



Walking with Others

Walking with Others
Stage 3: A Leadership of Companionship

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

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WALKING WITH OTHERS: STAGE THREE

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Preface

VantagePoint3's *Walking with Others* invites you along with 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 are being challenged to take a next step in your development—*helping others grow up in every way into Christ* (Ephesians 4:15).

Stage 3: A Leadership of Companionship—The Christian life is a relational way of life that is caught as well as taught interpersonally. Beyond simply telling people how to live, we can provide a mentoring attention 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.

SUPPLEMENTAL STAGE 3 BOOK

Christine Pohl's *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Eerdmans, 2012) invites us into the beauty and messiness and challenge of living gratefully, truthfully, faithfully, and hospitably with others. We would like each of the selected chapters assigned throughout *Stage 3: A Leadership of Companionship* to function like *a mirror, a wise conversation partner, and a horizon* in considering the quality of companionship we offer others.

SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP TRIADS

We will continue to foster attention to our apprenticeship with Jesus through these same spiritual friendship triads in Sessions 2 and 5.

BIBLE READING: *The Psalms of Ascent*

We will continue reading, meditating upon, and praying through one psalm a week from the psalms of ascent (Psalm 120–134), along with the accompanying chapter from Peterson's *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. Allow these psalms to lead you to prayer, not just think or talk about prayer.



PEER FACILITATION

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

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

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

In Preparation for Session 1

Part 1 – Psalm 131 & A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

For next week, meditate and pray with Psalm 131. Read and reflect upon Eugene Peterson's meditations on Psalm 131 in Chapter 13: *Humility of A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. Be prepared to share your thoughts and discoveries with your group.

Part 2 – Read and Prepare for Session 1: A More Relational Way of Life and Ministry

Read and complete the questions in Session 1. Be prepared to share your discoveries with the group.

SESSION ONE:

A More Relational Way of Life and Ministry

Invitation & Prayer

“Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones;
for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven.
What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray,
does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?
And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.
So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.”

Jesus (Matthew 18:10–14)

We do not flourish as human beings when we know no one and no one knows us;
we do not flourish as human beings when we belong to no place and no place cares about us.
When we have no sense of relationship to people or place,
we have no sense of responsibility to people or place.
Perhaps the saddest face of the modern world is its anonymity,
to live as if I am known by no one and belong nowhere.
From road rage on freeways to the casually cruel crime of the city
to the existential angst of being lost in the cosmos,
when we are not in relationships that matter,
it is almost impossible to see ourselves as responsible to and for others....
When we are disconnected from people and place,
we lose something crucial to our humanity.¹

Steven Garber

The language of telling people what to think and what to do
dominates most leadership paradigms in the church, with very little, if any,
mentoring attention given to the actual details of being
a Christian in the home and workplace.²

Eugene Peterson

Overview

This session will help us think more clearly about the importance in our culture for a mentoring way of life and ministry, a leadership of companionship, if we desire to help adults grow toward a deeper maturity in Christ.

- I. A More Relational Way
- II. Two Messages Culture Has Tossed Our Way
- III. Exercise: Preparing One's Heart (Luke 24:13–35)

Focusing Question

- Recall a time in your adult life when you felt a bit uncertain or adrift or even lost. Looking back now, what do you think you needed at that point in your life?

Instruction & Reflection

Little Walker's favorite place on earth is the boardwalk in Ocean City, New Jersey. If you have ever been to this boardwalk in the summer you know the extent of the crowds of people – it can be both exhilarating and overwhelming. For five-year-old Little Walker, with amusement rides and snacks and so many people, a night spent on the boardwalk was his most favorite thing to do. All day long he told everyone he encountered "I am going to the boardwalk tonight!" So when dinner was done and the dishes were all washed and dried, he headed up to the boards with his parents and little sister, his aunt and uncle. Little Walker could barely contain himself as he entered the scene: Ferris wheels and boogie boards and flashing billboards, skateboards and strollers, Steel's fudge and Mack & Manco's pizza and Shriver's saltwater taffy, the sounds of the ocean in the background, and wave upon wave upon wave of people. Absolutely wonderful!

But when he spotted the Johnson Caramel Popcorn shop (his dad's favorite place on the boardwalk) and excitedly looked back for his dad and could not find him, the whole scene turned on Little Walker. The lights, the noises, the smells, and the faces all began to press in upon him, and terrify him. The excitement was gone. Little Walker was lost. He began to quietly cry as he searched the crowd for his family. Face after face, big and

small, young and old, missed him and his desperate situation. Not one of them focused any sort of sustained attention on him. Everything and everyone raced by the boy in a collective overlooking, until out of the crowd, one familiar face stood out. The moment for Little Walker was not when he saw his uncle's face but when his uncle's face rested on him. What a wonderful face looking at and moving toward him through the hurried mob of people. His uncle ran over and hoisted him up into his arms. Little Walker began to cry harder and harder as his uncle carried him back to the rest of the family. His uncle had found him! The panic was over.

There are many people in our church communities today who relate to Little Walker's experience on the boardwalk. For them the church has been such a good place in their lives, one in which they learned to trust God and serve their neighbor and find friendship in the world. But then somewhere along the way—a job loss, mission trip, a rejection, a lingering discontentment, a new and promising relationship, an illness—something in their life has triggered a recognition, “a turn” of sorts, and they have begun to look around and realize how alone and unsure they actually feel. They wonder if they have somehow lost their way in the midst of that place that has in the past been so instrumental in helping them find their way. We desperately need people who in simple and unspectacular ways play the role of the uncle for the many Little Walkers in our midst. Men and women who pay attention and really listen and patiently give space for others' questions, confusions, frustrations, and wonderings provide a powerful presence in our communities.

We also find ourselves wondering in particular about those of you who have been uncles and aunts for years in your communities, but now, in the season you find yourselves, you are beginning to identify or feel more like Little Walker, a bit lost in the crowd. This realization can be profoundly disillusioning. We obviously don't know the dynamics and circumstances of where you are, but we do wonder: Who is providing a presence that helps you sort out your current set of feelings and thoughts? Are you open to receiving the friendship you need? Are you providing friendship to others? We never grow out of our need for spiritual companionship.

Living truthfully and faithfully in this complex world while serving others is proving to be a difficult and lonely task. In many churches, surviving and succeeding are the challenges of the day. Ministry competency and some political maneuvering are the “skills required”—yet underneath this, so many people simply long to be heard and recognized as persons with unique stories and questions and gifts. Many of us are finding that while engaged in corporate worship, or acts of service or mission, we can more or less hide in our personality and performance, but it is over a cup of coffee, or on a long morning walk, or around a dinner table, that the life of the person emerges. It is as we pay attention to one another that our lives are disclosed, that neighborly love is expressed, and an awareness of the life of the Spirit begins to develop and deepen.

Throughout Stage 3: *A Leadership of Companionship*, we will focus our reflections, conversations, and prayers upon the priority and character of intentionally walking with others, a mentoring way of life and ministry. Amidst the increasingly depersonalizing nature of our contemporary culture, we must recognize that helping others grow up into Christ requires a more relational way of life and ministry. Jesus invites us to join him in his *deepening work* (Session 3), *hospitable work* (Session 4), *particularizing work* (Session 6), and *patient work* (Session 7). We trust our conversations will launch us into a deeper imagination and commitment to investing in the growth and maturity of those around us.

I. A More Relational Way

I have sought to live by a principle first expressed by the classical philosophers:
knowledge without action is meaningless, and action that does not foster friendship is useless.

To live in a relational universe as a person in the triune God of grace
means that human relationships have priority over all other actions and thoughts.

As such the Christian life is much more tested in the home than in the church.

I have often reminded my students that their academic degrees
are a much less significant statement about their Christian life than the look on their spouse's face!³

James Houston

We have underscored throughout *The Journey, A Way of Life, and Walking with Others* that the Christian life is a relational way of life that is transmitted—caught as well as taught—interpersonally, life-upon-life, keeping company with God and others. A more relational way of life and ministry is needed in our impersonal culture today.

A. Jesus' personal way in the world

The gospel of John records Jesus saying to his somewhat confused disciples on the eve of his death, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6). Certainly his words have echoed through the life of the church and the ears of many other confused followers since that evening. Jesus' assertion here has been spoken and heard with many different nuances and emphases throughout the centuries. Eugene Peterson's book *The Jesus Way: A Conversation On The Ways That Jesus Is The Way* (Eerdmans, 2007) thoroughly explores this theme. He urges us to pay greater attention to Jesus' declaration "I am the way" amidst the particular cultural conditions and challenges of our lives. Peterson

focuses his attention upon the ways in which we follow Jesus as *the way* today by alerting us to the need for congruence between our ends and our means in our Christian lives. *Ends* refer to our goals or outcomes (*the what*). *Means* refer to the ways in which we reach our ends (*the how*). “How does Jesus do it?” is as critically important to following Jesus as “What would Jesus do?” Peterson expresses his concern right from the start:

The ways employed in our North American culture are conspicuously impersonal: programs, organizations, techniques, general guidelines, information detached from place. In matters of ways and means, the vocabulary of numbers is preferred over names, ideologies crowd out ideas, the gray fog of abstraction absorbs the sharp particularities of the recognizable face and the familiar street.

My concern is provoked by the observation that so many who understand themselves to be followers of Jesus, without hesitation, and apparently without thinking, embrace the ways and means of the culture as they go about their daily living “in Jesus name.”...

Jesus is an alternative to the dominant ways of the world, not a supplement to them. We cannot use impersonal means to do or say a personal thing—and the gospel is personal or it is nothing.

In the matter of ways, the how of following Jesus and taking up with the world cannot be depersonalized by reduction into a how-to formula. We are involved in a highly personal, interrelational, dynamic way of life consisting of many elements—emotions and ideas, weather and work, friends and enemies, seductions and illusions, legislation and elections—that are constantly being rearranged, always in flux, and always in relation to our very personal and holy God and our very personal (but not so holy!) brothers and sisters.⁴

The reality that Jesus’ lessons are never independent of his person confront so many of us who live in constant search for the next *technique* or *tip* or *program* for how to “get ahead” in the Christian life. But we are not following a methodology; we are following a person. This is God’s irreducibly personal way in the world. Kingdom-ends cannot be arrived at by simply adopting any means or method we choose.

Jesus’ approach is so radically unlike our dominant cultural ways of thinking and living. Our North American language of progress and purchase, of marketing and programming, of styles and techniques is all so ill fitted to God’s work in the world as revealed in the Scriptures—a way of sacrifice and faith, failure and beauty, holiness and service, lived out in community. Living kingdom-means congruent with kingdom-ends requires some profound re-training of our imagination of the world and Jesus’ loving way of thinking and living in it. Those of us who seek to live and serve faithfully in Jesus’ name must become more attentive to the critical contrast between personal and impersonal ways of thinking and living in the world. For Jesus’ way in the world is always personal.

Reflect & Respond:

- When you think of your own church setting, what are the Jesus-ends or outcomes that your church is seeking? What means are they using to get to these ends? With Peterson's thoughts on ends and means, are the means congruent with Jesus' ends in your setting? Any gaps or misalignment you are wondering about?

B. Simply being with people

In considering *how* Jesus lived out his mission by forming and developing his learning community of disciples, we must not overlook this most obvious element: *personal relationship*.⁵ His life touched theirs. He was not distant, but lived in their stories, and he invited them to live in his. We underscored all of this earlier in the process, but it bears repeating. Jesus had many other options available to him, but he chose to live out his purposes by *being with* people, life upon life.⁶ Rob Loane reflects upon a recent cross-cultural experience that exposed how *simply being with people* is harder than it first appears.

During the month of March my wife and I led a mission team down to southern Brazil to serve at a ministry called Chain of Love.⁷ For two-and-a-half weeks we immersed ourselves in this community that provides loving, secure, and caring homes for abandoned and abused street children in Brazil. If ever I encountered a “visual aid” for God’s kingdom work in the world today, it was there. Chain of Love and the 100 or more kids and staff became my teachers in so many ways. A central lesson that has been lingering with me is the importance in God’s economy of *simply being with people*. The first day we arrived, a missionary and administrator at Chain of Love named Chris briefed us on our two weeks. His initial words that night centered upon the importance of

developing relationships with the children by spending time with the kids. He warned that for us task-oriented North Americans this might be a bit harder than we think.

Sure enough I struggled over those first five or six days with the pace of our days. And the question that was plaguing me personally as we served was: *“Was I doing enough? We have come these thousands of miles, spent thousands of dollars to get here... are we as a team accomplishing enough?”* Chris’ invitation to simply spend time with the kids was proving more difficult than I had imagined. In reality, it took nearly a week of playing with the kids and serving wherever we were needed around the homes in order for me to readily embrace the rhythm and pace of the Chain of Love culture. And amidst this culture I began to hear the Spirit’s words: *Rob, let go of your constant need to “get things done” and fix things and solve problems and feel “useful.” Spend time with the kids, develop relationships with them, love them.*

Since I have returned home from the Chain of Love homes, this lesson continues to stir in my heart. I have begun to wonder how much of my busy-ness and pace is really about serving God and others; or does it stem more from a need, perhaps even an addiction, to feeling useful and accomplishing things. I have returned to Henri Nouwen’s reflections on leaving Harvard and going to Daybreak, the L’Arche community in Toronto. He writes,

This experience was and, in many ways, is still the most important experience of my new life, because it forced me to rediscover my true identity. These broken, wounded, and completely unpretentious people forced me to let go of my relevant self—the self that can do things, show things, prove things, build things—and forced me to reclaim that unadorned self in which I am completely vulnerable, open to receive and give love regardless of any accomplishments.

I am telling you all this because I am deeply convinced that the Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self. That is the way Jesus came to reveal God’s love. The great message we have to carry as ministers of God’s word and followers of Jesus, is that God loves us not because of what we do or accomplish, but because God has created and redeemed us in love and chosen us to proclaim that love as the true source of all human life.⁸

Nouwen’s invitation to “be irrelevant” is one of the more difficult and misunderstood sections in his wonderful little book *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. But my experience in Brazil has begun to shed some new insight on this invitation “to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self.” Sure there will always be tasks to accomplish and competencies to be developed, but we (North American task-oriented folks in particular) must not let these things dominate us and define us and thereby overshadow the priority and power in God’s kingdom work of simply *being with* people. Undoubtedly the Spirit has much more

learning and unlearning in store for me along these same lines, but for now I find myself grateful for the gift of struggle during those weeks at Chain of Love.

We must not underestimate the challenge Jesus' personal way poses for us, a people who have been shaped by a prevailing ethos of "bigger and better," "always more and more and more of something," and "do everything faster." We have much to learn and unlearn when it comes to being *open to receive and give love regardless of accomplishments*. Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, "Do small things with great love," and it seems what is needed today is that sort of relational economy, challenging and resonating through our many daily interactions, everyday conversations and community life. Developing others in Jesus' name, amidst our relentlessly impersonal culture, requires that we intentionally prioritize nurturing a culture of meaningful and attentive relationships over the many other tasks of our church community.

Reflect & Respond:

- What does the Chain of Love experience reveal about your own comfort in "simply being with people"?

II. Two Messages Culture Has Tossed Our Way

The glory of God is a fully alive human being.⁹

Irenaeus of Lyons (130–202)

Our culture has lost sight of what constitutes truly human existence.¹⁰ Much of what we experience in modern life is depersonalizing—that is, we are conceived of and treated as *less than what we are*—and consequently we become less over time. Christian witness, in all its forms, words and deeds, must testify to the fullness of humanity as God intended it, men and women created in the image of God and reconciled to be sons and daughters in God's family.

We find ourselves today caught in the tension of two powerful messages. We didn't receive these particular messages explicitly through an email or phone call or Google news; rather we have encountered their implicit messaging simply by being alive and awake in the culture. Our exposure to these two messages has been so pervasive that by the time we reach adulthood we have most certainly come to embody them in one form or another.

The first message culture tosses our way is ***your story doesn't really matter***. The experience of being a stranger in the crowd characterizes so many of our social interactions in modern life. We go to malls and hospitals and universities and airports and sporting events and even churches where the vast majority of the people we are surrounded by—we do not know. We watch television, browse the internet, drive on crowded roads and freeways, we go shopping at Target or Walmart, we have a cup of coffee at Starbucks or Chapters, all experiences and places in which who I am particularly doesn't really matter; at best we are a customer, a consumer who fits a certain demographic. It was not so long ago that people by and large had a personal connection to the clothes they wore, the food they ate, the furniture they sat on.

Our point here is not to attempt to turn back the clock, but rather to point out that so many of our social and economic interactions today, in startling contrast to the local life of 150 years ago and before, involve this all-pervasive experience of being an anonymous participant in our mass culture, being a stranger in the crowd. Throughout human history there has always been this experience of being a stranger, but only recently in history has this experience so dominated our lives. Our modern culture, with its weight of anonymity, has taken quite a toll on human life and community.

Psychologists tell us that much pathology and mental disease result from the experience of being unnoticed, especially early in life. Our communities, in their many forms, somehow do not notice and care for persons in the way they are designed to be noticed. Consequently, early on, people internalize the pain of this unnoticedness. Over time they learn to compensate for this loss in many different ways. Some become high achievers. Others become very skilled at entertaining or pleasing others. Some withdraw. Others addictively attach themselves to someone else. All of them ache for someone or something to address their deep sense of unnoticedness.

We have to wonder, as we sit in church or a coffee shop or as we walk through the supermarket, how many of the people around us feel alone and overlooked? Are they longing for someone to pay attention in simple and very human ways? The impersonality of our modern culture and the deep unnoticedness we experience even in our families and closest communities have formed (or mal-formed) us into persons who struggle deeply with our sense of worth and value. "Perhaps the saddest face of the modern world is its anonymity, to live as if I am known by no one and belong nowhere," writes Steven Garber.¹¹ *Your story doesn't really matter.*

The other message culture tosses our way is *your story is all that matters*. There has been an intensifying individualism in western culture over the past several centuries. Men and women are less able to see their lives collectively. Well-being is now construed of, for the most part, in individual and autonomous terms.

In the 1830s a 20-year-old Frenchman traveled around North America for nine months. When he got home Alexis de Tocqueville put on paper his wonderings and insights about this young country, entitled *Democracy in America*. Among his many observations, he noted a balance at play between the individualism and pioneering self-reliance of America's people on one hand, and on the other hand their sense of family, town, church, community, what he called their "habits of the heart"—the one force pulling people apart, forging new ground on this vast new continent and the other social force drawing people together, forming deep civic commitments and relational bonds. For de Tocqueville the defining question of the American project was—*Which one will win out? The pioneering individualism or the habits of the heart?*

In the late 20th century social researchers took on de Tocqueville's question and concluded that the individualizing influences are certainly winning out.¹² Communal bonds and civic commitments that pull people together have sharply declined. There are less and less "habits of the heart" holding us together.

We see our lives as individuals with a few attachments and shared interests. But finding ourselves as part of any sort of larger story or framework or purpose has become increasing counter cultural. One thinker named "a suspicion of all metanarratives" as the chief feature of contemporary culture.¹³ A metanarrative is an all-encompassing, grand story (like how world religions or some political ideologies or even science operate) that speaks for all of reality. Any story or framework that claims authority over everything else is in doubt or suspect in our modern pluralistic culture. And in the absence of such a grand story our attention focuses on our own individual stories. Well-being is reduced to stabs at self-fulfillment. As one T-shirt captures it—"I am the star of my own soap opera." What our culture increasingly leaves us with as a people is an obsessively self-centered and shrunken view of reality. *Your story is all that matters*.

The effects of these two messages are profoundly impoverishing to us. Individuals in our communities, to varied degrees, live in the tension of a struggling sense of worth (your story doesn't really matter) *and* a plaguing self-centeredness (your story is all that matters). These messages function in our minds like deep currents in a river powerfully stirring and driving the things on the surface. The depravity of our particular culture is leaving quite a wake of relational and personal deprivation in our communities.

Reflect & Respond:

- How do you see these two messages—*your story doesn't really matter* and *your story is all that matters*—being expressed in your world (e.g. work, home, neighborhood, church, country)?

How does the good news of and in Jesus Christ confront the deep voices in our lives that say *your story doesn't really matter* and *your story is all that matters*? The great news is both of these messages are patently false; our lives matter profoundly (e.g. Psalm 139), but they are not all that matters (e.g. Matthew 16:24–26). Yes, we are deeply flawed, but we are immeasurably valuable. However, making sense of our lives Christianly in midst of the tension of these two messages can be profoundly confusing, lonely, and anxiety producing. Sometimes in confronting a person's struggling sense of worth—*you are fearfully and wonderfully made by God*—we can actually feed his or her self-absorption. In simply telling people their lives matter, sometimes the wires get crossed and what people hear is *their story is all that matters*, it's all about them and how their life can be improved. Or on the other hand, sometimes in confronting a person's self-centeredness—*deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus*—we actually can feed their sense of worthlessness. Simply telling people that it is not all about them—there is a larger story—sometimes gets misheard as *their story doesn't really matter*, their life isn't really worth that much. It is often difficult to sort out some of these tensions and to connect the gospel's truth with our actual hearts and lives.

Graciously confronting the impact of these two messages on our lives or on the lives of those with whom we walk requires a mentoring presence and attention, life upon life. The gospel is always more than just the message; it also includes the delivery or act of proclaiming the message. The messenger or messengers incarnate the message of this living and personal God. We need to experience and communicate the gospel as more than just a set of ideas or a message spoken. Timothy Jones writes, "Sometimes we need to see the Christian life lived out; we need to stand in the presence of the genuine article, not just be told about it."¹⁴ Today's urgent need in the church is for more of a personal, specifying relational approach.



We must allow Jesus' way of noticing *the other*, not from behind a pulpit or lectern or computer screen, but up close and personal, to challenge how we so often go about doing what we do for God. Personal ends require personal means. Jesus' life requires Jesus' ways. Amid our fast-paced, independent, and complicated lives, many people are wondering why things are as they are and are hoping for a better way of life—*there has got to be more to this Christian life*. James Houston writes,

We have been born into and grown up in a culture that is deeply alienated from God. So as we cross the border into God's kingdom, with its radically new attitudes and priorities, we will need all the help we can get from a spiritual friend who has made the same perilous journey before.

The way in which friends behave towards us can also help us to have faith in God. If friends really pay attention to me, listening to me and not just to my words, then I am encouraged to believe that God pays attention and listens to me in an even greater way.¹⁶

We desperately need leaders who befriend and mentor and guide and come alongside others; in short, people for whom walking with others becomes their primary way of life and ministry wherever they are placed, whatever their responsibilities. Beyond simply telling people how to live, we need to provide **a leadership of companionship** in our contexts that actually helps others be freed up to 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.

Reflect & Respond:

- What do you find yourself thinking as you consider the impact of these two voices—your story doesn't really matter and your story is all that matters—in your life?

The helper can properly regard him- or herself as making God present to the other in God's concern, compassion, acceptance, support. People need that. God can seem very distant, and oneself very much alone. God may well be believed in, but there is no real experience of him. He is a notion, not a reality perceived. And then comes incarnation. At the hands of someone in a helping role, a person sees flesh and blood on a lot of faith notions. God is real, is present, does care; his word heals, his assurance gives strength, his faithfulness is life. Through the experience of being ministered to by one who shows a genuine personal concern, an acceptance which goes beyond one's deserts, and an affirmation of all that is good in one's life, a person can believe, perhaps for the first time, that God is love and what he is said to have said is true. The helper takes one seriously, and implicitly expresses the confidence that one can take responsibility for one's own life and turn it to some account. This gives the person the exultant feeling that God himself is holding out life as something precious, and offering a person his or her selfhood as a gift and charge of immense value.¹⁵

Thomas Hart

- Can you think of an example of these two voices being played out in the life of someone you are investing in? Describe.

IV. Exercise: Preparing One's Heart (Luke 24:13–25)

While they were talking and discussing,
Jesus himself came near and went with them.

Luke 24:15

As the two disciples walked to Emmaus on that first Easter Sunday, mulling their profound disappointment and confusion surrounding the events of their master's crucifixion, *Jesus came near and walked with them*. At first they did not recognize Jesus; as they traveled together, he drew them out, inquiring of their sadness, listening to their situation. And when this curious stranger began stunningly reframing for them the meaning of those tragic events of the week, the two disciples' sadness turned and their interest was peaked—*"Stay with us, stay with us."* Then as the two disciples shared a meal with the resurrected Jesus their eyes were opened and they recognized their master and their friend. *Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking on the road?*

Throughout these last sessions of *Walking with Others*, we want you to walk with those two disciples heading toward Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). Allow this story to suggest and shape the mindset and posture of our mentoring way with others. *Jesus continues to come near and walk with us when we walk together as his disciples*. Many times we encounter him but do not recognize him. But over time and conversation we recognize his stunning presence with us and among us. Our role as developers of others is not to be Jesus or messiah in the life of another. Rather, let's increasingly envision ourselves as fellow disciples, companions on the journey, helping one another mature into Christ, always alert and expectant to the resurrected Jesus coming near to us and walking with us.



Thomas Hart's *The Art of Christian Listening* (Paulist Press, 1980) provides fruitful perspectives for this work of walking alongside others on their spiritual journey. We have translated some of his thoughts into four self-examining questions. As you think and pray about the Emmaus Road and your desire to walk well with others as a mentor or friend or pastor or facilitator or colleague, allow these four questions to orient and ready your heart:

- 1. *Am I willing to listen?*** Listening is fundamental to building trust in the relationship. By listening attentively to one another we remind each other that our lives profoundly matter.
 - 2. *Am I willing to simply be a companion?*** I need to leave behind any ambitions to be savior or problem solver or fix-it person in another's life. The gift we can promise to another is our presence and genuine interest along the way.
 - 3. *Am I willing to love?*** It is un-love that makes people unwell, and it is love, and love alone, that makes people well (Karl Menninger). To choose to walk alongside another on their spiritual journey is to choose to love them.
 - 4. *Am I willing to be myself?*** Pretending to be someone I am not erodes trust in a relationship or small group. It is also a recipe for burnout; wearing a mask is absolutely exhausting. Allow the Spirit to gently free you up to be more comfortable in our own skin as you walk with others (Romans 12:3).
- *Where do these self-examining questions stir your heart and mind? Any discoveries ... barriers ... longings you are bumping into as you ask yourself these four questions? Confess your thoughts and feelings and hopes in a written prayer.*

The best human relationships should mediate the friendship of God. As we see in the experience of the two disciples on the Emmaus Road, when true friends walk together, Jesus comes alongside. Therefore if we take divine friendship seriously, we must also take human friendship seriously. This type of friendship that interweaves the divine and the human is what writers like James M. Houston call "spiritual friendship," "...a friendship in the company of Christ."¹⁷

Soo-Inn Tan

A Psalm of Ascent

Psalm 131

*O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.*

*O Israel, hope in the Lord
from this time on and forevermore.*



Along Obedience in the Same Direction

In your reading of Psalm 131 and Chapter 13: *Humility*, what have you found yourself saying to yourself?

Convert your thoughts into a written prayer:

In Preparation for Session 2

Part 1 – Psalm 132 & A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

For next week, meditate and pray with Psalm 132. Read and reflect upon Eugene Peterson's meditations on Psalm 132 in Chapter 14: *Obedience of A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. Be prepared to share your thoughts and discoveries with your group.

Part 2 – Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us

Read Christine Pohl's Chapter 1: *Introduction: Four Practices That Sustain Community* and be prepared to share your thoughts and wonderings about this introductory chapter with your triad.

Part 3 – Read and Prepare for Session 2: Spiritual Friendship Triad

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