

4 Ingredients for Deeply Formed Lives

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, and perhaps even because of all these efforts, there is a growing realization today that we are just skimming across the surface.

John Stott put it this way, “Our zeal to grow wider has not been matched by a commitment to go deeper.” Just a 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. Something needs to change. **If you care about helping others deepen and grow, here are a few initial ingredients that need to be included in the mix of your discipleship and formation efforts.**

1 - Slow it down!

The development of people cannot be crammed or hurried. Repentance and conversion (turning from and turning toward) are lifelong processes. Perhaps it is our preoccupation with speed, efficiency, and control that makes it so hard for us to trust Jesus’ patient way of bringing people to maturity. He is not conditioned by our constant search for shortcuts.

Growing up is a lifelong journey. And we are invited to join a fellowship of slow learners and encounter Jesus’ gracious and patient way with us. Our imaginations, which have been largely shaped by our cultural addiction to speed and control and technique, must be confronted and retrained by the Gospels’ images of Jesus’ patient way with others.

2 - A Double Knowledge

There are many Christians floundering in their faith today because they have, in one form or another, failed to appreciate the interrelationship between knowledge of God and knowledge of self. Some become stalled in their Christian life because they have subtly ignored the horizon of God’s character and work and reduced Christian maturity to a self-actualizing journey. Others become stuck in their Christian life not because they are ignorant of Scripture but because they are ignorant of their own hearts.



There was an understanding among the early church fathers and mothers that true wisdom in the life of faith is always “a double knowledge.” That is, knowledge of God and knowledge of self are inextricably linked together. **A heart to know God more intimately and serve him more faithfully requires an openness to discover oneself more truthfully.**

3 - Good Conversation

Too often we major on the presentation or the performance—the monologue—without majoring on the hard work of cultivating dialogue. The back-and-forth conversational work of listening and question asking, reflection, clarification and discernment are so necessary for development and maturity.

Many of us yearn for more than the chitchat prompted by the fill-in-the-blank small group questions. We want meaningful conversation around the biggest questions of our lives. We want to candidly ask others whether they think the dreams and hopes we carry within are of the Spirit or not. It is a small, yet powerful matter—our ability to talk and listen—to use words and silence well with each other.

If our faith formation is to move beyond a mostly heady exercise and become a place where our faith is personalized and lived out, then we are going to have to place high value upon practicing the art of dialogue.

4 - Friendship is Essential

Friendship is not “a cherry on top” of the Christian life; it is an essential condition for a maturing life in Christ. As we make space for a common sharing, honoring, and enjoying of life, something of the Spirit’s nurturing grace is imparted to us.

We long to know and be known more intimately. We desire deeper, more enduring, and meaningful relationships. And without these sorts of friendships our good intentions to mature into wise, loving, joyful, and resilient people never materialize. **Christian maturity is never a do-it-yourself project.**

- What do you find yourself thinking as you read through these formation and discipleship ingredients?
- What “one decision,” if you had the courage to initiate, would change everything else in your formation efforts?
- We often say at VP3, “conversation creates culture.” Who would you like to convene to discuss this further?

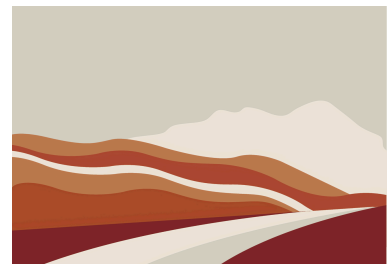
All four of these ingredients are embedded in *The Journey*, an uncommon, faith-deepening, community-building, and life-aligning process.



AN ATTENTIVE LIFE



AN EXAMINED LIFE



A SHARED LIFE