gives us to apply in our own life, personal invitations we sense from the biblical story, or any leadership insights we recognize along the way. Our *Bible Reading & Journaling* assignments of Luke will begin in preparation for Session 3.

OUR SUGGESTED STAGE 1 BOOK

The Journey will also include an additional book to supplement each of the stage manuals. The authors of these books offer not only thoughtful perspectives on faithful living and leading, they also “bring to the table” their honesty, experience, and wisdom from following Jesus over the long haul. Read with both a critical mind and a prayerful spirit. In Stage 1, Henri Nouwen's *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (Crossroad, 1991) will invite reflection, conversation, and prayer regarding Jesus' truly counter-cultural way of living and leading in the world. Nouwen's perspectives on what it means to lead *Christianly* will stir, provoke, and challenge each of us at our heart and character level. Most weeks, a portion of this text will be assigned in preparation for the next session of Stage 1.

ORGANIZATION OF EACH SESSION

Each of the sessions will be organized into these six sections:

Invitation & Prayer

The session begins with brief quotations or verses that reflect the learning content of the session. Pay attention to what stands out to you from these short excerpts. While going over this section during the weekly group gathering, some find it helpful to briefly pray together. Be mindful that our time together includes God's company and care.

Overview

A sentence briefly summarizes the session as a lead-in to the coming reflection and discussion time.

Focusing Question

The *Focusing Question* attempts to help us think about our own preconceived notions regarding the upcoming subject matter—“What is it that we bring to the table?” As such, the questions tend to be non-objective

(meaning there will tend to be no right or wrong answers). Our personal engagement with this question will allow for a more fruitful time interacting with the material in the *Instruction & Reflection* section.

Instruction & Reflection

This section contains the bulk of the session's content upon which the rest of our learning together is built. Read the material and work through the questions in this section prior to meeting with the group. It is essential that we give time to digest, verbally and otherwise, the flow of the session. In addition to answering the *Reflect & Respond* questions that are in each session, mark (or underline or question mark, etc.) those things that really stand out personally. Use the shaded space in the margins to journal thoughts or take notes along the way.

During weekly group gatherings, the facilitator will provide adequate time to discuss those parts of the session that are particularly moving or thought-provoking. So from week to week pay attention to those places in the session that are particularly engaging. Come prepared to share some of these places with the group.



Each session may include a number of windows in the margins that will help enhance the flow of thought developing in the session. Most windows stand apart and are meant to generate further personal reflection and insight into the material by introducing new authors, challenging thoughts, words from Scripture, prayers, songs, poems, or even exercises.

Prayer

Each session will close with a prayer or a thought about prayer. Remind one another each session to be prayerfully attentive to what God might be saying to us during the week. Our personal preparation and our weekly group conversations are all done in the company of a profoundly creative and gracious God who travels with us along the way.

In Preparation for the Next Session

This final section is situated in between the sessions and provides an opportunity to look ahead to the coming week's assignments. Typically it will include a Bible reading and journaling assignment, a reading from the recommended text, and an assignment to read and complete the questions for the next session.

WE BELIEVE

We have developed *The Journey* believing the following to be true:

- You are ready to be challenged to grow deeper in your faith.
- You possess a high level of motivation as an adult learner.
- You are “the expert” on your own life and the many experiences you already possess.
- Your learning will happen best in a community of other learners.
- You will need guides along the way to help you “connect the dots” of your life.
- You can learn much from the lives of other men and women who have finished their journey faithful to God and others.

In particular, we believe God is already up to something very good in your life and community, something that calls forth from you a response with the whole of your life (Ephesians 2:10).

Blessings on the journey,
The VantagePoint³ Team

SESSION ONE:

**An Invitation
to Discover**

Invitation & Prayer

I kneel before the Father,
from whom his whole family
in heaven and on earth derives its name.

I pray that out of his glorious riches
he may strengthen you with power
through his Spirit in your inner being,
so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And I pray that you,
being rooted and established in love,
may have power,
together with all the saints,
to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,
and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—
that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him
who is able to do immeasurably more
than all we ask or imagine,
according to his power that is at work within us,
to him be glory in the church
and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations,
for ever and ever!

Amen.

Ephesians 3:14–21 (NLT)

Overview

This session will introduce *The Journey* by inviting (1) reflection and conversation around some overarching themes/elements of the process, and (2) prayerful reflection upon where we currently find ourselves on our Christian faith journey.

- I. An Invitation to Discover
- II. A Mentoring Relationship
- III. Where Are You on the Journey?

Focusing Question

- What are your expectations for this *Journey* process?

Instruction & Reflection

I. An Invitation to Discover

Around the Passover table, on the eve of his death, Jesus offered a remarkable portrait of authority. In a world full of compelling images of rulers and kings and governors and rabbis and Caesars and lords, Jesus spoke to his friends, “*But not so with you....*” Jesus told the bickering and posturing apostles to look on a slave, a servant, one who serves at a table.

The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves (Luke 22:25–27).

For two thousand years it has been this image that has continued to challenge the church in her conceptions and practices of discipleship and leadership. We have had the luxury of centuries of history to get used to combining the words *leader* and *servant*. This familiarity muddles the story for us today.

It lessens our awareness of the apostles' shock at Jesus' use of this servant image. For there was little nobility or honor attached to being a servant in first-century Israel. It was an extremely low position in society. How puzzling and humiliating for the apostles to grasp. Only Jesus' crucifixion would surpass it in terms of humbling connotations for spiritual authority. *"But not so with you...I am among you as one who serves."*

Jesus invites us today to wrestle with this same portrait, to live out this same image of a lowly servant in the daily-ness of our lives. He is the teacher, the example, and the source of such authority in our lives. His words and work confront us each with the question: *What is it to be a follower of this Jesus today?*

In our time together we are each invited to *pay attention*: to our lives, to our neighbors' lives, and to God's life in this world. For if we take the time together to pay attention, we will soon discover that God's Spirit is already up to something in our lives—giving shape to Christ-like lives, the servant-leader-Jesus-authority sorts of lives, that are destined to be released for God's Kingdom purposes.

But discovering this is not an easy task in today's world. It requires much reflection, prayer, guidance, and friendship. Much must be unlearned as well as learned within this fellowship with Jesus. J.I. Packer has often said, *"The church in North America is 1000 miles wide but 1/2 inch deep."* And his voice is not alone. Richard Foster introduced his book *Celebration of Discipline* with these words:

Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.¹

Any sort of surface level approach to our lives and character and leadership will not sustain us for the long-term if we are to remain faithful to Jesus. The world needs deep people; people who will live faithfully from the inside out, men and women who will attune their hearts to Jesus' *but not so with you* in the uniqueness of their lives and communities, persons who will follow Jesus' way.

This *Journey* in which you have been invited to participate seeks to introduce you to the biblical, personal, and relational foundations of a life of growing integrity, influence, and faithfulness to Jesus. The personal study and preparation, the weekly group sessions, the mentoring relationships, and the other learning experiences all combine to help you begin, continue, and sustain a journey of learning and committed service to God over the long haul.



So let's enter this process expectantly, eager to be surprised by God's already present action in our lives and communities. May we together prayerfully cultivate hearts that will more deeply understand who God is, who we are, and what God desires to do through us in Jesus' name.

Reflect & Respond

- What phrases or themes from this "Invitation to Discover" stood out as significant to you?

II. A Mentoring Relationship

The Christian spiritual journey is a journey we take with others. Each of us must take our own journey, and for each of us that journey will be unique. But none of us is intended to make the journey alone. The myth of a solitary Christian making his or her own way alone flies in the face of everything the Bible teaches about the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12–31). We are parts of one body as we follow Christ on the journey of personal transformation. We cannot make the journey apart from spiritual companions and community.²

David Benner

We must not travel alone on this faith journey. The Christian life offers a deep relational experience with God and others. One of our intentions in this process is to assist you in making significant connections

TAKE THE MERCY, ACCEPT THE HELP

God means what he says. What he says goes. His powerful word is sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defense, laying us open to listen and obey. Nothing and no one is impervious to God's word. We can't get away from it—no matter what.

Now that we know what we have—Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God—let's not let it slip through our fingers. We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.

Hebrews 4:12–16
(The Message)

between Scriptural truth and the everyday reality of our lives. The connection between truth and life is best discovered in the context of relationship. This relational dynamic will certainly be experienced within your *Journey* group over the next several months.

In addition to your group experience we would like you to enter into a mentoring relationship over the next several months. This relationship can be a safe place where each of us can begin to unpack our lives and “learnings” in light of the reading, reflection, and conversation from *The Journey* process. The role of the mentor here is not to be a guru or “advice-dispenser” or “answer-person” to every question we have along the way. Rather, his or her role is to be a wise presence that shows an interest in what we are learning by *asking questions* and *listening* and *praying* with us.

Our guidance to you at this point is to think and pray about someone in your church and/or community whom you respect and look up to as a mature Christian; is there someone you are attracted to, spiritually speaking? This person need not have gone through *The Journey* already. They will be given a mentoring guide to assist with the mentoring times. This guide will include an introduction to a number of mentoring themes, as well as timely questions for your mentor to ask you along the way. The expectation is that this person will meet with you twice a month.

Pause for moment and discuss together: *What are four or five guiding criteria for choosing a mentor?*

Spend the next week praying that God might guide you to someone who might be a good fit for you. Come next week with some possible names of people who could offer this mentoring relationship in your life throughout *The Journey*.

III. Where Are You on the Journey?

Evangelist Billy Graham writes,

Life is a journey—although sometimes we forget it. Life becomes so hectic, and we become so preoccupied with our immediate concerns that we don’t step back and see the whole picture. For many people life is a constant struggle just to survive. Others have everything they could ever want yet remain unsatisfied.

Perhaps you see your own life’s journey as a series of unrelated events—some good, some bad—strung together like beads on a string. Or perhaps you feel trapped like a leaf in a rushing stream, tossed about by

circumstances beyond your control. Or like many people you may never have stopped to think about the road you are traveling—never asking where you came from or why you are here or where you are going.

But God didn't intend for our journey through life to be this way. Instead, he meant for it to be filled with joy and purpose, with even the most ordinary events being part of his plan.... Most of all, He wants to join us on our life's journey.³

British theologian Alister McGrath writes,

[The journey of faith is] the greatest journey that can ever be undertaken and brings immense satisfaction and fulfillment to those who make it. But it is also difficult, challenging, and perplexing. Those who travel need constant encouragement and reassurance from those who have undertaken the journey before them.

For many, that journey begins with a sense of dissatisfaction.... It is like an early explorer, convinced that new worlds lie beyond the horizon, who would not be satisfied until he discovered and explored them. To encounter God is to begin a new way of life so radical that we could speak of "being born again."

For others, the journey has already begun. Some have loved God ever since they were capable of loving anything.... For such people, the journey is that of deeper exploration into something they already possess—yet do not fully understand or appreciate....

Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a pearl of great price—something that was worth selling everything for.... The problem is that this pearl has been thrown before swine like us, who just don't appreciate its wonder and joy. We have failed to grasp its beauty and comprehend its value. Many of those who think that they are dissatisfied with Christianity are really dissatisfied with something else—their own grasp of Christianity. For most of us, we have scraped the surface and nothing more, yet we mistakenly believe our superficial encounter represents the gospel in its totality.⁴

Reflect & Respond

- What really stands out to you from Graham's and McGrath's thoughts?

- *Where are you on your journey?*

(Take 15 minutes or so to reflect and jot down an answer to this second question.)

Prayer

*Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.
As they pass through the Valley of Baca,
they make it a place of springs;
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.
They go from strength to strength,
till each appears before God in Zion.*

Psalm 84:5–7 (NIV)

In Preparation for Session 2

Part 1 – Praying for and Identifying a Mentor

Spend the next week praying that God might guide you to someone who might be a good fit for your mentoring relationship. Come next week with some possible names of people who could offer this relationship throughout *The Journey*.

Part 2 – The Journey Assessment

We want to invite you to take a brief online assessment now at the beginning *The Journey* experience and then again near the completion of Stage 3 in order to help you reflect back on how you may have grown through the process. The assessment process will also provide you perspective for some next steps in your development. To take Part 1 of the assessment go to vantagepoint3.org/assessment. VantagePoint³ will send you your results upon completion of Part 2 of the assessment toward the end of Stage 3 of *The Journey*.

Part 3 – Read Session 2: Developing a Biblical Foundation

Read and complete the questions in Session 2. Be prepared to share your discoveries with the group.