

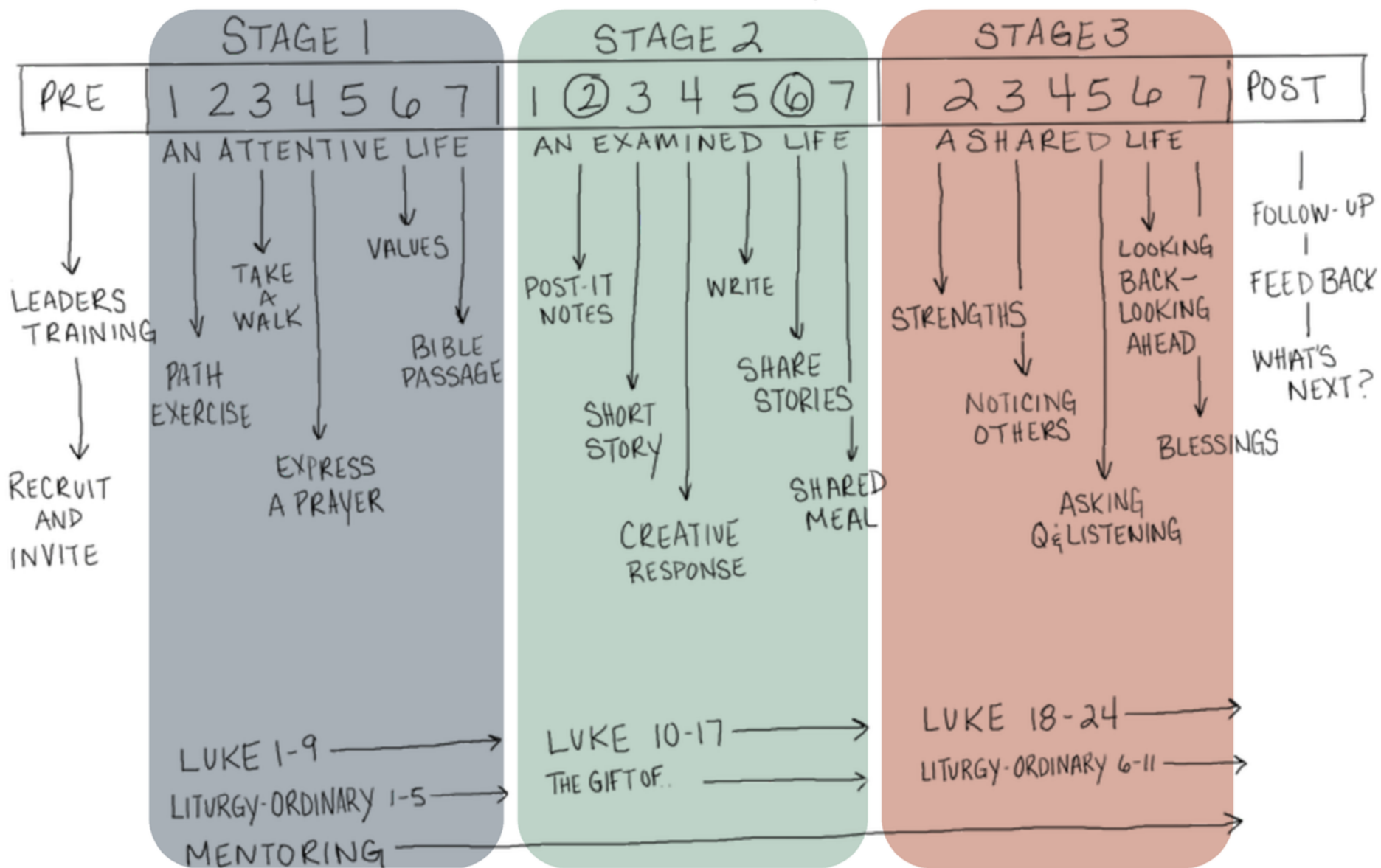
The Journey:

AN EXAMINED LIFE

FACILITATOR GUIDE

2

THE JOURNEY



The Journey

Stage 2: An Examined Life

As the facilitator and leader of *An Examined Life*, your primary role is to continue to pay attention to the adults who have chosen to grow in maturity toward Christ with you, versus seek to master the educational material. The content is important, but it is not what matters most.

Continue to pay attention to how adults best learn and grow by experimenting with methods to enhance dialogue, discovery, and application. Continue to be prayerful toward the group as a whole, as well as individual nuances and circumstances. The Spirit of God is at work far beyond what you can see. Trust the process.

In these seven sessions, we hope to cultivate:

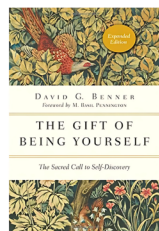
- an increased familiarity with our own life stories from the time we were born to the present, seeking to become more aware of God's presence with us along the way.
- the notion that knowledge of God and knowledge of self are inextricably linked together and this is a good thing.
- a trusted space with increased authenticity, intimacy, and discovery.

BIBLE READING & JOURNALING

Luke's Gospel and the Story of Jesus—chapters 10-17

Throughout each session of *The Journey*, we will read a chapter from Luke's Gospel.

TEXT



The Gift of Being Yourself

David G Benner
InterVarsity Press, 2004



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Session 2: Remembering Your Story:
A Timeline Exercise

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Session 4: Twists and Turns Along the Way

Session 5: Writing Our Spiritual Narratives

Session 6: Sharing Our Spiritual Narratives

Session 7: A Shared Meal

Exploring Further

- Part 1 - Remembering Your Story: A Timeline Exercise
- Part 2 - Big Picture: Gaining A Lifelong Perspective
- Part 3 - Learning from Others
- Part 4 - Twists and Turns Along the Way: A Playlist

Stage Two Specific Questions

Building trust, vulnerability, and connection

- Share a joy and a sorrow that you have recently experienced.
- On a scale of 1-10, how are you? (1= really struggling, 10= doing great)
- What is something you find yourself continuing to pray about?
- How have you been encouraged since we last met?
- Name a prayer that has been answered for you.
- What are you noticing as you participate in *The Journey* process so far?

Stage manual/Scripture discussion questions

- What do you find yourself thinking about? Tell me more....
- What excites you about ...? What concerns you?
- How is the life of Jesus and your narrative intersecting?
- What or who do you find yourself identifying with as you listen to each other's life stories?
- Is there something God is challenging you to let go of as you write your spiritual narrative?
- Name a surprise that has shown up in this work of writing your narrative.

Accountability questions:

- What spiritual practice has been helping you keep company with God?
- What is your posture toward silence and solitude?
- How has God shown his love for you recently?
- Is there anything that has been drawing you away from God lately?

Mentoring check-in questions:

- How is your mentoring experience going?
- What is something you are learning about yourself in this mentoring process?
- Does sharing with a mentor feel easy or challenging? Say more about this.
- What has been most valuable about the time spent with your mentor so far?
- Are there any areas where the mentoring hasn't been as helpful as hoped?
- Are there any aspects of communication that could be improved in the relationship?

In general, a demeanor of curiosity toward others is critical. And what do curious people do? They ask a lot of good questions, with follow up questions, and they listen and listen and listen with an honest desire to know more.

A Mentoring Guide: Christ. Conversation. Companionship,
VantagePoint3, 2019, p. 46

Stage Two Facilitating Considerations

As the guide for your group, it can become standard practice to have your full session discussion take place as a large group because it's easy, and because everyone wants to hear everything.

If this has been your practice, consider mixing it up and shifting how you have some of the session conversations. Adults like to move around physically and mentally. This gives adults energy. We also each have different learning styles and preferences for engagement. Think introvert and extrovert. We process differently.

So then, how about a conversation in twos or threes versus a large group?

How about a silent space to simply write and reflect upon a question or topic? Never discussing it out loud as a group, but trusting God's gentle processing in the Spirit?

The primary focus of Stage Two is sharing narratives. How will you do this? Adding sessions or in a retreat format?

SESSION ONE:

A God Who Shapes Us

Overview:

This session introduces *The Journey: An Examined Life*. Participants are invited to explore God's ongoing shaping activity in our lives. The concept of "double-knowledge," which is the importance of coming to know that knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves are inextricably linked together, is a key foundational element to the entire Stage 2 process.

Focusing Question:

As we look back on our lives so far, where has God's grace been operating all along the way of my life story?

Crafting My Group Time:

Dialogue • Discovery • Application

- *Recall an event, a person, or place...* Reflect and Respond question (p. 14)
- Dane Ortland quote. What stands out to you? (p. 14)
- Discuss double knowledge with second question on p. 18
- **A Creative and Developmental God.** What stands out to you? Why? (pp. 18-20)

Pay attention:

- Set the stage for what the whole of *The Examined Life* process of *The Journey* is all about. Page 21 has a short overview.
- Consider revisiting your group covenant if you have one. Slowly read what was agreed upon.
- Consider revisiting the Listener-Talker Continuum. Discuss what's improving and what could still improve in a desire to have shared talk time. (Leaders+)
- Introduce *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery*. Preview how the chapters will be integrated with the session readings. Be ready to discuss the preface and chapter one.
- **Exploring Further**, page 108, is a Stage Two resource around adult development over time that highlights behaviors accompanied with finishing the Christian life well. Don't miss it!

Moving on to Session 2→

- Session 2 will begin to focus on remembering our personal stories through a Post-it™ note timeline exercise.
- Collect all your necessary extra materials ahead of time. Explicit instructions are in *Exploring Further* (pp. 106-107).
- Participants will need plenty of space for the next session's activity. Does your present space allow for this? How can the space be improved?
- Reach out for prayer support for the next session. You just don't know the history of your participants' lives. But God does.

What I Notice About the Group:

Prayers for Those in the Group:

SESSION TWO:

Remembering Your Story: A Timeline Exercise

Overview:

This session invites participants to begin remembering and reflecting on their life stories through a timeline exercise. By prayerfully recalling significant events, people, and seasons, participants gain greater awareness of God's shaping presence and begin to see their stories as part of God's redemptive story.

Focusing Question:

What stories do you hear yourself telling others about your own life, about God, and about your participation in God's kingdom?

Crafting My Group Time:

Dialogue • Discovery • Application

- Quote from Darryl Tippens. How's your memory? Does memory matter? (p. 29)
- Before the timeline exercise. Read page 31. What stands out to you? Do you think of yourself as the author of your own story, making choices?
- Timeline exercise instructions. *Exploring Further* (pp.106-107)
- Conclude with a thoughtful processing question. What do you find yourself noticing?

Pay attention:

- Consider soft background music. This will make the session feel different.
- Pray during the quiet processing of Post-it™ notes. Have Kleenex on hand.
- Tell participants to leave 2" empty at the top of their poster board. This is a detail easily overlooked in the instructions.
- Pay attention to those in the group who may have issues with God's sovereignty and hesitancy toward God's shaping activity in their lives. Trust the process. Be gentle and encouraging.

Overseeing the Post-it™ note experience requires a prayerful and observant posture. You just do not know what the adults in your space are returning to in their lives. Even if you know them well.

If you see someone slow to write on Post-it™ notes, struggling with the instructions, or literally backing away from the table, we suggest quietly and quickly moving toward them and talking with them. Pray. Encourage. Listen. Follow up with them later or the next day.

Moving on to Session 3→

- The timeline exercise is designed to be a starting place for remembering your life. Session 3 will focus on the early foundational years of our lives, inviting more processing and memories.
- It's possible some may begin to be especially fearful about writing or sharing their life story. Listen well. Encouraging them to trust the process. No one will be forced to share anything they do not want to share.
- There is a **Short Story Exercise** (p. 50). This is designed to prime the larger writing assignment. Point this out and preview your expectations. Will everyone share?
- Leaders+ has excellent additional resources in preparation for this sacred assignment. The video, "Preparing, Sharing, and Receiving a Narrative," and "Best Practices in Receiving a Story" are especially helpful.

What I Notice About the Group:

Prayers for Those in the Group:

SESSION THREE:

Early Shaping Experiences

Overview:

This session helps participants look closely at their earliest shaping years—place and time, family history, and “destiny moments.” By honoring the particulars of our stories and listening well to one another, we begin to see God’s faithful, formative presence at work beneath the surface.

Focusing Question:

What from my early years (place, family, key moments) most shaped how I see God, myself, and the world?

Crafting My Group Time:

Dialogue • Discovery • Application

- Check in with the group on how everyone is doing. On a scale of 1 to 10. What’s your number?
What’s going on for you?
- *The Gift of Being Yourself*. What’s standing out?
- **Short Story Exercise**. (p. 50)
- **What are you taking away from our group time together?** (p. 55)

Pay attention:

- There are several big, reflective questions in this session, as well as the Short Story Exercise (p. 50). Perhaps choose just one place to land and plan for deeper discussion.
- There's a good chance some participants will be more vulnerable than they have been before. Affirm this. Invite honest sharing without pressure. Normalize passing and writing privately first.
- Coach the group to listen first, reflect back, and refrain from "fixing" or quick advice; model brief, honoring responses.
- Notice "threads" or themes in participants' lives.

When conversations are more vulnerable, or tender, a good way to care for the group is to break into twos or threes for conversation. Keeping genders separate may also be protective. This keeps the overall session "moving" and upbeat in energy.

Moving on to Session 4→

- Session 4 will continue story work by moving from the early years of our formation to all of the twists, and turns, and trouble we have faced in our lives. The VP3 Team created a playlist consistent with the themes focused on in this session. Use the QR code to find and share on Spotify, or find the list in Exploring Further (p. 118). Enjoy!
- *The Gift of Being Yourself* mentions a resource called the Enneagram. It's a personality tool that helps us understand our motivations for doing things. Some group members may be familiar with this; others not. Use your own judgment on what's best for your group in pursuing it further.
- You may notice some weariness among the group during this extended focus on themselves and developing their narratives. You could balance this with Luke readings and discussion.



What I Notice About the Group:

Prayers for Those in the Group:

SESSION FOUR:

Twists and Turns Along the Way

Overview:

This session explores how life's twists, turns, disruptions, and transitions become significant places of God's shaping work. By reflecting on times of continuity and discontinuity, joy and sorrow, participants are invited to see change not as an interruption but as a condition in which God forms and matures us.

Focusing Question:

How have the twists and turns of my life—both chosen and unchosen—shaped me into the person God is forming me to be?

Crafting My Group Time:

Dialogue • Discovery • Application

- *One research study says that 80% of all learning can be attributed to coping with a life transition.*
How do you know if you are growing? (p. 59)
- **Kinds of change.** Share one with the group. (pp. 60-61)
- Lifequakes take 5-7 years of adjustment. Have you found this to be true? (p. 63)
- **The Truth about Twists and Turns.** Which truth is standing out to you? (p. 66)

Pay attention:

- Watch for participants' emotional responses—resistance, grief, relief, or gratitude—as they recall life's twists and turns.
- Be mindful that some may recall painful experiences. There was an invitation for a creative response to the session as a whole (p. 69). Be sensitive to those who may want to share this; and those who do not.
- Notice when participants begin to reframe disruption as an opportunity for growth rather than only as loss.
- Pay attention to how listening and sharing build solidarity; affirm the sacredness of hearing each other's stories.

Moving on to Session 5→

- Session 5 is all about actually writing the life story narrative. Encourage participants to GET STARTED!
- Share stories of encouragement in the writing process.

What I Notice About the Group:**Prayers for Those in the Group:**

SESSION FIVE:

Writing Our Spiritual Narratives

Overview:

This session invites participants to begin writing their spiritual narratives as an act of prayer and an act of seeking God's gracious and active presence in the story of our lives. By weaving together themes, memories, and God's presence, writing becomes a way to notice the Spirit's shaping work and to share our stories with sincerity and courage.

Focusing Question:

What is the tone I want to embrace as I prayerfully write my story, revealing God's faithful presence and shaping work in my life?

Crafting My Group Time:

Dialogue • Discovery • Application

- **Keep Company with God.** What does beginning prayerfully look like for you? (p. 76)
- **Getting Started on Your Spiritual Narrative.** (pp. 77-79)
- *The Gift of Being Yourself.* What's helping you craft your story?
- Model by sharing your own story.

Pay attention:

- The goal of this writing process is not to compose a riveting narrative or “to figure ourselves out,” but rather to seriously, honestly, and courageously seek God’s gracious and active presence in the story of our lives.
- Help participants approach writing gently, without pressure for perfection. Suggest 5–10 pages double-spaced as a guideline.
- Remind them to begin with prayer, revisit their timeline, choose themes, start writing anywhere, and revise with care. Give permission to write things that they may decide not to share out loud.
- Creativity to fit the person is welcome in writing and sharing.
- If you share your own story, enlist your co-leader or one person in the group to facilitate the prayer and hold the space as you share.
- Your group will appreciate knowing in advance the order for the sharing of narratives. Let them choose who wants to go first, etc. They will want to know the order for the next 2-3 sessions.

Moving on to Session 6→

- Session 6 will focus on the sharing of spiritual narratives. Ask participants to bring a printed final draft (5–10 pages) of what they plan to share to read out loud to the group (30–40 minutes each).
- Encourage participants to read their narrative to one other person before this group.
- Provide instructions for what the sharing time will look like. If you are holding a retreat for the sharing time, be sure everyone knows where to be and what to bring.
- Prepare the group on how to receive a story well. **Receiving the Narratives**, p. 88 in session 6.

What I Notice About the Group:

Prayers for Those in the Group:

SESSION SIX:

Sharing Our Spiritual Narratives

Overview:

This session centers on the sacred practice of sharing spiritual narratives within the group. Listening to one another with compassion and attentiveness creates space for healing, encouragement, and recognition of God's faithful presence. Each story is holy ground—an opportunity to honor, receive, and pray with one another.

Focusing Question:

How can we listen to and honor one another's spiritual narratives as sacred stories of God's deep love for us and his redemptive work in our lives?

Crafting My Group Time:

Dialogue • Discovery • Application

- Narrative Sharing. Create space that invites the Holy Spirit into this process.
- Carefully think through the flow of each person sharing. Prayer, pause, silence. How to respond.
- Listen well. No problem-solving, fixing, or advice-giving; respond with affirmations, questions, or appreciations.
- Pray for one another. After each narrative, invite group prayer, naming what was heard, asking for God's presence, and blessing the storyteller.

Pay attention:

- Allow 30–40 minutes for each narrative, followed by 10–15 minutes of group response and prayer. Limit to two, maybe three narratives per session.
- Create a safe environment with clear expectations of confidentiality, kindness, and respect; reassure participants that they may share only what feels safe.
- A best practice for receiving stories can be using “stones or cards” where listeners write a word or phrase they hear and then share it with the storyteller.
- If the group is larger, the story sharing can extend for several sessions. Pay attention to the group’s energy and ongoing care over time.

Moving on to Session 7→

- Session 7 takes place after all stories have been shared. It will celebrate the story-telling with a shared meal and invite reflections on the experience.
- In preparation for the next session, participants are invited to review all of *An Examined Life* process. Guide them toward the questions on pages 95-96.
- Make plans to share and create a meal together. Who will do what? Emphasis here on sharing in the full experience by everyone.
- Decide as a group if you want the shared meal to also be the final session or if you want to add an additional closing session.

What I Notice About the Group:**Prayers for Those in the Group:**

SESSION SEVEN:

A Shared Meal

Overview:

This final *An Examined Life* session is centered on gathering for a shared meal—an act of gratitude, fellowship, and remembrance. Sharing food together creates sacred space to reflect on the stories exchanged, and celebrate God's presence around the table.

Focusing Question:

How does gathering around the table help us recognize God's presence and celebrate his ongoing work in our lives?

Crafting My Group Time:

Dialogue • Discovery • Application

- Shauna Niequist quote from *Bread and Wine* (p. 93)
- Enjoy the meal preparation and eating together.
- Brene' Brown vulnerability hangover. What's been your experience? (p. 95)
- ***An Examined Life Review***. Choose among the questions. (pp. 95-96)

Pay attention:

- Ensure everyone contributes to preparing, serving, and cleaning up. This is a shared experience, not a spectator event.
- Guide the group with gentle structure while also allowing conversation and gratitude to flow naturally.
- Create time for participants to revisit their ***An Examined Life Review***, sharing key discoveries, prayers, and commitments.
- Help the group recognize this session as both an ending and a sending. Celebrate what God has done and anticipate what he continues to do.

Moving on→

- Although this marks the conclusion of *Stage Two, The Journey* process continues.
- Is the group moving on to *Stage 3, A Shared Life*? If not, do you want to plan an additional time together so that you finish well?
- What next steps do participants see ahead of them?
- How will you, as their leader, stay in touch and encourage them until you reconvene?

What I Notice About the Group:

Prayers for Those in the Group:

WRAPPING UP:

The Journey: An Examined Life

As a facilitator completing this stage, you have taken a group of adults through a significant experience with the spiritual narrative process. For many, if not all, this has been deeply meaningful and impactful.

Pay Attention

- When you met for your shared meal, did you also adequately process the spiritual narrative experience?
- Is there anyone, in particular, you want to follow up with more personally following the spiritual narrative?
- Who might benefit from a personal word or note from you?
- Who might be a candidate for leading *The Journey*?

More Suggestions for Finishing Stage Two

Make space to reflect. Allow 15-30 minutes, or much more, for journaling and sharing around:

- What's changing for you?
- What is God stirring in your heart?
- What spiritual rhythm do you want to carry forward?
- Who will walk with you going forward?
- How will you continue to pay attention to God's presence?

Celebrate the courage to continue to trust the process. Remind participants that formation is slow, sacred work, and that consistently showing up is a sign of spiritual maturity.

Exploring Further, p. 108, is an excellent resource around adult developmental phases of maturity and what contributes to, and diminishes, finishing well in the Christian life.

Facilitator Self-Reflection Questions

As you conclude *An Examined Life*, take a few moments to reflect on your own experience as a leader.

- How is God showing his love toward you as you lead this *Journey* experience?
- Do you notice any spiritual rhythms forming that are enhancing your leadership with your participants?
- What was especially life-giving or stretching about facilitating these *Examined Life* sessions?
- Are you feeling any nudges from the Holy Spirit on how you can lean into your leadership role?
- Who are you sharing your experience as a facilitator with? Find a trusted friend or mentor to help you process the good work that God is doing in you as you lead others.

We at VantagePoint3 welcome a conversation with you and count it an honor to be a small part of what God is doing in and through YOU. Trust the process.

Gather me to be with you

Oh God, gather me now to be with you as you are with me.

Soothe my tiredness;

quiet my fretfulness;

curb my aimlessness;

relieve my compulsiveness;

let me be easy for a moment.

O Lord, release me

from the fears and guilts which grip me so tightly;

from the expectations and opinions which I so tightly grip,

that I may be open

to receiving what you give,

to risking something genuinely new,

to learning something refreshingly different.

Forgive me

for claiming so much for myself

that I leave no room for gratitude;

for confusing exercises in self-importance

with acceptance of self-worth;

for complaining so much of my burdens

that I become a burden;

for competing against others so insidiously

that I stifle celebrating them

and receiving your blessing through their gifts.

O God, gather me to be with you as you are with me.

Amen.

— by Ted Loder, *Guerillas of Grace*

The Journey

Stage 3: A Shared Life

As the leader of *A Shared Life*, you have become much more than a facilitator of this process; you are becoming a guide, mentor, friend, even a pastor, to those in your group.

You have been prayerfully creating conditions in which the Spirit of God might uniquely meet with each participant in just the right ways. This is a privilege. A front row seat to the activity of God.

One of the surprises along the way at this juncture in *The Journey* process is the profound creativity God has orchestrated in putting together your unique group of adults. It's almost as if God knew that we needed each other. May you continue to trust the process.

In these seven sessions, we hope to cultivate:

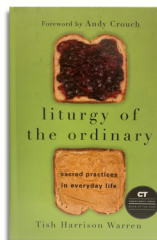
- a relational approach to life in Christ versus an individualistic “lone ranger” faith.
- a way of life marked by giving and receiving mentoring and companionship.
- an exploration of the talents God has given and is developing in us for kingdom purposes.
- a horizon for our next steps in kingdom servanthood, leadership, and growth.

BIBLE READING & JOURNALING

Luke’s Gospel and the Story of Jesus—chapters 18 - 24

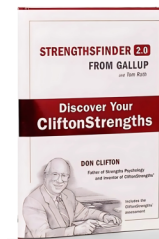
Throughout each session of *The Journey*, we will read a chapter from Luke’s Gospel.

TEXT



Liturgy of the Ordinary

Tish Harrison Warren
InterVarsity Press, 2016



StrengthsFinder 2.0

Gallup, 2021



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Session 1: A Shared Way of Life

Session 2: Jesus’ Relational Way with Others

Session 3: Companionship Others

Session 4: Exploring our Strengths

Session 5: Embracing a Sense of Calling

Session 6: Next Steps on the Journey

Session 7: A Time of Blessing

Exploring Further

VP3's A Mentoring Way

The gospel plays out best in relationships. If you are looking for another resource to guide your more relational ways of life and ministry, we strongly endorse these amentoringway.org resources:



At the
TABLE

Thoughtful words. Meaningful Conversations. Formation that shapes how you live and lead.

At the Table is designed for those eager to grow, deepen, and learn how to be companions for others in creating space for God.

We invite you to subscribe to the *At the Table* blog. Invest in your own formation and the formation of those you walk alongside in Jesus' name.

If you are looking for a quick one-to-three-minute daily read with tips, quotes, short videos, encouragement, and free downloads all on mentoring, then sign up for **30 DAYS OF MENTORING**.



3-2-1: Following Jesus in Threes by Soo-Inn Tan (GraceWorks.sg, 2013)

"Three friends meeting over a meal is an achievable way to experience spiritual friendship. '3-2-1' is a simple summary of the concept— three friends meeting two hours one time a month over a meal.... This short book contains all you need to understand and practise a 3-2-1 approach to spiritual friendship."
— Soo-Inn Tan.

Many *Journey* alumni have found this book to be a valuable model for continuing to cultivate the spiritual companionship they experienced in *The Journey* process.

3•2•1 GROUPS

TAKE A DEEP DIVE INTO YOUR LIFE IN LIGHT OF THE STUNNING STORY OF JESUS

