



We hope you take the opportunity to read through the downloaded sample of *Walking with Others*. We have included the introductory session of the process entitled “An Invitation to Invest,” as well as a session found in the last third of the process entitled “A More Relational Way of Life and Ministry.”

Walking with Others will challenge you to take a next step in your development—learning to guide other adults toward a deeper maturity in Christ. As one discovers throughout *The Journey* and *A Way of Life*, each of us has a unique mix of experiences, gifts, talents, strengths, personality, education, history, and character. Your life is a gift you offer to others and to the Lord.

The VantagePoint3 Team

SESSION ONE:

**An Invitation
to Invest**

Invitation & Prayer

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

2 Timothy 2:1-2

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

Martin Thornton
(1915-1986)

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

Timothy Jones

Overview

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

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

II. “Pocket-Full Sorts of Walks”

Focusing Question

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

An Invitation To Invest

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reflect & Respond:

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

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

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

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

A. *Developing Others (3 stages)*

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

Stage 1: A Place of Learning and Formation

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

Stage 2: A Lifelong Journey

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

Stage 3: A Leadership of Companionship

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Journey, Stage 3: Relational Foundations

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

James M. Houston



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

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

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

II. "Pocket-full Sorts of Walks"

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

1 Thessalonians 2:8

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

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

Rob Loane tells the story:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reflect + Respond

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

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

Prayer

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

But I do more than thank.

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

The Apostle Paul

Ephesians 1:15–19 (MSG)

In Preparation for Session 2

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

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

Part 2 – A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

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

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

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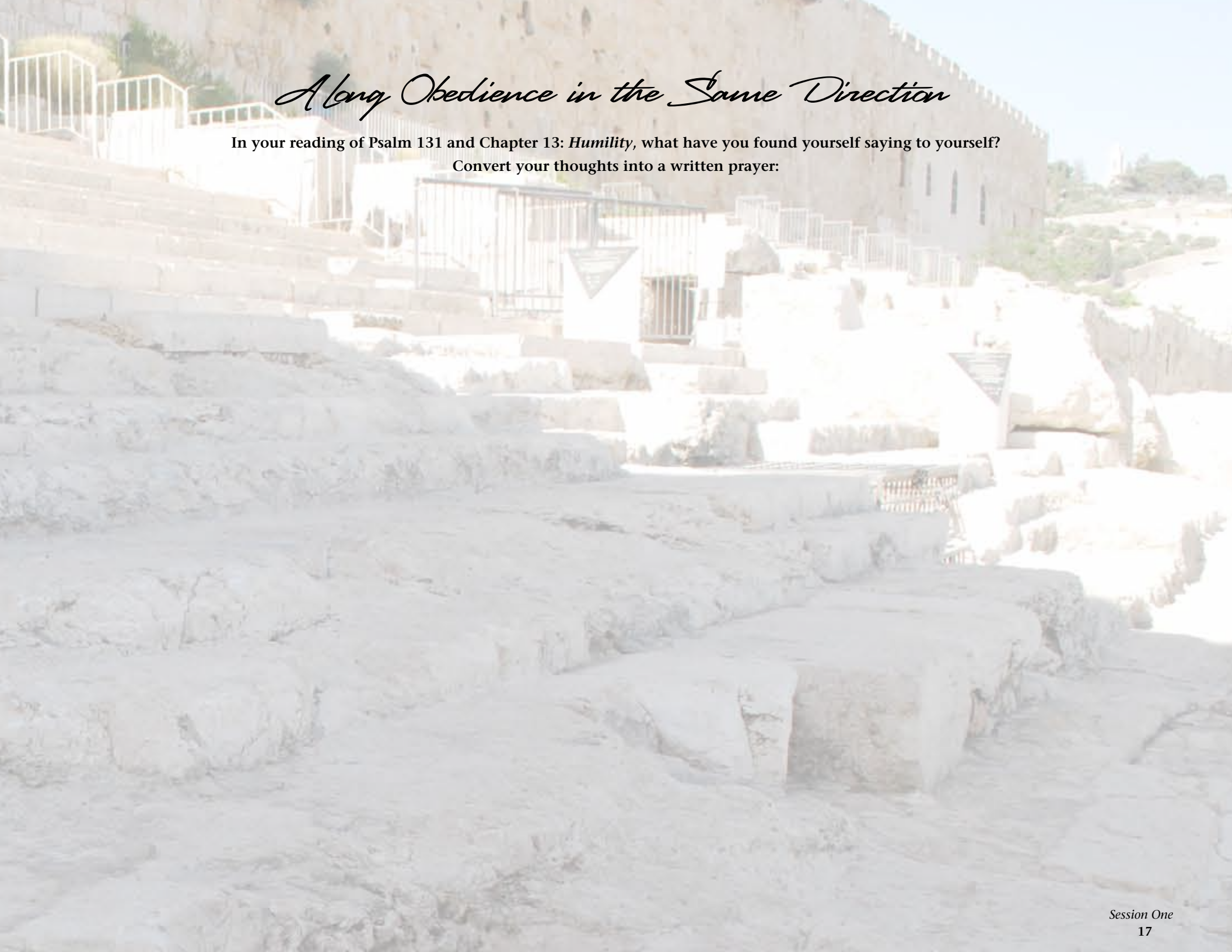


A Psalm of Ascent

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.

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Walking with Others

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