



Walking with Others

Walking with Others
Stage 1: A Place of Learning and Formation

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

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Stage 1: A Place of Learning
and Formation

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WALKING WITH OTHERS: STAGE ONE

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Preface

VantagePoint3's *Walking with Others* invites you to join a group of fellow travelers to learn to guide other adults toward a deeper maturity in Christ. Building on your discoveries from *The Journey* and *A Way of Life*, you will be challenged to take a next step in your development—*helping others grow up in every way into Christ* (Ephesians 4:15).

A mark of Christian maturity is becoming more convinced and intentional
at investing in the growth and maturity of those around us.
It has become one of the more significant needs within our culture and with the church today.

Randy Reese
VantagePoint3, Founder/President

OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

Stage 1: A Place of Learning and Formation—How can we be a part of cultivating conditions for our church community to become a place where men and women mature into persons of greater wisdom, integrity, compassion, joy, giftedness, and service as apprentices of Jesus?

- Session 1: An Invitation to Invest
- Session 2: Paying Attention
- Session 3: Challenges of Developing Mature Disciples
- Session 4: *Spiritual Friendship Triad*
- Session 5: Called To Be the Church
- Session 6: Fostering a Learning Environment
- Session 7: *Spiritual Friendship Triad*

Stage 2: A Lifelong Perspective—Developing others in Jesus' name requires that we adopt a lifelong and holistic perspective on each person's maturity into Christ, learning to pay attention to developmental cues along the way.

- Session 1: A Vision of Christian Maturity
- Session 2: Life Story
- Session 3: *Spiritual Friendship Triad*

Session 4: Life Rhythms
Session 5: Life Transitions
Session 6: *Spiritual Friendship Triad*
Session 7: Retreat

Stage 3: A Leadership of Companionship—Beyond simply telling people how to live, we can provide a mentoring attention and presence in our contexts that actually helps others discover more deeply who God is, who they are, and what God wants them to be up to in their community and in the world.

Session 1: A More Relational Way of Life and Ministry
Session 2: *Spiritual Friendship Triad*
Session 3: A Deepening Work
Session 4: A Hospitable Work
Session 5: *Spiritual Friendship Triad*
Session 6: A Particularizing Work
Session 7: A Patient Work

SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP TRIADS

Throughout all three stages of *Walking with Others*, we will organize spiritual friendship triads (preferably three people per group; four if necessary) in order to foster continued attention to our apprenticeship with Jesus. These triads are designed to be an exercise in spiritual companionship, each person helping the other persons to grow in their faith by providing consistent space to pay attention to what God is up to in each other's lives. These triads will meet about every third session in the place of a typical whole group session. Soo-Inn Tan's book, *3-2-1: Following Jesus in Threes* (Graceworks, 2013), will serve as a companion piece to the triads throughout the process and beyond.

BIBLE READING: *The Psalms of Ascent*

We will be reading, meditating upon, and praying Psalm 120–134 throughout *Walking with Others*. Beginning in Session 3, we will be assigning one psalm a week, along with the accompanying chapter from Peterson's *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. There will be space near the end of each session to convert your thoughts about the particular psalm into a written prayer. One of our hopes is that this practice will lead us to pray, not just think about prayer.

PEER FACILITATION

We encourage your group to share in the facilitation of the *Walking with Others* process. We suggest that group members lead 50–75 percent of the sessions (individual or co-lead). Your facilitator will help organize this.

ORGANIZATION OF EACH SESSION

Typical 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 of interaction 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 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.

A Psalm of Ascent and A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

Our personal preparation and our weekly group conversations are all done in the company of a profoundly creative and gracious God who invites us to a more holy and human way of life. There will be space provided near the end of each session to convert your thoughts about the assigned psalm of ascent into a written prayer.

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 psalm of ascent assignment, a reading from the recommended text, and an assignment to read and complete the questions for the next session.

A VANTAGEPOINT3 PATHWAY

Beginning with *The Journey*, VantagePoint3 offers a pathway for adult development to deepen and ignite people in your church. The processes have been designed to help the adults in your community mature toward greater kingdom life and influence.



VantagePoint3 hopes to see:

- Ordinary people deepened and ignited toward kingdom life and influence.
- Walking alongside others becoming a way of life and ministry for Christian leaders.
- Churches becoming vibrant places of learning—that is, communities where people are consistently mentored into a life of apprenticeship with Jesus.

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 Invest

Invitation & Prayer

You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus;
and what you have heard from me through many witnesses
entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.

2 Timothy 2:1-2

A walloping great congregation is fine and fun,
but what most communities really need is a couple saints.
The tragedy is that they may well be there in embryo,
waiting to be discovered, waiting for sound training,
waiting to be emancipated from the cult of the mediocre.¹

Martin Thornton
(1915-1986)

Progress in our spiritual lives may mean
we move into a new place of not being merely the receiver.
Indeed, a cornerstone of Christian faith is that a full Christian life
involves both receiving spiritual blessing and in turn becoming a blessing.
We deepen our Christian life for more than our private edification.
We grow to help others grow.
The one who learns becomes one who helps others learn,
in a beautiful reciprocal relationship.²

Timothy Jones

Overview

This session will introduce *Walking with Others* by inviting reflection and conversation around the overarching themes and elements of the process.

I. *Walking with Others* at-a-Glance

II. “Pocket-Full Sorts of Walks”

Focusing Question

- Why did you say “yes” to *Walking with Others*? What are your hopes?

An Invitation To Invest

It was almost 2,000 years ago that the Apostle Paul wrote a letter that undoubtedly prompted reflection and prayer for Jesus followers in and around the large commercial city of Ephesus. Paul’s words offered both support and challenge to church communities who were struggling with fear, immorality, and disunity. After painting a magnificent portrait of God at work in the world through Christ (Ephesians 1–3), Paul *urged* them to live a way of life worthy of God’s gracious and powerful work (4:1). He challenged the community’s leaders to foster maturity within the members (4:1–13). Then Paul wrote,

We must no longer be children.... But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:14–16)

The need for spiritual maturity in a congregation gripped the Apostle Paul over 2,000 years ago. *It was urgent work then; it is urgent work now.*

One is hard pressed to find a time in history when the church has gone more places, provided more resources, and proclaimed the gospel more widely than over the past several decades. Yet amidst all these efforts, there is a growing realization today that we are just skimming across the surface.

A quick glance around our congregations reveals that people's lives are more often a reflection of our culture's superficiality than of the depth of gospel living. J. I. Packer expressed it this way, "The church in North America is 3,000 miles wide, but a half-inch deep." In a 2007 article entitled "So Many Christian Infants," Gordon MacDonald bemoaned our lack of maturity by asking the church, "Why are we so good at leading people to faith and so bad at prodding them to maturity?"

A congregation today cannot afford to procrastinate this work of helping others grow up into Christ because its flourishing depends upon men and women maturing in their relationship with God and with one another. Many of us have been hearing or preaching Ephesians 4 for years; but we want more, we want to be a part of living it out more fully in our community. We want to live our way into Paul's vision of equipping "the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12–13).

You are gathered around this *Walking with Others* table because at one level or another you share the Apostle Paul's deep concern—*helping others grow up into Christ*. You believe the local church can be a place of deep growth for adults. And you want to contribute. Throughout this process, you will be invited into a set of conversations, practices, and relationships to help you learn to notice others and come alongside others so that they can grow into Christian maturity (Ephesians 4:13).

Walking with Others invites us to explore and embrace our responsibility to invest in others' lives. We will not all live out this responsibility in exactly the same manner. As we have been discovering throughout *The Journey* and *A Way of Life*, we each have a unique mix of experiences, gifts, talents, strengths, personality, education, history, and character that the Spirit has been graciously crafting into a shape fitting for the body's functioning and flourishing (Romans 8:3–12). Our prayer is that we will each hear the Spirit's invitation to intentionally invest in others' lives. Fundamentally our lives are not our own; they are gifts we offer to others and to the Lord. How then is this gift of your unique life a gift for others?

Reflect & Respond:

- What jumps out to you from this invitation to invest?

I. *Walking with Others at-a-Glance*

What should we expect to get out of this process? *Walking with Others* will challenge us to take a next step in our development—learning to become developers of others, helping guide others toward a deeper maturity and faithfulness. And picking up on the *A Way of Life* process, *Walking with Others* will also weave in an ongoing attention to one's lifelong apprenticeship with Jesus. In short, the process will invite us to:

1. Understand more deeply that God is a developmental God and we are his developmental people.
2. Become a developer of others.
3. Pay attention to our lifelong apprenticeship with Jesus.
4. Embrace our roles as change agents in the world, in our communities.

A. *Developing Others (3 stages)*

The reflections, conversations, and practices will be broken into three stages:

Stage 1: A Place of Learning and Formation

The local church can be a vibrant place of learning and formation, a setting where we are all learning to become disciples of Jesus. How can we be a part of cultivating conditions for our community to become a place where men and women mature into persons of greater wisdom, integrity, compassion, joy, giftedness, and service as apprentices of Jesus?

Stage 2: A Lifelong Journey

In walking with others we must learn to pay attention and discern the already present action and shaping of the Spirit of God in their lives. This work of developing others in Jesus' name requires that we adopt a lifelong and holistic perspective on each person's maturity into Christ, learning to pay attention to developmental cues along the way.

Stage 3: A Leadership of Companionship

The Christian life is a relational way of life that is caught as well as taught interpersonally, life-upon-life. Beyond simply telling people how to live, we can provide a mentoring attention and presence in our contexts that actually helps others discover more deeply who God is, who they are, and what God wants them to be up to in their community and in the world.

B. Cultivating a Jesus-way-of-life (*Spiritual Friendship Triads*)

Life cannot be reduced to a "how to" skill. Loving a person is not a strategy one simply applies.

Beyond anything we do, the people we serve and love receive who we are.

The greatest gift you will give your community is the gift of you being a growing person yourself.

*How are you becoming a stronger "you" so that we can become a better "we"? Are you a growing person?*³

The Journey, Stage 3: Relational Foundations

We live and serve out of who we are. So in addition to our reflection, conversation, and practice around the work of developing others, *Walking with Others* will continue to encourage you to cultivate a life of apprenticeship with Jesus. As we pointed out in *A Way of Life*, intentionally paying attention to the three rhythms of *friendship with God*, *community with others*, and *mission on the way* nourishes and sustains us, matures us, and finally helps us to grow up into Christ (Ephesians 4:15).

In order to foster continued attention to our apprenticeship with Jesus throughout *Walking with Others*, we will organize spiritual friendship triads (preferably three people per group; four if necessary) like we did in *A Way of Life*. These triads are designed to be an exercise in spiritual companionship, each person helping the other persons to grow in their faith by providing consistent space to pay attention to what God is up to in each other's lives.

In particular we encourage each triad to direct their conversation with, and prayer for, one another around living the three rhythms of being Jesus' apprentice: (1) toward a deeper level of *intimacy with God*,



(2) toward a greater capacity to *be with others faithfully* in community, and (3) toward a more compelling understanding of your own life as *being sent by God into the world* as holy and compassionate people.

We have scheduled these spiritual friendship triads to meet about every third session in the place of a typical whole group session. We would suggest that the triads meet for 1–2 hours. Many triads like this have found it helpful to meet over a meal in which they can leisurely check in, converse and pay prayerful attention to one another. Your facilitator will provide guidance during the first or second session for setting up the groups.

Spiritual friendship is one practice we hope will stick long after we have finished *Walking with Others*. If we are to finish well as followers of Jesus we are going to need the love, support, and challenge that meeting regularly in small groups of three or four friends for spiritual conversation and prayer provides. Soo-Inn Tan's small book *3-2-1: Following Jesus in Threes* will be a great companion piece throughout the process and beyond. Allow it to be both a reminder of the importance of intentional spiritual friendship and a conversation starter for your triads.

C. Meditating on the Songs of Ascent (Psalm 120–134)

We will be reading, meditating upon, and praying Psalm 120–134 throughout *Walking with Others*. Through his set of practical meditations upon these psalms in *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (IVP, 1980), Eugene Peterson will lead us through 15 psalms. In introducing these psalms of ascent as invitations to a life of discipleship, Peterson writes,

I knew that following Jesus could never develop into a “long obedience” without a deepening life of prayer and that the Psalms had always been the primary means by which Christians learned to pray everything they lived, and live everything they prayed over the long haul.

But the people I was around didn't pray the Psalms. That puzzled me; Christians have *always* prayed the Psalms; why didn't my friends and neighbors? Then I realized that it was because the language, cadenced and beautiful and harmonious, seemed remote from their jerky and messy and discordant everyday lives. But when these Psalms were first prayed and written by our Hebrew ancestors, they were every bit as jerky and messy and discordant as anything we experience today. I wanted to translate them from their Hebrew original and convey the raw, rough and robust energy that is so characteristic of these prayers. I wanted people to start praying them again, not just admiring them from a distance, and thereby learn to pray everything they experienced and felt and thought as they followed Jesus, not just what they thought was proper to pray in church.⁵

Spiritual friendship is friendship in the company of Christ. It is not just giving good advice, though we all need wisdom in the application of the gospel to daily life. Rather it is like being an accompanist, a teacher playing along with her pupil and giving the music greater range and quality.⁴

James M. Houston



Spiritual transformation ... comes from partnering with the Trinity for change. That doesn't mean we give the Holy Spirit an agenda or a demand. We simply desire. We bring our ache for change, our longing for belonging, our desperation to make a difference. Then we keep company with Jesus by making space for him through a spiritual discipline. Our part is to offer ourselves lovingly and obediently to God. God then works within us doing what he alone can do. Our desires don't obligate the holy One. God is free to come to us in spiritual disciplines as he wills, not as we demand. But unless we open ourselves to him through spiritual practices, we will miss his coming altogether.⁶

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

Beginning in Session 3, we will be assigning one psalm a week, along with the accompanying chapter from Peterson's *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. There will be space near the end of each session to convert your thoughts about the particular psalm into a written prayer. One of our hopes is that this practice will lead us to pray, not just think about prayer.

II. "Pocket-full Sorts of Walks"

So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you
not only the gospel of God but also our own selves,
because you have become very dear to us.

1 Thessalonians 2:8

Regent College's James Houston once commented that within the evangelical Christian world we have spiritual maps and mapmakers, ad nauseam, when what we really need is a few mountain guides who have been there before us on the journey. *Walking with Others* is for those who have ears to hear what Houston is noticing in the church. Developmental theories and maps serve a vital purpose, but what we desperately need more of today are wise men and women who have the humility, courage, and patience to walk faithfully alongside others, helping them explore the real places in their lives that the map may describe.

So much of what passes for discipleship and leadership development today lacks interpersonal investment, life upon life. Simply telling others to grow up into Christ will not cut it, no matter how articulately or creatively or loudly we state it. The journey toward growth and maturity must be shared and explored from the inside out.

Rob Loane tells the story:

There are a lot of Toms in my family. My father's name is Tom, my pop-pop was a Tom, and even my middle name is Thomas. I also have a Tom for a second cousin. But there was only one Uncle Tom in my world growing up. He was my dad's uncle, one of my grandma's four brothers.

Uncle Tom was quite a humorous character. In our family, the stories abound. He was the sort of person who when told not to touch the chocolate fudge cooling in the kitchen was known not just to brush aside such cautions by taking a finger full but he was known to take the whole tray with him to work. As a butcher he was known to cause a couple of unsuspecting women to all but pass out by his sharp chop of the cleaver followed by yelling and writhing as if he just chopped off a finger or two.

My dad tells a story of Uncle Tom taking him and his sister fishing, when they were still young, at a creek a short walk from their house. Now this creek was lucky to have a couple frogs, some worms and a stray snake or two. It majored mostly on mosquitoes. There were no fish to be found in that creek. But my Dad and Aunt Harriet were very young, and they didn't know better. So off they went with Uncle Tom and two fishing rods. He generated the sort of enthusiasm fit for a serious fishermen at a raging Montana stream. Once they got to the creek he set them up and they started fishing. He didn't place them right next to each other but spread them out a bit, "so that we can find out where the fish are really biting." As Dad tells it, Uncle Tom moved back and forth between the two of them for a bit.

And then he said, "Tommy, you'd better go see if Harriet needs some help, I think they might be biting down there. Here, I'll hold your rod."

After looking at Harriet's situation for a bit and without any results, Dad walked back to his rod. Uncle Tom handed him the rod and headed back to Harriet.

But as he left he said, "Tommy, you might want to reel back in your line, I think I felt a couple tugs."

So, as the story goes, Uncle Tom walked back to see Harriet. And in a short time, Harriet was sent over to find Dad reeling in the biggest fish either of them had ever caught. Then Harriet ran back to tell Uncle Tom of "Tommy's great big fish," only to discover a whopper at the end of her own rod. What an absolutely wonderful afternoon for Dad and Aunt Harriet! And I suspect, for Uncle Tom as well. They grinned and bounced with joy, delight and pride, and headed home, carrying their catch and their rods, and walking with Uncle Tom. A strange and humorous sight it must have seemed to neighbors watching the threesome walking proudly back to the house with their miraculous catch.

It was not until years later that Dad learned of Uncle Tom's stop at the fish market before they headed down to the creek. But, by then, his memory had done its work and Uncle Tom's place in his heart was secure and fruitful and unrivaled.

Dad recounts another childhood discovery when he finally realized why it was that every time he returned home from a walk with Uncle Tom, his pockets would be full of change. Whenever he took a walk with anyone else—other uncles or aunts or his mom or dad—he might have found a chance penny or two, and that on a good afternoon. But his walks with Uncle Tom were profitable beyond a small boy's imagination. Everywhere they went together Dad spotted coins on the pavement, on the sidewalks, even on some lawns—pennies and nickels and even dimes filled and jingled and weighed heavy in his pocket by the end of their trek. Again, it was not until well through early childhood that Dad discovered Uncle Tom's skillful coin-flicking on their walks together.

Walks with Uncle Tom were about far more than dollars and cents, they were, for a small boy, profound offerings of grace and life and care. There was a tremendous generosity about Uncle Tom's life. His spirit spilled over to everyone who knew him. His life shaped and occupied deep places in others' lives.

Uncle Tom and his walks have offered a portrait, perhaps even a parable, of what it is like to journey through life with certain people. Some people just seem to rub off on you. They are infectious with life and spirit and grace, and you cannot remain the same person, merely because you have been with them. Like a small boy taking a walk with his Uncle Tom, when you are with them, truly good things seem to happen *over and again*. And this *over and again* does its work, inviting, guiding and forming us in deep places we cannot reach on our own. We walk home and our pockets are full. We catch impossible fish. And much of the time it is absolutely inexplicable and delightful, because we have also taken these same walks alone and with others, and we know what it is to return home with *empty* pockets. We have discovered that every person does not take walks the same.

We find ourselves where we are today because at some point a person or a series of people have taken "pocket-full sorts of walks" with us. They intersected our lives full of life and grace and time and laughter and acceptance. For some it was a grandparent or a teacher early in our lives, for others it is was a neighbor or a coworker or a pastor. Their impact is written all over the stories of our lives. Their attention may have lasted for decades or it may have been a penetrating conversation at a critical time in our lives. Most often such relationships are unspectacular, but in retrospect their effects are dramatic.

Keri Wyatt Kent uses a very helpful phrase to describe what happens as we allow the Spirit to lead us into sharing our lives in this manner. She writes:

If we are led by the Spirit, we will increasingly imitate God and become people who are filled with "coming-alongside-ness." That is, we listen to God and people and then come into their story, get involved with them enough that we can point out where God is in their story and allow them to do that for us as well. When we are full of come-alongside-ness, we will be willing to walk with people through their pain; we will listen before we try to fix. We will be with people.⁷

The Spirit calls us to *be with* people in a way that honors both his purposes and our well-being. Testimonies of "coming-alongside-ness" are strewn through the Bible. Just think about Naomi and Ruth, Jonathan and David, Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy, to name a few. We would suggest that a mark of spiritual maturity for the believer is the desire and capacity to become more intentional at investing in the formation of others—to notice them uniquely and be willing to be used of the Spirit to "call them out."

This is true generally in the work of discipleship, and fundamental to the work of Christian leadership development. It is in these relationships that we find women and men empowered and sustained for holiness and influence.

Throughout *The Journey* and *A Way of Life* we have underscored the importance of spiritual companionship. No matter what stage of development, we need spiritual companions—mentors and guides, friends and peers, teachers and shepherds. In *Walking with Others* we want to underscore the need to intentionally walk well with others, coming alongside them, helping them discover God's gracious activity in their lives and communities.

Reflect & Respond

- Who has been an "Uncle Tom" in your own life?

- What prevents you from intentionally investing in others more deeply?

Prayer

*That's why, when I heard of the solid trust you have in the Master Jesus
and your outpouring of love to all the followers of Jesus,
I couldn't stop thanking God for you—every time I prayed,
I'd think of you and give thanks.*

But I do more than thank.

*I ask—ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—
to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally,
your eyes focused and clear,
so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do,
grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for his followers,
oh, the utter extravagance of his work
in us who trust him—endless energy, boundless strength!*

The Apostle Paul

Ephesians 1:15–19 (MSG)

In Preparation for Session 2

Part 1 – Read and Prepare for Session 2: Paying Attention

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

Part 2 – A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

For next week, read and reflect upon Eugene Peterson's Preface and Chapter 1: *Discipleship* (pages 11–22). Be prepared to share your thoughts and discoveries with your group.