

Investing Your Life in Others

The Quiet Work of Walking with People as They Grow

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.”

—1 Corinthians 3:6 NIV

The People Who Invested in Me

Several years ago, while preparing to speak about developing others, I went back through the timeline of my life and began writing down the names of people who had influenced me.

The list grew quickly. Before long, I had more than thirty-five names, and I could easily have added many more. There were family members, teachers, pastors, bosses, counselors, coaches, and friends. Some walked closely with me for years. Others came alongside me for a particular season. A few shaped my thinking through something they taught or wrote, even though I never knew them personally.

Beside each name, I wrote what that person had contributed to my life. One taught me how to think. Another believed in me before I believed in myself. Some opened doors, trusted me with responsibility, or told me the truth when I needed to hear it. Others allowed me to watch the way they lived.

As I looked over those names, I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude. So much of what I had once thought of as my own development had come through the investment of other people. God’s hand was all through it.

A personal timeline can help us see relationships, experiences, disappointments, and turning points that may be difficult to recognize while we are living through them. For a fuller explanation of how to develop and use one, see my course *Discovering Your Life Purpose*.

My sisters Debbie and Patty led me to Christ when I was nineteen. They loved me, prayed for me, and helped me find my footing as a young Christian. They continue to encourage and celebrate me today.

My precious bride, Denise, has made the deepest contribution of anyone. Her devotion to God, simplicity of faith, wisdom, and honest counsel have shaped me in more ways than I could ever describe. She has prayed for me, challenged me, stood beside me, and helped me understand experiences I could not make sense of by myself. Life makes more sense when I am with her.

Three men played another kind of role. The best word I know for it is father.

The first was my biological father, Jerry Sr. From the time I was young, Dad brought me into his world. He taught me how to build and repair almost anything, but he also showed me how business worked and how to approach practical problems. His simple faith in God became part of the foundation of my own life.

My father-in-law, Bruno Alfieri, was one of the godliest men I have ever known. I watched him trust God for things that seemed impossible. Wherever he went, he shared his faith. By his early eighties, he had stopped counting the people he had personally led to Christ because the number had grown beyond seven hundred. Shortly before he died at ninety-three, barely conscious in a hospital bed, he led a nurse to Christ. Bruno showed me what a lifetime of simple faith and obedience could look like.

Then there was Paul Stanley. I met Paul, and we walked together for almost twenty years until his death in 2020. Over those years, he taught me to lead with what I came to call a developmental bias—an intentional desire to see people become more fully who God created them to be.

Paul coached me when I was still a relatively new CEO and mentored me as I sought to go deeper with Christ. We taught and traveled side by side. We shared meals, laughter, prayer, and some difficult seasons. In time, he became another father to me.

None of these people did everything. One gave me something another could not. Some taught me directly; others influenced me simply by allowing me close enough to see their lives. A few were present for only a season, while others remained for many years.

Together, they helped form the person I became.

That realization changed the way I thought about investing in others. I no longer saw it primarily as a program, a ministry strategy, or a leadership technique. I began to understand it as the faithful sharing of what God and life have entrusted to us, while also helping another person recognize what God has placed within them.

More Than Passing Along What We Know

Discipleship is sometimes reduced to teaching people what to believe or how to behave. Those things matter, but they do not seem large enough to describe what Jesus did with the people closest to Him.

Jesus taught His disciples, but He also shared life with them. They traveled, ate, faced opposition, and carried responsibility alongside Him. They watched Him pray, respond to interruption, treat people with dignity, and remain faithful under pressure. He asked questions, corrected their misunderstandings, gave them challenges, and helped them learn from what followed.

Much of what they received could never have been learned from a lesson alone.

I have come to see discipleship as walking closely enough with another person that something of what God has worked into us can become useful to them. But it is not only about passing along what we have learned. It is also about helping people discover how God has uniquely wired and designed them.

What gifts has He placed within them? What gives them life? What do they care about deeply? What experiences have shaped them? Where does God seem to be drawing their attention, and what might He be preparing them to do?

We often uncover those things through questions, observation, conversation, and the ordinary experiences of life. We give people opportunities to try something new. We trust them with responsibility. We allow them to struggle without abandoning them, then help them think about what happened. At times we offer what experience has taught us. At other times, the greater gift is helping them recognize something that was already within them.

The purpose is not to create another version of ourselves. It is to help people become more fully who God made them to be and more faithful to what He has entrusted to them.

This understanding takes some pressure off those of us who want to help. We can offer wisdom, ask good questions, and create opportunities, but we cannot manufacture another person's growth. We plant and water. God is the one who brings life from the seed.

It also reminds us to be careful. A sincere desire to influence another person can quietly become a desire to direct that person's life. Advice can become control. Concern can become intrusion. Even spiritual language can be used in ways that leave someone feeling unable to disagree or make a decision for themselves.

Healthy investment strengthens another person's relationship with God, understanding of who they are, confidence in making responsible decisions, and ability to stand without us. It does not create unnecessary dependence.

The same principle applies in the workplace. A Christian leader can care deeply about the development of employees without turning every professional relationship into a spiritual one. We can teach, coach, mentor, and model while respecting the responsibilities of our position and the freedom of the other person. When a more explicitly

spiritual relationship is welcomed, we can enter it with humility and care.

Leader2Leader: Bringing Emerging Leaders into Our World

During my years at Colorado Springs Utilities, I started a program called Leader2Leader. Its purpose was to bring experienced and emerging leaders together in relationships that went well beyond a classroom.

I asked members of our senior leadership team to walk with a small group of emerging leaders over the course of a year. We brought them into our world and allowed them to see the responsibilities we carried, the problems we were trying to solve, and some of the decisions we had to make. We listened to their concerns, answered their questions, used assessments to help them understand themselves, and placed them in practical experiences where they could learn by doing.

We shared what experience had taught us, but that was only part of the work. We were also trying to understand each person. We wanted to recognize their strengths, motivations, aspirations, and the kinds of responsibility they might eventually be prepared to carry.

Some people needed encouragement to step forward. Others needed a more honest understanding of a weakness that could hold them back. A few discovered that the kind of role they had been pursuing did not fit them as well as they once believed. Our purpose was not merely to prepare people for advancement. We wanted to help them become more fully who they really were.

This required more than a course outline. It meant conversations, assignments, feedback, questions, observation, and time. The senior leaders had to make room in their lives, not simply in their calendars. The emerging leaders had to be willing to try, reflect, receive truth, and take responsibility for what they were learning.

Leader2Leader became part of a broader leadership-development effort at Colorado Springs Utilities that received significant recognition. I appreciated that recognition, but what mattered most to me was watching people gain confidence, understand themselves more clearly, and become ready for responsibilities they could not have carried a year earlier.

The experience reinforced something I had been learning for a long time: people develop best when someone is willing to bring them close enough to see real life, give them meaningful opportunities, and remain present while they learn from what happens.

The Different Ways We Come Alongside People

Over the years, I have used several words to describe the ways we contribute to another person's development. These are not rigid categories, and one relationship may include several of them. Still, the distinctions are helpful because people do not always need the same thing from us.

Here is how I have come to understand them:

- **Modeling:** A model influences others through who they are and the way they live.
- **Teaching:** A teacher helps another person understand truth and learn how to put it into practice.
- **Coaching:** A coach helps others discover and maximize their God-given gifts and talents.
- **Spiritual coaching:** A spiritual coach helps others discover God's activity and align with His purposes.
- **Mentoring:** A mentor shares wisdom and experience, helping others discover and reach for destiny.
- **Life-on-life discipleship:** A mature follower of Christ walks closely with a few people over an extended period, allowing faith, wisdom, truth, prayer, and shared experience to shape the whole person.

These descriptions are useful, but real relationships are rarely this tidy. A mentor may need to ask a coaching question. A coach may

have an experience worth sharing. A teacher always models something, whether intentionally or not. A relationship that begins as mentoring may deepen over time into something more enduring.

The question is not, Which title should I claim? The better question is, What would most serve the person in front of me?

Modeling: The Life Behind Our Words

Paul told Timothy to be an example—a tupos—in speech, life, love, faith, and purity. The word carries the idea of a mark left by a die or stamp. Our lives leave an impression, whether or not we intend them to.

I have come to believe that I influence people more through who I am and how I live than through what I say. They notice how I respond when plans fail, how I treat someone who cannot advance my interests, and whether I keep my commitments. They watch what happens when I am disappointed, corrected, or placed under pressure. Often, they are learning something from me when I have no idea a lesson is being taught.

Early in my career, I was leading the engineering department within a larger company when a new leader decided to move in a different direction. I learned through one of my employees that my department had effectively been taken away from me and that my own future was uncertain.

The news hurt deeply. I was angry, embarrassed, and afraid. I also sensed that the way I responded could shape far more than the next few weeks of my career.

Denise prayed with me throughout the weekend. I would think I had forgiven, only to feel the anger return. She would pray again, and I would choose forgiveness again. Slowly, what I had decided in my mind began to settle into my heart.

When I returned to work, I told the leader I was willing to stay, accept another responsibility, or leave if that was what he believed was best. He asked me to leave the organization within two weeks. I told him I

was grateful for the ways God had used the experience to work character into my life.

During those final days, I tried to serve him and the organization faithfully. On my last day, a coworker told me he had never seen the love of Christ demonstrated in a workplace the way he had watched it during those two weeks.

I had not known he was watching.

A life worth following is not a flawless life. People may learn more from watching us find our footing after a failure, take responsibility for a mistake, or forgive someone who has wounded us than they learn from watching our successes. What matters is that our lives keep returning to truth, humility, and faithfulness.

Teaching: Helping Truth Become Useful

I am not a credentialed teacher, and I have never formally studied all the theories of teaching and learning. As a young engineer, I assumed that effective teaching was mostly good public speaking. If the presenter was interesting and the information was strong, I thought learning would naturally follow.

Then I began noticing how little I remembered a week after attending even an excellent seminar. I might leave inspired and impressed, yet very little of what I heard found its way into the way I lived or worked.

I had confused speaking with teaching.

That realization changed my approach. I began using stories, discussion, reflection, real assignments, and opportunities to practice. Sometimes I used movie clips that allowed people to see an idea unfolding in front of them. I also incorporated biographies of people whose lives demonstrated the principles we were trying to convey.

A well-chosen story can make an idea real. Instead of merely describing courage, humility, integrity, or steadiness, we can watch someone face a moment in which those qualities are tested. The conversation then moves beyond, Do you understand the principle? to

What do you see happening here, and how might you respond in a similar situation?

I also tried to connect each idea with something people were already facing. The aim was no longer to cover as much material as possible. It was to offer something they could understand, remember, and use.

Teaching does not always require a classroom or prepared lesson. It may happen beside someone as a problem is being solved. It may begin with a mistake, a question, or a situation neither person expected. Some of the best teaching simply gives language to something the other person has been experiencing but has not yet known how to describe.

Coaching: Making Room for Discovery

A coach helps people discover and maximize their God-given gifts and talents. That usually requires more listening than telling.

Most of us are quicker to give advice than we realize. We hear part of a problem, recognize something familiar, and begin offering a solution. Our advice may even be good, but it can keep the other person from discovering what they already know or taking responsibility for the decision that belongs to them.

A thoughtful question slows the conversation down. It gives someone room to hear their own words, examine assumptions, and recognize possibilities that may have been present all along.

In one Leader2Leader conversation, I coached a woman whose strengths and passions did not fit well with her current role. As we reviewed several assessments and talked about what gave her energy, she began to recognize the disconnect for herself.

I did not need to tell her which job to pursue. We considered possibilities, explored what mattered most to her, and identified a direction she could begin moving toward. She later told me that the conversation had changed the way she saw her future.

The insight belonged to her. My role was to help create the space in which she could recognize it.

Coaching can also involve challenges and opportunities. We may invite someone to lead a meeting, take responsibility for a project, have a difficult conversation, or try something they have never attempted before. The experience gives them new information about themselves. Our role is to help them think about what happened and what it may reveal about their abilities, desires, fears, and areas that still need development.

Coaching does not mean questions are always the right response. There are times when someone needs clear direction, candid feedback, or the benefit of another person's experience. Wisdom lies in knowing when to ask and when to speak.

For a more complete discussion of questions as a means of discovery, see the companion paper *Coaching with the Questions of Jesus*.

Spiritual Coaching: Paying Attention to God's Activity

Spiritual coaching shares many of the practices of coaching, but its attention is turned more directly toward God. A spiritual coach helps another person discover God's activity and align with His purposes.

That does not mean telling someone what God is saying to them. It certainly does not mean placing our preferences beneath spiritual language. A spiritual coach listens carefully and helps the other person notice what may already be stirring within them.

Where have you sensed God's presence recently? What seems to be receiving His attention? Is there an invitation you have been resisting? What is producing life, peace, conviction, or holy discomfort? What response might faith require?

Questions such as these can help someone move beyond asking, What do I want to do? and begin asking, What might God be doing, and how can I respond?

There have been times when someone came to me wanting an answer and discovered, through conversation and prayer, that the deeper need was clarity. Once that clarity came, the next step was often already within reach.

A spiritual coach does not stand between another person and God. The coach walks beside them as they learn to recognize His activity and respond for themselves.

Mentoring: Sharing a Road We Have Traveled

Mentoring begins from a different place. A mentor has usually traveled some portion of the road the other person is beginning to walk. The mentor can share perspective gained through experience—what worked, what failed, what proved costly, and what became clear only with time.

That wisdom should be offered with humility. What was right for me may not be right for someone else. Circumstances change, people differ, and God does not write the same story twice. A mentor offers experience as a gift, not as a command.

Mentoring is also more than telling our stories or passing along our conclusions. A good mentor remains curious about the other person. What is distinctive about the way they think? What abilities are beginning to emerge? What do they care about enough to give themselves to? Where might their path need to be different from ours?

I once began meeting with a twenty-seven-year-old emerging leader who was hungry for God and eager to mature. What started as a coaching conversation gradually became mentoring. He identified two areas he wanted to address: financial stewardship and his understanding of manhood.

We met regularly for several months. He developed a budget, began tithing, and worked through a book on manhood. Before long, he was sharing what he was learning with a small group of his own.

As our relationship deepened, pain involving his father began to surface. We talked about the difference between honoring a person and pretending that person has no faults. I invited him to consider what he could sincerely appreciate in his father while also acknowledging the wounds that still needed attention. Over time, he

worked through forgiveness and prepared for an honest conversation with his dad.

The relationship went somewhere neither of us could have predicted at the beginning. What started with practical goals eventually touched something much deeper.

Mentoring often unfolds that way. A person may begin by asking for help with work, finances, marriage, or leadership. As trust develops, the questions beneath those questions begin to emerge. The mentor's responsibility is to remain attentive without assuming the right to enter places the other person has not opened.

No mentor is equipped to guide someone through every part of life. I have often pointed people toward a pastor, counselor, book, or another mentor because they could offer something I could not. Admitting our limitations does not weaken the relationship. It makes it safer.

Life-on-Life Discipleship: Walking Together Across Seasons

Most coaching and mentoring relationships begin with a particular purpose and continue for an agreed-upon period. Sometimes, however, a relationship becomes deeper and more enduring. The original purpose may be fulfilled, but the relationship continues because trust, affection, and a shared life have grown around it.

This is what I mean by life-on-life discipleship.

Some Christians use the terms spiritual fathering or spiritual mothering. Paul himself used the language of both a father and a mother to describe his care for others. The biblical idea is meaningful, but the terminology can be misunderstood, especially when someone claims the position for themselves or uses it to establish authority over another person.

For that reason, I prefer language that describes the relationship rather than assigns a title. Life-on-life discipleship means walking closely with a few people over a longer period. It includes prayer, encouragement, correction, shared experience, and the freedom to know one another beyond a particular goal or assignment.

My relationship with Paul Stanley eventually became this kind of relationship. He coached and mentored me, but over nearly twenty years the relationship grew beyond either description. We knew one another's families, walked through losses and transitions, and shared parts of life that were not connected to a program or developmental goal. That is why, in time, he became another father to me.

Before our daughter Elise was married, she often invited young adults into our home for fellowship, games, and worship. On one occasion, I spoke with them about the love of the Father and the belonging He gives His children. Denise and I then prayed with them individually.

I was deeply moved by how many seemed to need the simple assurance that they were seen, welcomed, and loved. Some wept as those truths were spoken over them.

That evening did not make Denise and me spiritual parents to everyone in the room. It did remind me how deeply people long for the kind of presence that sees them, believes in them, and gives them a safe place to belong.

We cannot share that depth of life with many people. Nor should we try. But there may be a few whom God invites us to love and walk beside across many seasons. The relationship is not built around dependence or title. It grows through trust and the willingness to remain.

The Kind of Growth I Hope to Encourage

When I coach, mentor, teach, or walk closely with someone, I am not simply trying to help that person perform better or advance into a larger role. Those may be worthwhile outcomes, but they are not large enough to describe what I hope will happen.

I want people to become more secure in God's love and more honest about what is true. I want them to understand how they have been designed, recognize the purpose within their lives, and become attentive to God's presence. I hope they learn to receive grace when they fail, draw wisdom from their experience, and build relationships that can sustain them.

I have described that desire this way:

I help leaders to be rooted in love, grounded in truth, driven by purpose, focused by presence, empowered by grace, crafted by experience, and intentional in relationships.

This is not a formula. It is a picture of the kind of person I hope to help develop.

In practical terms, I want people to understand who they are and what has been placed within them. I want them to make decisions that agree with their deepest convictions, learn from what life brings, and become more capable of loving and serving others. I want them to recognize God's invitations and have the courage to respond.

Although I often use the word leaders, I do not mean only people with titles or organizational authority. Parents lead. Friends influence one another. Teachers, neighbors, pastors, volunteers, brothers, sisters, and grandparents all help shape the lives around them. Anyone who offers clarity, courage, wisdom, or hope is exercising a form of leadership.

When Life Becomes the Classroom

The best opportunities to help someone develop often arrive without an appointment.

As a father to Elise and Jonathan, I tried to pay attention to the lessons life placed in front of us. A success could open a conversation about gratitude. A mistake could teach responsibility without allowing failure to define them. A disappointment could reveal what they valued or where they were placing their hope.

The same thing happens in friendship, ministry, and work. A difficult meeting, an unexpected conflict, or a decision that turns out poorly may teach more than a carefully prepared lesson if someone helps us look at it honestly.

I have often called this evaluated experience. Experience alone does not necessarily make us wise. We can repeat the same pattern for

years and simply become more practiced at it. Wisdom grows when we slow down long enough to consider what happened, what was taking place within us, what we missed, and what we might do differently next time.

Evaluated experience can also reveal how a person is wired. What part of the experience gave them energy? What came naturally? Where did they struggle? What did others recognize in them? What desire, ability, or concern began to surface?

The purpose is not simply to analyze what happened. It is to harvest the nuggets of wisdom hidden within an experience so they are not lost. Something we lived through years ago may still contain insight we have never taken the time to gather.

For a fuller treatment of this practice, see the companion white paper *Recognizing God's Fingerprints in Your Story*. My course *Discovering Your Life Purpose* explores the broader use of timelines and other tools for recognizing the way God has designed and led us.

Leader2Leader gave us many opportunities to practice evaluated experience. Emerging leaders worked on real assignments and observed experienced people wrestling with problems that could never be reproduced in a classroom. They were trusted with responsibility and then invited to reflect on what happened.

Those assignments helped us see more than whether someone could complete a task. They sometimes revealed an ability the person had not recognized, a type of work that brought unusual energy, or an area in which further development was needed. We were not simply passing along lessons. We were learning who these people were and helping them see it too.

Mistakes became an important part of the classroom. When people believe every failure will be used against them, they learn to hide. When they discover that truth can be faced without losing their dignity, they are more likely to take responsibility and learn.

That does not mean ignoring negligence or removing consequences. Grace and accountability belong together. It means that even difficult

truth can be offered with the hope that something better will grow from it.

Investing with Wisdom and Care

A generous heart may want to help everyone, but a lifetime teaches us that we cannot walk deeply with every person. Time, energy, and attention are limited. Some relationships will last for years; others are meant for a single season or conversation.

Jesus cared for crowds, traveled with a larger company of followers, chose twelve, and invited three into a few particularly important moments. His love was not limited, but His time was focused.

I try to treat every person with dignity while being prayerful about deeper investment. I look for someone who is teachable, willing to act on what they learn, and open to honest conversation. I also pay attention to whether they have a desire to share with others. That is not a test of their value. It is simply an acknowledgment that a fruitful coaching or mentoring relationship requires something from both people.

Questions can help bring clarity. Before I agree to coach or mentor someone, I like to ask questions such as these:

- What would you most like to understand or develop during this season of your life?
- Where do you sense God may already be at work, even if you cannot yet explain it?
- What gifts, strengths, desires, or recurring themes do you believe He may have placed within you?
- What kind of help are you hoping I can offer?
- Are you willing to prepare, speak honestly, try new things, and act on what you discover?
- How often should we meet, when should we review the relationship, and how might what you learn eventually become useful to someone else?

Their answers help both of us determine what kind of relationship would be useful. They may also reveal that I am not the right person or that what they need is different from what I can provide.

I have questions to ask myself as well. Do I have the experience and capacity to serve this person well? Can I enter the relationship without needing to control the outcome? Am I willing to listen long enough to understand how God has designed them rather than assuming their path should resemble mine?

These conversations do not need to make the relationship feel formal or mechanical. They simply bring unspoken expectations into the open.

Consent is especially important when one person already holds authority over the other. An employee may not feel free to decline an invitation from a senior leader. A younger Christian may believe spiritual maturity requires accepting every suggestion made by an older person. The greater our authority or influence, the more carefully we should protect another person's freedom.

Boundaries matter as well. A coach is not a counselor. A mentor is not qualified to address every emotional, relational, financial, or spiritual concern. A long-term discipleship relationship should never become possessive. Wisdom includes knowing when to continue, when to step back, and when to involve someone better equipped for what has emerged.

We should also be honest about our own motives. Sometimes our desire to be needed can hide inside our desire to help. We may enjoy being the person with the answers or feel disappointed when someone no longer turns to us as often. Those feelings are worth noticing.

The healthiest investment eventually requires less of us, not more. People become stronger, wiser, more aware of how God has made them, and better able to recognize His leading for themselves.

The Aim Is Maturity, Not Dependence

Paul told Timothy to entrust what he had received to reliable people who would be able to teach others. In that brief sentence, the investment passes from Paul to Timothy, from Timothy to others, and from them to still more people.

That is the quiet multiplication at the heart of discipleship.

We are not trying to gather people who will always need us. We are helping them understand who they are, recognize God's purposes, exercise judgment, carry responsibility, and offer something of themselves to others. Over time, the relationship may change. Someone we once taught may become a trusted friend. A person we mentored may surpass us in an area and eventually become someone from whom we learn.

One of the foremen who participated in Leader2Leader gave me a simple picture of this. After learning about individual strengths, he returned to the group responsible for unloading coal trains and managing the coal pile. He invited the members of his team to consider their own strengths and the work each of them did especially well.

They rearranged several responsibilities around what they discovered. The operation became more efficient, but something else happened. People became more engaged because someone had taken the time to notice what they could contribute.

The foreman did not wait until he considered himself a teacher or expert. He took what had been useful to him, adapted it to the people he led, and helped them see something valuable in themselves.

This kind of multiplication often begins quietly. Someone who has been encouraged becomes an encourager. Someone who has been mentored begins walking with another person. Someone who has been helped to recognize a gift begins making room for the gifts of others.

The investment continues, often in ways the original giver will never see.

What Has Been Entrusted to Us

When I look again at the names on my timeline, I am reminded that much of what I now carry began as someone else's gift.

My father brought me into his world. Bruno showed me the beauty of simple faith. Denise helped me hear God and understand my own heart. Paul shared wisdom, questions, friendship, and years of experience. Countless others taught me, corrected me, encouraged me, and believed in me.

I could never repay them by returning everything they gave me. The best way I know to honor their investment is to offer what I have received to someone else.

There are people around each of us who may need something God has worked into our lives. They may not need everything we know, and we will not be the right person for every need. But a lesson gained through faithfulness, failure, suffering, family, work, or years of walking with God may become an answer to another person's prayer.

They may also need someone who sees what they cannot yet see in themselves. A gift may still be hidden beneath insecurity. A desire may not yet have found its proper expression. An experience that once seemed disconnected may turn out to be part of a much larger story.

We do not have to force the relationship or pretend to possess wisdom we do not have. We can begin by paying attention. Who is already near us? Who is asking questions? Who has shown a desire to mature? What do we see in them that may need encouragement, opportunity, or time to develop?

Then we can take a simple step. Invite someone to coffee. Ask what is happening in their life. Share a lesson that cost us something to learn. Ask a question that helps them think. Bring them with us. Trust them

with responsibility. Stay close enough to help them make sense of what follows.

We plant. We water. God gives the growth. In time, the person beside us may do the same for someone else.

Companion Papers

This paper presents the larger calling to invest our lives in others and the different forms that investment may take. Three companion papers explore particular parts of that work without repeating the broader material developed here.

- **Coaching with the Questions of Jesus: An Invitation into Clarity, Discernment, and Wholehearted Response** explores the use of thoughtful questions in coaching and spiritual coaching. It considers how questions can help people understand what is happening within them, recognize God's activity, and respond with greater clarity.
- **Helping People Grow: Learning to Give and Receive Truth with Grace** addresses encouragement, correction, and difficult conversations. It considers how truth can be offered and received in a way that preserves dignity and supports genuine change.
- **Recognizing God's Fingerprints in Your Story** explores how to revisit meaningful experiences and harvest the nuggets of wisdom they contain. It helps readers recognize what an experience taught them about God, themselves, other people, and the way they may be called to live going forward.

Each paper can stand on its own, but together they offer a fuller understanding of how people discover who they are, learn from experience, and continue growing.

Reflection Questions

- Who are the people who most influenced the person you have become? What did each one contribute?
- What has God and life taught you that may now be useful to someone else?

- What gifts or possibilities do you see in someone that they may not yet recognize in themselves?
- Which way of helping others comes most naturally to you: modeling, teaching, coaching, spiritual coaching, mentoring, or life-on-life discipleship?
- Are you sometimes too quick to give an answer when a thoughtful question might serve the other person better?
- Is there someone already near you whom you may be invited to walk with more intentionally?
- What would healthy expectations and boundaries look like in that relationship?
- Are you helping people become more mature and responsible, or are you unintentionally encouraging them to remain dependent upon you?
- Who might eventually benefit from what this person is now learning?

Putting It into Practice

- Revisit the timeline of your life. Write down the names of those who influenced you and what each one contributed.
- Thank someone whose investment continues to bear fruit in your life.
- Consider what experience has taught you that could be useful to another person. Be honest about what you know and equally honest about what you do not.
- Identify someone you may be able to serve. Pray before deciding what kind of involvement would be most helpful.
- Begin with curiosity rather than a plan. Ask what the person hopes to understand, develop, or pursue. Listen for what gives them life and where God may already be at work.
- Give them an opportunity to try something, then help them think about what the experience revealed.
- Agree on a practical next step and a time to reconnect. Allow the relationship to deepen naturally rather than deciding in advance what it must become.

- Keep maturity and multiplication in view. Look for the day when what the person has received can be offered freely to someone else.

Prayer

Lord,

Thank You for the people You have used to shape our lives. Thank You for those who taught us, encouraged us, corrected us, prayed for us, and allowed us to see what faithfulness looked like in the ordinary moments of life.

Help us recognize what You have entrusted to us and hold it with open hands. Show us the people You may be inviting us to walk beside, and give us wisdom to understand what they truly need.

Teach us when to speak and when to listen. Help us ask questions that bring clarity, offer truth without diminishing another person, and live in a way that leaves a worthy impression. Give us eyes to recognize the gifts, desires, and possibilities You have placed within others.

Keep us humble enough to recognize our limitations and secure enough to release people rather than make them dependent upon us. May those we serve become more fully who You created them to be. In time, may they offer to others the same generosity someone once offered to us.

We will plant and water. We trust You to bring the growth.

Amen.

One-Page Reference: Six Ways We Invest in People

Approach	What it offers	A helpful question
Modeling	The influence of a life that demonstrates what our words describe.	What is the way I live teaching the people around me?

Approach	What it offers	A helpful question
Teaching	Truth, knowledge, or skill presented in a way another person can understand and use.	What does this person need to understand or learn to practice?
Coaching	Questions, opportunities, and reflection that help people recognize and develop their God-given gifts.	What question or experience might help this person see something for themselves?
Spiritual coaching	A prayerful conversation that helps someone notice God's activity and align with His purposes.	Where might God already be at work, and what response could He be inviting?
Mentoring	Wisdom and perspective shared by someone who has traveled part of the road before.	What has experience taught me that may be useful to this person?
Life-on-life discipleship	A long-term relationship in which faith, wisdom, prayer, truth, and shared experience shape the whole person across seasons.	Am I willing and able to remain close as this person continues to mature?

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