

---

We hope you take the opportunity to read through the downloaded sample of *The Journey*. We have included the introductory session of the process entitled “An Invitation to Discover,” as well as a session found in the last third of the process entitled “Imitating Jesus Way with Others.”

At its core, *The Journey* provides neither a book nor a seminar, but rather an extended conversation about God, ourselves, and what contribution God is inviting us to make in the world. May we all become “detectives of divinity,” joining with God in his developing others’ work in the world.

Blessings,

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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

---

**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.<sup>4</sup>

*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 – Read Session 2: Developing a Biblical Foundation***

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

SESSION TWO:

# Imitating Jesus' Way with Others

## *Invitation & Prayer*

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord,  
continue to live your lives in him,  
rooted and built up in him and established in faith,  
just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Colossians 2:6–7

We must imitate Christ's life and his ways  
if we are to be truly enlightened and set free from the darkness of our own hearts.  
Let it be the most important thing we do, then,  
to reflect on the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas à Kempis  
(1380–1471)

The first thing Jesus did after announcing the kingdom was to gather a community.  
To follow Jesus meant to share Jesus's life and to share it with others. From the beginning,  
the kingdom would be manifest through a people who shared a common life.  
Their visible fellowship would be the sign and the firstfruits of God's new order begun in Jesus Christ.  
Those who had left everything to follow Jesus were given the gift of community with one another.  
Henceforth they would belong to Jesus and be inextricably  
bound together as brothers and sisters in the family of God.  
The call of Jesus was not only to a new commitment;  
it was also to a new companionship,  
a new community established by conversion.<sup>2</sup>

Jim Wallis

## Overview

This session will explore the character of Jesus' way of being with others and the need for imitating this way in our lives.

I. Jesus' Way with Others

II. Imitating Jesus' Way with Others

## Focusing Question

- What are the main values that Jesus tried to live in his relationships with others?

## Instruction & Reflection

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory,  
the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

Stage 3: *Relational Foundations* focuses our learning upon the communal or relational element of the Christian journey. If we are to continue maturing into people of integrity, compassion, and influence in Jesus' name then we will not travel alone. However, the nature of this shared journey does not unfold easily in our imaginations. A way of life that prioritizes meaningful relationships poses significant challenges to our contemporary understanding and living in the world. For this reason we must return to the life of Jesus.

Michael Card writes in *The Walk*:



We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1 John 1:1–5

Whenever we are faced with a challenge...we must learn to “flee to the life of Jesus.” In any given situation, we should always ask the question, “What would Jesus do?” or “How did Jesus accomplish this?” In order to do this, we must all become experts on His life.<sup>3</sup>

And it is to Jesus’ way with others that we “flee” in this session. Jesus’ earthly life can be viewed through many different eyes or lenses. In this session we want to view Jesus’ life through *the lens of community*. For the Gospels reflect a person who was intimately involved in the lives of the people he encountered. Whether it was the crowds who swarmed him, the enemies who challenged him and ultimately killed him, or the friends and followers who stuck with him, Jesus lived his life immersed in a network of relationships. *Jesus was with people*. His life touched theirs. His head, hands, and heart were available to those with whom he lived. He walked the journey with them as a friend. He was not distant from them, but lived in their stories, and he invited them to live in his story. 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*. He had many other options available to him, but he chose to live out his purposes by *being with* his followers, life upon life.

So let’s read and reflect on Jesus’ life with this lens of community in order to help see and re-imagine what some of this Jesus way of life could look like in our relationships and communities today. For Jesus’ words, “follow me,” continue to provide us impetus for a lifetime of discipleship and disciple making. Imitation follows initiation. God initiates in Jesus—*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*—and we respond. As we listen to Jesus’ life and words today we are challenged by his Spirit to follow and imitate his relational way in the world.

## I. Jesus’ Way with Others

A Christian is one who points at Christ and says, “I can’t prove a thing,  
but there’s something about His eyes and His voice. There’s something about the way he carries His head,  
His hands, the way He carries His cross—the way He carries me.”<sup>4</sup>

Frederick Buechner

Let’s launch our reflection and discussion upon Jesus’ loving way with others by looking at five characteristics: Jesus’ way is hospitable, particularizing, deepening, patient, and prayerful. Imagine yourself near him throughout his earthly ministry as you read: *What are you noticing about the way he moves in community and treats other people?*

## A. A hospitable way with others


Jesus' life and ministry reflect a spirit of hospitality. That is, as one person puts it, Jesus consistently *creates a safe, open space where friends or strangers can enter and experience a welcoming spirit* of respect, acceptance, and care.<sup>5</sup> And this was not simply common courtesy or good manners on display. In fact, what got Jesus in trouble often was that he befriended all sorts of characters who most righteous people at the time thought were not deserving of such welcome (e.g. tax collectors, prostitutes, Samaritans, Gentiles). In a Jewish culture that drew clear categorizing lines, Jesus scandalously crossed all those lines. This was the gospel, God's loving and restoring way in the world, in practice. He looked across the scope of first-century Israel life and society and said, in essence, *there is room at the table for you*.

### 1. Jesus' practice of table fellowship

The Gospel writers repeatedly point out this hospitable spirit in *Jesus' practice of table fellowship*. Jesus was eating with all the wrong people. And sharing a meal during Jesus' day communicated far more than it does today. More than mere acquaintance or good manners, sharing a meal was an act of *mutual acceptance*. To eat with someone was an act of friendship. And Jesus was turning the first-century Jewish world upside down with his choice of meal partners. The contemptuous question that would be repeated by religious authorities, "Why do you eat and drink with tax-collectors and sinners?" (Luke 5:30) reflected Jesus' alternative vision of hope and healing for those with ears to hear. Jesus would put it this way when seated around Levi's table, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31–32). The common thinking and practice of the day could only offer hostility, contempt, and fear for a tax collector like Levi, but Jesus offered loving attention and acceptance. This meal scene would be repeated over and again throughout Jesus' lifetime. His way with others is a hospitable way. *There is room at the table for you*.

### 2. Jesus' practice of friendship

This spirit of hospitality was also expressed in the way *Jesus befriended his disciples*. Christine Pohl writes, "In hospitality, the stranger is welcomed into a safe, personal, and comfortable place, a place of respect and acceptance and friendship. Even if only briefly, the stranger is included in a life-giving and life-sustaining network of relations."<sup>7</sup> Her description is characteristic of Jesus' way with those closest to him. He made space for a *life-giving and life-sustaining network of relations* in which his followers would learn and grow, follow and imitate him. In short, he formed a learning community that would in time be released and sent out for Kingdom purposes. His nurturing way—respect, acceptance, and friendship—was a critical element in his inviting and preparing his followers to serve, lead, and guide others down the road. David Benner



"Table fellowship"—sharing a meal with somebody—had a significance in Jesus' social world that is difficult for us to imagine. It was not a casual act, as it can be in the modern world. In a general way, sharing a meal represented mutual acceptance. More specifically, rules surrounding meals were deeply embedded in the purity system. Those rules governed not only what might be eaten and how it should be prepared, but also with whom one might eat. Refusing to share a meal was a form of social ostracism. Pharisees (and others) would not eat with somebody who was impure, and no decent person would share a meal with an outcast. The meal was a microcosm of the social system, table fellowship an embodiment of social vision.<sup>6</sup>

Marcus Borg



Jesus lived his life and fulfilled his purposes as a companion—sojourning in the caravan of his relationships with family, neighbors, friends, strangers, and enemies. We can learn a lot about being a companion through the way he lived and what he said. By his words and example he invites us to see ourselves not merely as individuals, but as part of a community of people yearning for wholeness and completion. This is evident in the way he taught his disciples to pray using the plural, “Our Father in heaven...give us this day our daily bread...Forgive us our sins,” and “lead us not into temptation” (Matthew 6:9–13). We are invited to see our lives and our destiny as interwoven with one other.<sup>10</sup>

Mark Scandrette

writes, “Reading the Gospels with a focus on the relationship between Jesus and the disciples is a powerful experience.”<sup>8</sup> He points out:

Jesus was not just talk. He did not just speak of friendship; he actually offered it to his disciples and followers. He

- spent time with them—eating, drinking, walking and discussing things that were both important to him and them (Luke 24:13–45)
- shared the most painful depths of his experience with them (Matthew 26:38)
- shared insights that were not disclosed to those outside the circle of friendship (Matthew 13:36–52)
- humbled himself in offering acts of tender care (John 13:1–17)
- offered them emotional support, repeatedly assuring them that there was no need for fear; and demonstrating genuine concern for their feelings (John 14)
- invited and answered their questions (Luke 19:18–27)
- related to them in ways that were loving yet challenged them to grow (John 13:1–17).<sup>9</sup>

**The Gospels portray Jesus offering a staggering level of intimacy and approachability with his disciples. He never reduced them to mere pawns on his chessboard. Nor were they simply means for his greater purposes. It was not their functionality or usefulness that was primary to him; it was their person. He honored them with dignity, treasured their company, and developed them with great affection. They were his friends.**

### **B. A particularizing way with others**

Jesus proved in person that God loves people not as a race or species, but as individuals. We *matter* to God.

“By loving the unlovable,” said Augustine, “You made me lovable.”<sup>11</sup>

Philip Yancey

Closely linked to Jesus’ hospitable way with people is the way he particularized others throughout his earthly ministry. That is, Jesus noticed people uniquely. His compassion toward others was no one-size-fits-all approach. He singled people out amidst the crowds and approached them for the unique persons they were. Just imagine sitting up in the tree with the small and despised Zacchaeus, who was straining to see this Jesus, yearning to get a glimpse of this reputed “friend of tax collectors.” And just as he is getting a good look, the whole scene turns on Zacchaeus. Jesus looks up into his face and startles him with these words, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today” (Luke 19:5).

Or imagine sneaking away with the shameful woman after she has just touched the trim of Jesus' clothing and been immediately healed of her decade-long bleeding illness, only to become caught at the center of the crowd's attention. "Who touched my clothes?" Jesus asks. Those closest to him are perplexed by the foolishness of the question, considering the crowds pressing in upon Jesus. But this woman knows of whom Jesus speaks. She fearfully falls down before him and tells him *the whole truth* (Mark 5:33). "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Zacchaeus, the bleeding woman, and the many others like them were all transformed by Jesus' particularizing attention. Their lives were never the same. Jesus had a way of seeing and believing in people well beyond their capacity to do the same for themselves. They felt noticed, embraced, accepted, forgiven, and invited into the gospel—God was seeking them out and finding them for new life.

It is a powerful thing to be lovingly and particularly noticed by another person, let alone by Jesus. And in our culture today we hunger to be seen in this manner. So many people carry a deep sense of unnoticed-ness with them from an early age. We long to be "picked out of the crowd"—noticed and invited, "chosen" and "called," like Zacchaeus was by Jesus. Unfortunately, due to the "high rpm" of life and leadership today, both inside and outside the church, we more often miss or overlook each other's unique person and context. This aspect of Jesus' neighborly way with others, which seems so inefficient considering everything "we have to get done," must continue to be instructive to our traveling together in the Christian life. Jesus' way with others continues to be a particularizing way.

### **C. A deepening way with others**

John Ortberg defines the spiritual life as "a way of referring to one's life—every moment and facet of it—from God's perspective."<sup>12</sup> By this definition, Jesus was very concerned with inviting people to greater spiritual depth in *every moment and facet of their lives*. He recognized that so much of their "righteous" living was simply scraping the surface of God's faithful way as revealed in the Law and the Prophets. Consider one table conversation recorded by Luke:

While he was speaking a Pharisee invited him to dine with him; so he went in and took his place at the table. The Pharisee was amazed to see that he did not wash before dinner. Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? So give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you." (Luke 11:37–40)

His poignant words unsettled, even threatened, those who sat around the table. He asked, “Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?” Over and again in the Gospels, Jesus confronts those who define the faithful life by only a part of their life (e.g. behavior, right thoughts, religious experiences). Like the great prophets of the Old Testament, Jesus’ hard words drive his community below the superficialities of their faith and conduct, in order to pay attention to the greater concerns of *justice and the love of God* (Luke 11:42).

### **1. Jesus’ gift of a good question**

This Luke dinner table scene clearly illustrates one of the primary methods Jesus utilized in this deepening way with others: question-asking. Stephanie Ford, in her book *Kindred Souls*, calls it *the gift of a good question*. She writes:

...Jesus was a master of the kind of question that took a conversation deeper. Moreover, he deflected many questions, realizing that the issue behind the seeker’s question needed to be explored, rather than an answer provided. In fact, he often directed a similar question back to the individual. Jesus’ questions pushed his followers and friends beyond where they had been to honesty before God and themselves that was vulnerable, and risky. Yet he knew that the right question could open the seeker to transformation, a new experience of grace, and greater congruity of life and faith.<sup>13</sup>

Whether it is a brief encounter or a deep friendship, Jesus’ questions consistently draw his listeners into a greater field of discovery. To the suspicious religious authorities who tried to trap him with a question of his authority, Jesus exposed their hearts by turning the question on them with a question of his own: “Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it from human origin?” (Luke 20:4). Or to the blind Bartimaeus, disrupting and demanding Jesus’ attention, Jesus pulls him into the vulnerability of his need with a question, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mark 10:51). Jesus seems to prefer asking questions in order to invite deeper exploration rather than offering direct answers that invite little or no personal engagement.

### **2. Jesus’ storytelling**

Along with asking good questions, Jesus also told stories or parables in order to cultivate a deeper dialogue and exploration into faithful living. Jesus’ *storytelling* is strewn through the gospel accounts. So distinctive is it that his disciples even ask at one point, “Why do you speak in parables?” (Matthew 13:10). Matthew even records that “Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing” (Matthew 13:34). Whether addressing opposition to his choice of unseemly meal partners (Luke 15) or communicating the nature of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13) or unfolding what loving



one's neighbors will actually mean (Luke 10), Jesus tells a story. And these stories or parables have a way of inviting and involving the listeners that demands their response. Brennan Manning characterizes Jesus' storytelling:

To move through the language and imagery of Jesus' parables offers some fascinating insights into his sensibilities. Noah Webster defines an iconoclast as "one who makes attacks on cherished beliefs and institutions, one who destroys or opposes the veneration of religious images." Jesus, the master storyteller, was clearly an iconoclast. His parables expressed in words what his actions demonstrated. He shattered idols and blew away preconceived ideas of who God is and what men and women are meant to be.<sup>14</sup>

Through his imaginative stories and metaphors Jesus confronts his listeners with another way of seeing and living. And again they—and we—are forced into deeper exploration of God's way in the world.

Jesus offered a sharply contrasting perspective from other rabbis and leaders of the day. He walked the same streets, worshipped in the same synagogues, read the same Scriptures, observed the same festivals, and yet, when we listen to his teaching, we are immediately faced with a different sort of presence. We agree with Luke: "They were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority" (Luke 4:32). Jesus was noticing things and expressing things that everyone else was apparently missing at the time. And consequently, both "sinner" and "righteous" were dramatically engaged anew by God's saving way. In comparison to Jesus, the rest of his community seemed to have missed the whole point of this life with God. Jesus' way with others was a deepening way.

#### **D. A patient way with others**

Better is the end of a thing than its beginning;  
the patient in spirit are better than the proud in spirit.

Ecclesiastes 7:8

Perhaps it is our cultural preoccupation with speed, efficiency, and control that causes us to notice Jesus' patient way with others. Jesus is not conditioned by our constant search for shortcuts and "getting the biggest bang for our buck" as he moves through the world. It is in the way Jesus treats his disciples that this slow and patient mentoring unfolds most clearly. Over and again the Gospels reflect the disciples' slow learning process. After just witnessing Jesus miraculously feed five thousand people (Mark 6:35–44), the disciples, when faced with another crowd, incredulously ask, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" (Mark 8:4). And Jesus yet again blesses the little food they do have and

Parables entice their hearers into new territory. If the goal is an interactive relationship (which is at the heart of terms like *kingdom of God* and *eternal life...*), a parable succeeds where easy answers and obvious explanations couldn't. With a clear and easy explanation, hearers can listen and achieve understanding and then go their way, independent of the teacher. But when a parable confounds them, it invites them to ask questions, so they continue to depend on the teacher himself, not just their independent understanding of his words.

...parables have a capacity that goes beyond *informing* their hearers; parables also have the power to help *transform* them into interactive, interdependent, humble, inquisitive, and persistent people.<sup>15</sup>

Brian McLaren

amazingly stretches it into a meal for four thousand. On the eve of his death the familiar argument over the disciples' "pecking order" repeats itself, and Jesus graciously reminds them yet again, "But not so with you...I am among you as one who serves." The Gospels paint a picture of the disciples as a fellowship of slow learners. And we as readers are invited to join this fellowship and to encounter Jesus' gracious and patient way with us.

In particular, the gospel writers draw us into Jesus' development of the impetuous and determined Simon Peter. More is offered about his relationship with Jesus than any other person in the Gospels. We would encourage you to pay attention to Jesus' interactions with Peter as you continue to read through Luke. For our purposes now, let's reflect upon a few passages with an eye to Jesus' patient way with Peter.

### *Reflect & Respond*

---

*Place yourself in Peter's shoes in each of these incidents. What do you notice about Jesus' way with you? What do you imagine you would have remembered years later from this encounter?*

- *Luke 5:1–11*

- *Matthew 16:13–23*

- *Luke 22:24–62*

- *John 21:1–23*

---

Peter knew first hand the transformative power of Jesus' patient mentoring in his life. A much older and wiser Peter would tell a suffering church in a letter years later, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you *in due time*" (1 Peter 5:6, italics added).



Jesus' mission involved apprenticing others to faithfully share in God's way and work in the world. And Jesus knew that one couldn't rush the development of people. Projects can be crammed and hurried, but nurturing and challenging people to maturity cannot. There would be setbacks and differences and failures along the way, but Jesus kept the end in mind. And consequently, he never seems to be hurried or in a panic. For those of us who find ourselves frustrated over and over again by the slow pace of change in our lives and in our communities we would do well to prayerfully study and reflect upon Jesus' way of apprenticing his followers. Our imaginations, which have been largely shaped by a cultural addiction to speed and control and technique, must be retrained by the Gospels' images of Jesus' patient way with others.

### **E. A prayerful way with others**

This exploration of Jesus' way with others must include the prayerfulness that weaves itself throughout the Gospels. After his baptism and temptation in the wilderness, Jesus begins his teaching and healing ministry surrounded by crowds of curious onlookers and committed disciples. And it was during these early days that Jesus would often withdraw to *deserted places* to pray (Luke 5:16). For example, on the night before he chooses the twelve apostles from among his many disciples, Jesus spends the night in prayer (Luke 6:12–13). Luke also portrays Jesus often praying alone with his disciples nearby. On one of these occasions Jesus stops his praying and asks, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" This conversation leads to Peter's bold declaration that Jesus is the Messiah (Luke 9:18–20). On another occasion Jesus takes Peter, James and John to the mountain to pray. And it is here that Moses and Elijah join them and witness Jesus' transfiguration (Luke 9:28–36). On the night before his death the Gospels let us in on Jesus' prayerful way to an even greater extent. To Peter he communicates that he has prayed for him *that his faith may not fail* (Luke 22:32). And John 17 records Jesus praying at length for his disciples' protection and unity. His confidence in the disciples' wellbeing rested in the Father.

For that matter, Jesus' whole life and ministry was firmly rooted in his intimate relationship with his Father. John writes:

Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these so that you will be astonished." John 5:19–20

John's gospel conveys over and over again the centrality of Jesus' relationship with the Father. It mirrors the intimacy between Jesus and his Father with the intimacy between Jesus and his disciples. Just as Jesus tells the disciples initially "the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing," so he

I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:25–30



The Lord's Prayer summarizes the important attitudes and teachings that Jesus lived and preached to his followers. It reminds us that God is Abba who provides us with everything we have. God lavishes heavenly love on us in creation, enfleshes it in our neighbor and dreams the reality of its fullness in Jesus' kingdom of peace, love and justice. God forgives all our sins with mercy and compassion. And this loving God never abandons us in times of temptation, testing, or trial. No matter the situation or circumstance, God is as close to us as a father is to his beloved children....

Not a method or technique, this prayer is truly "an abridgement of the entire Gospel," as Tertullian said in the late second century. To live the Lord's Prayer is to walk the way of the disciple.<sup>16</sup>

Albert Haase

will communicate to them later, "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Jesus models to them a trust and dependency on the Father that textured all of his relationships on earth. It would be this same sort of trust and dependency that they in time would be encouraged to imitate.

Finally, it is noteworthy that only on one occasion do the gospel writers record the disciples asking Jesus to teach them something. Luke records that after Jesus had finished praying they asked him, "Lord, teach us to pray..." (Luke 11:1). This alone underscores the prevalence of prayer in Jesus' life. It was the custom of rabbis in Jesus' day to summarize their worldview into a prayer. What we call "the Lord's Prayer" is a simple and powerful portrait of Jesus' way of understanding and living in the world. Jesus taught them this way:

When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial. (Luke 11:2-4)

**This prayer is fundamentally relational and communal. It is a prayer for the community of disciples and not merely to be prayed in individualistic isolation. "Father" is a powerful title and affirmation of family relationship. Jesus wanted them to learn in intimate relationship with God. And he wanted them to learn together with each other.**

*Reflect & Respond*

---

- Briefly summarize in your own words what each of these characteristics of Jesus' way with others means:

- A hospitable way:

- A particularizing way:

- A deepening way:

- A patient way:

- A prayerful way:

- *From your observations of Jesus in the Gospels, what other aspects or characteristics of his way with others would you like to add?*
- *Imagine Jesus living your actual life with your unique set of people and places, roles, and circumstances. What would be the concrete ways he would express this hospitable love to others today?*
- *Why do you suppose Jesus used so many stories, parables, metaphors to teach and challenge his listeners? Do you think he would teach in the same storytelling way today if he walked among us?*

## II. Imitating Jesus' Way with Others

And then Jesus said, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like the wise man who built his house on the rock."

Matthew 7:24

We face tremendous pressure in our lives today to be simply spectators of this Jesus. But faithful living has never been a spectator sport. Over 150 years ago Danish Christian thinker Søren Kierkegaard emphasized this by drawing a contrast between being an admirer and being an imitator. He wrote:

What, then, is the difference between an admirer and an imitator? An imitator is or strives to be what he admires, and an admirer keeps himself personally detached, consciously or unconsciously does not discover that what is admired involves a claim upon him to be or at least to strive to be what is admired.<sup>17</sup>

We can become too self-satisfied in our admiration of Jesus and thereby keep his *claim* or demand upon our lives at a safe distance. But Jesus is seeking something far different than mere admirers or knowledgeable spectators. Jesus calls us to appreciate who he is to such an extent that we seek to imitate him day-in-day-out. It requires getting out of the stands and on to the field to follow him. This is, after all, what the Spirit is doing in our lives—inviting and empowering us to move beyond spectatorship and to live into Jesus' loving way in the world (Ephesians 3:16–17).

### A. Responding to Jesus' invitation to follow

As simple as it sounds, we must first learn to hear and respond to Jesus' invitation to follow. Do we hear his personal invitation to follow amidst the everyday circumstances of our lives? "Follow me to a place I will show you," said Jesus. "You know the way." The disciples candidly admitted that they did not yet know the way. But the way was standing before them, as it does before us. Jesus responded, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:5–6). Beyond a mental assent or agreement with this statement, we apprentices of Jesus have much to learn about trusting him and imitating his way. Dallas Willard underscores the critical need in Christian ministry today to "reestablish Christ as a living teacher in the midst of his people."<sup>18</sup> He asks:

Who, among Christians today, is a disciple of Jesus, in any substantive sense of the word "disciple"? A disciple is a learner, a student, an apprentice—a *practitioner*, even if only a beginner. The New Testament literature, which must be allowed to define our terms if we are ever to get our bearings in the Way of Christ, makes this clear. In



that context, disciples of Jesus are people who do not profess certain views as their own but apply their growing understanding of life in the Kingdom of Heaven to every aspect of their life on earth.

In contrast, the governing assumption today among professing Christians is that we can be “Christians” forever and never become disciples....That is the accepted teaching now....

Jesus told us explicitly what to do....He told us, *as disciples*, to *make disciples*. Not converts to Christianity, nor to some particular “faith and practice.” He did not tell us to arrange people to “get in” or “make the cut” after they die, nor to eliminate the various brutal forms of injustice, nor to produce and maintain “successful” churches. These are all good things, and he had something to say about all of them. They will certainly happen if—but *only if*—we are (his constant apprentices) and do (make constant apprentices) what he told us to be and do. If we do this, it will little matter what else we do or do not do.<sup>19</sup>

**Undoubtedly the Spirit of God has been inviting us to a greater depth of Christian living. And at the heart of this invitation is the person of Jesus, both our savior and our teacher, who is calling us to follow and learn and imitate just as he did with Peter and Thomas and Mary and Paul. Jesus has much to teach us as disciples about life in general, and about his way of treating people in particular. And the sort of learning he is seeking to foster requires imparting much more than just knowledge or information, but a whole way of life.**

### **B. Inviting others to follow faithfully**

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Apostle Paul  
1 Corinthians 11:1

**Responding to Jesus’ initiating and inviting work in our lives is only half of the story (*being disciples*). The other half is about being in others’ lives in such a manner that they too can faithfully respond to God’s initiating work (*making disciples*). In essence we follow and learn and imitate together as apprentices of Jesus. As we discussed in the last session, this life together can complicate the journey for those of us who are conditioned to self-reliance and making it on our own. Tim Stafford confesses:**

I used to think of following Jesus as steps on an individual pilgrimage. Jesus was ahead; I followed behind by myself. Now I see that I can’t walk alone. I have to stick close to my brothers and sisters. We are a crowd following Jesus—badly. We get off the path. We lose our bearings. Nevertheless, we seek to

The skill of these early spiritual teachers was their ability to imitate and model the kind of life Jesus lived: “Therefore I urge you to *imitate me*. For this reason I am sending you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus...” (1 Corinthians 4:16–17). These early teachers were so convinced of the necessity of modeling that they urged their apprentices, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). We get clues about making a new life in the way of Jesus by spending time with people we admire for how they live a life of radical love.<sup>20</sup>

Mark Scandrette



The purpose of our lives is to become like Jesus, and not just to resemble him externally but to be rooted and grounded in him (Ephesians 3:17), to be ever more closely identified with him so that we can say, “I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). Any growth in the living out of the great commandment is growth in Christ. The entire object of Christian spirituality is right here.<sup>22</sup>

Thomas Hart

walk the way Jesus showed. He promises to get us to the destination, even though we are poor followers. He promises to get us there together.<sup>21</sup>

**We need constant reminders and encouragements that we are in this together as we walk with Jesus. Paying attention to God’s leading in our lives *and* helping others pay attention to God’s activity in their lives are not easy tasks amidst the fast-paced, superficial, self-serving, and prayer-less way of our dominant culture. We can become so easily distracted and forgetful. This is why we need relationships of mutual support and challenge. A listening ear or an accepting presence or a timely challenge or a thoughtful prayer can go a long way toward sustaining a fellow apprentice on the journey when he or she grows tired or confused or doubtful. Learning and imparting Jesus’ way of life requires a commitment to being *living reminders* that there is another way to live in relationship to one another.**

Just a glimpse of his earthly life and ministry reveals that Jesus immersed himself within a web of personal interactions and friendships in order to live out his mission. He journeyed with others in a manner that we have characterized as hospitable, particularizing, deepening, patient, and prayerful. The question to which we want to return over and again throughout the next several weeks is, “*What are the concrete ways we can imitate this relational way of Jesus today?*”

*Reflect & Respond* \_\_\_\_\_

- Reread Dallas Willard’s quote on pages 34–35. What stands out to you? What significance do his thoughts hold for our church community?
- Looking back through the entire session, what aspects of Jesus’ way with others inspire you the most? Challenge you the most?

- *Reflect upon the current character of your relationships at work, at home, with your friends. What difference does Jesus' way of being a companion to others make to these relationships? How might God's Spirit be inviting you to follow more faithfully?*

---

## *Prayer*

*All wise God,  
the world is in confusion and disarray as information accumulates  
and there is no one to interpret it.  
Give me, along with people of faith,  
wisdom to lead my friends and neighbors to live wisely  
by the vision you provide in Jesus Christ. Amen.<sup>23</sup>*

*Eugene Peterson*

## *In Preparation for Session 3*

### ***Part 1 – Bible Reading and Journaling: The Gospel of Luke***

Read and reflect upon Luke 15-16. Remember to keep journal entries of any insights you are gaining or prayers that are emerging in your heart. Be prepared to share your thoughts and discoveries with your group and/or mentor. You will find space for this journaling at the back of the manual.

### ***Part 2 – Beginning Your Intentional Spiritual Conversation***

Last week you were asked to pray for guidance regarding someone you might ask to meet with for a three-week intentional conversation. This week, initiate a connection with that person, inviting them to join you on the journey in this way. You may find it helpful to offer to them some of what you have been learning in *The Journey* and to explain to them some of your desire in meeting together in this way. You may also share with them that your time together would primarily take the form of some questions you would ask them about their spiritual journey. You might also begin these conversations if possible. Appendix A at the back of this manual (pages 144-145) provides a suggested guide for these conversations.

### ***Part 3– The Walk***

Continue your reading of Michael Card's *The Walk: The Life-Changing Journey of Two Friends* by reading *Part 2: The Call*. As you read, reflect on the ways that others have helped you learn or deepen the reality of being *with* Jesus in all things.

### ***Part 4 – Read Session 3: Walking with Others***

Read and complete the questions in Session 3. Be prepared to share your discoveries with the group.



VANTAGEPOINT<sup>3</sup> is a ministry committed to fostering depth and empowerment in local churches through Christian leadership formation.

For further information concerning VP3, its process and its materials, visit  
**[vantagepoint3.org](http://vantagepoint3.org)**

***The Journey***

*Copyright* © 2009 by VANTAGEPOINT<sup>3</sup>

***All Rights Reserved***

**Developed by the VANTAGEPOINT<sup>3</sup> Team**

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