



In *Walk with Me*, you'll return to the essential biblical practices that help people grow as Christ-followers in simple, slow, and deep ways. Learn how you can connect with your neighbors, coworkers, or anyone you want to reach with the gospel in ways that are relational and Spirit-led.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# PRINCIPLE 1— WE WALK HEART-TO-HEART

*The Puritans spoke about a  
“comfortable walking with God.”*

JAMES HOUSTON

**T**he Mowry family is a dog family. We’ve always had dogs in our home. Our current one is a rescue dog, a Treeing Walker Coonhound named Ginger.

Ginger was abused by her previous owner, so it’s taken a couple of years for her to bond with us. She is especially fearful of men, retreating from any personal sign of affection from me. We’ve had to teach her the pleasure of being petted. Appreciating the gentleness of my touch was a learned reaction because a hand gesture once meant an act of violence.

Now one statement makes her literally jump for joy. “Ginger, let’s go for a walk!”

Coonhounds love walks. Walks are adventures for them.

## WALK WITH ME

Ginger puts her nose to the ground and savors the novel scents, smells that are different from those in our backyard. Walking is a sensuous experience of new scents and sights.

Walking Ginger has been part of the bonding process between the two of us. She knows that the invitation to walk will be a pleasurable one. I've become someone to be enjoyed, someone to be trusted, someone who loves her. Walking is great exercise for both of us.

Walking is something more than what we do with a dog. Walking is a universal metaphor for relationship building, whether with other people or with our heavenly Father. Eugene Peterson writes:

Instead of walking straight to a destination by the shortest route, it suggests a casual walking around . . . conversing with a friend . . . This is the form the verb takes in Genesis that shows God out for an evening stroll in Eden, anticipating a conversation with Adam and Eve . . . He wasn't headed for a destination. He was entering into a place and time for relaxed conversation.<sup>1</sup>

When we invite people to walk with us, we're inviting them into our walks with God, the heart of who we are. We walk with God heart-to-heart and we walk with people heart-to-heart.

## THE "HEART" OF HEART-TO-HEART

Dan's intensity caught me off guard. I was expecting a casual conversation about his work and church ministry. Dan wanted

something more. “Jeannie and I are really struggling with our son,” he confided. “We deeply love him but the attention and care that his special needs require is driving a wedge between my wife and me. I return home from work to an exhausted wife, an overactive kid, and no time to myself. We’re trying to trust God, but our son’s needs are overwhelming us.”

In the space of about twenty minutes, Dan opened his heart to me about his frustrations, anger, and lack of communication with Jeannie. His transparent pain set aside any notions about my trying to sugarcoat his pain to make me look wise. He was hurting, and he needed a friend to talk to.

I felt honored to be invited into Dan’s heart of hearts. When people open up their hearts, real ministry happens. It’s at that moment that we need to connect Jesus to the issues of a person’s heart. Heart-to-heart speaks to the depth of who we are. It reflects our passions and connects emotionally with others.

Heart-to-heart ministry should not be unusual. After all, it’s been documented that the word “heart” is found over seven hundred times in the Bible. Engaging our hearts is so important that we’re commanded first to love God “with all your heart” (Matt. 22:37 NIV) and to seek Him with all our heart (Jer. 29:13). Jesus taught that the evil that comes from people comes from the heart (Mark 7:21). That is why the Lord gives us a “new heart” to love Him (Ezek. 36:26).

**OUR HEART  
IS THE CORE  
DEPOSITORY OF  
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OUR INNER  
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OUR HIDDEN  
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THAT LIFE  
TAKES PLACE.**

## WALK WITH ME

Our heart is the core depository of our passions, our inner secrets, and our hidden desires. It is in our hearts that life takes place. We can disguise it with our surface actions or expressions but they simply hide the true reality of what's in our hearts.

We truly “see” one another when we peer into one another's hearts. Our hearts reveal what we love, and when we find what people love, we see the person for who he or she really is. As author Steve Garber puts it,

It is why Augustine's long-ago question still rings true: you cannot really know someone by asking “What do you believe?” It is only when you ask, “What do you love?” that we begin to know another.<sup>2</sup>

An examination of our hearts tells us what we hold most dear and what motivates us for either good or evil. When we speak of heart-to-heart ministry, we engage with people at the most personal, passionate, and revealing parts of our being. Simply put, living heart-to-heart is what friends do. When we invite people to walk with us, we invite them into our hearts.

Dan felt safe in our relationship, so he invited me to peer underneath the covers of his life to see his heart. When we minister heart-to-heart with people, we engage them at a deep level of trust and openness. To build those kinds of relationships means engaging with another in heart-to-heart ways.

## **HEART-TO-HEART STARTS WITH GOD**

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart  
and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the  
great and first commandment.”*

*—Matthew 22:37–38*

Remember the eleven men on the hillside in Matthew 28? Remember how they obediently waited at Jesus’ pre-appointed location?

When the Lord showed up and the disciples saw Him, “they worshiped him” (Matt. 28:17 NIV). We don’t know what this worship looked like, but we know it was probably spontaneous and heartfelt. No one had instructed them to do this, and the Master did not require it.

What can we learn from this example? Before Jesus issued the command of “Go and make disciples,” the men showed their love for Him through worship. Here’s a basic principle: the Great Commandment of loving God always precedes the Great Commission of making disciples. If we don’t get this priority right, we will fail to minister in heart-to-heart ways. Loving God is the bottom-line requirement for passing on the faith to others. Love is the “royal law” of the kingdom (James 2:8).

Author and pastor John Piper gives a wonderful description of what it means to love God with all our hearts:

I define loving God mainly as treasuring God. That is, it is an experience of cherishing, delighting, admiring, and valuing. . . . Love for God is an affair of the affections . . . an affection of the heart.<sup>3</sup>

## WALK WITH ME

Jesus so values this love that He rebukes the Ephesian church because, as He told them, “you have left your first love” (Rev. 2:4 NASB). No one wants this accusation leveled against them by the Lord. How can this happen to a life? Let me describe how it happened to me.

Consider this: how many sermons do you remember? I’ve heard a lot of messages in my lifetime but one stands out.

I was halfheartedly listening to Lucas, a guest speaker at church, when he made a statement that caught my attention. “It’s easy for us to perfect the *means* in the Christian life but miss the *end*,” he said. The Holy Spirit nudged me to pay attention.

Lucas described how we can live the Christian life by erroneously focusing on perfecting the “means” to knowing God. What did this look like to me? I had developed my discipleship checklist. I was working on my prayer life, trying to read the Bible more, and looking for ways to share my faith. I was focusing on quantity (how long did I pray?) and technique (did I share my faith the “right” way?), and not on my relationship with God. Praying and witnessing are good to do and they’re biblical, but I realized that I was missing the “end”—loving God. I was perfecting the Christian disciplines but not loving God! I began to seriously think about what it meant to love Jesus and not perfect the disciplines of the spiritual life.

This Holy Spirit moment shifted my heart from doing to loving.



## HEART-TO-HEART IS A GODLY PLEASURE

Lucas's message showed me that I'm a recovering perfectionist. I've been working to change this condition ever since. Like anyone in recovery, I needed a new "why," a new motivation to replace my former one of mastering the Christian life. The Lord opened my heart to Psalm 27:4, using this passage to chart a path to recover my first love.

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek  
after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the  
days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD  
and to inquire in his temple.

I want the psalmist's passion to be my passion—seeking God should be my number-one priority. Now, notice what the author wants to find in this search. He wants to "gaze upon the beauty of the LORD."

Things of beauty always draw us back to look or taste again and again. We have favorite songs, restaurants, or scenic spots that draw us back like iron filings to a magnet. That's what it means to me to treasure our Lord. I'm drawn back again and again to taste His goodness and beauty. This lifestyle is more soul-filling than one of mastering the spiritual disciplines.

**OVER A CENTURY  
AGO, THE WORDS  
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DESCRIBE OUR  
BREAKTHROUGH  
INTO A PERSONAL  
RELATIONSHIP  
WITH JESUS WERE:  
"I WAS SEIZED  
BY THE POWER  
OF A GREAT  
AFFECTION." ISN'T  
THAT A THRILLING  
STATEMENT!**

The Puritan authors referred to the beauty of the Lord as *sua-vitas*, Latin for “sweetness.” To appreciate beauty is not simply an abstract idea but a genuine feeling of pleasure, a sweetness of the heart.<sup>4</sup> Our hearts become emotionally engaged in the object of beauty. As Christ followers, knowing God is the sweetest thing we can experience.

What makes our Lord so attractive, so pleasurable? We use a variety of words for becoming a Christian today. We talk about “being born again,” “receiving Christ,” or “accepting Christ.” Over a century ago, “the words used to describe the breakthrough into a personal relationship with Jesus were: ‘I was seized by the power of a great affection.’”<sup>5</sup> Isn’t that a thrilling statement? Because we’ve been seized by a great affection—God’s love—we respond from our hearts to Him.

Disciplemaking is fundamentally about helping people love God and live for Him. What changes lives is not my ministry competencies, my assured answers, or my moral conduct. It’s my life in Christ, a life “seized by a great affection,” a life passed on from one person to another. Like the apostle John, we want to take the life we have in Christ and invite people into fellowship “with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). This is true heart-to-heart ministry. This is what it means when we invite people to walk with us as we walk with Jesus.

Our love for God is the well from which all life and ministry flows. Jesus promised to be the one who fills this well, satisfying the thirst of our hearts so that “out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” through us (John 7:38).

I fill this well by treasuring my Lord, cherishing Him for who He is, and experiencing His sweetness. This cherishing needs

constant renewing and refreshing. James K. A. Smith quotes writer Geoff Dyer who said, “your deepest desire is the one manifested by your daily life of habits.”<sup>6</sup> This daily life of small habits can be the key to loving God.

## **HEART-TO-HEART NEEDS SOME LOVE HABITS**

Each of us has a routine when we get up in the morning. Some of us head for our cup of coffee, others pick up the paper to check the headlines, and some (like me!) take the dog outside. Routines hold our lives together.

Author Jean Fleming writes that our lives are “held together by a web of habits that have become nearly automatic.”<sup>7</sup> Consciously or unconsciously, we fill our lives with habits and routines, so most of them are now automatic. These small habits are necessary because, as Jan Johnson puts it, “disciplines provide personal space in which relationship is worked out.”<sup>8</sup>

Peggy and I have celebrated forty-five years of marriage. Because I work out of our home, we see each other frequently during the day. We seem to always be present with each other. However, this alone doesn’t guarantee a good marriage. We can pass each other repeatedly during the day and never have a conversation. Being present in the same place and time does not equate to loving another.

To maintain our love, we’ve settled on some daily and weekly disciplines. Daily, we take time to talk. Weekly, we go out for a date night. These simple disciplines keep our love focused and refreshed. It’s the same way in our walk with God. We need to

make regular investments into our love relationship with Him. I like to call these investments, these disciplines, our “love habits.”

I have several love habits for investing in my love for Jesus. One in particular has sustained my life for five decades. Here’s how it got started.

When I became a Christian in my sophomore year in college, Ed introduced me to the practice of a “quiet time,” a designated time during the day to read the Bible and pray. It was easy to maintain this habit when I was around friends in our campus ministry who practiced a quiet time and kept me accountable. This changed when I returned home for summer break and my network of Christian friends evaporated.

Left on my own, my time with God soon became one of fond memories. Work, time with former friends, and the lack of accountability had put my time with God on the shelf . . . until I picked up a certain book.

Tucked under a stack of papers and vinyl records in my bedroom was a small, inexpensive book titled *The School of Obedience* by a nineteenth-century author, Andrew Murray. At the end of the book was this challenge: Can you spend the first thirty minutes of every day alone with God? Are you willing to make this sacrifice? I still have this time-weathered book, which has been reprinted and reissued countless times. The original cover price of mine was fifty cents, and my pencil underlining is still present. Here’s a passage that leapt out at me:

Christ asked great sacrifices of His disciples; He has perhaps asked little of you as yet. But now He allows, He invites, He longs for you to make some.

Sacrifices make strong men [and women]. Sacrifices help wonderfully to wrench us away from earth and self-pleasing, and lift us heavenward.<sup>9</sup>

God grabbed my heart. I decided in the summer of 1970 that I would get up each morning and have my time with God. I could schedule time during the day or before I went to bed, but I wanted to make the sacrifice to seek Him in the morning, to give Him the first portion of my day.

Have I been 100 percent perfect in maintaining this daily habit? No, but I bet I'm around 75–80 percent over five decades. I can't imagine what life would be like if I didn't maintain this simple love habit.

Have I lost motivation at times? Yes. Is every morning a life-changing experience? No. Can I make this a “means,” a simple checkoff in my spiritual life? Of course. I have to work at keeping this time fresh in both vision and practice.

In heart-to-heart ministry, we recruit people to live the Great Commandment. Without a love for God we have a dry, mechanical faith that doesn't impart life to others. Let me ask you the same questions I ask others: What are you doing to invest in your first love? What love habits are you practicing to feed your soul and to treasure God? When we invite people to walk with us, we invite them into a heart-to-heart relationship that starts with loving God.<sup>10</sup>

**WHAT ARE  
YOU DOING TO  
INVEST IN YOUR  
FIRST LOVE?**

## WALK WITH ME

### HEART-TO-HEART MEANS LOVING MY NEIGHBORS

*“And a second is like it: You shall love  
your neighbor as yourself.”*

*—Matthew 22:39*

Stan is one of the most spiritually influential people I know. He’s not a popular speaker, seminar leader, or bestselling author. Stan is a small-business owner in southern Ohio. He simply loves his neighbors, living in heart-to-heart ways.

For Stan, loving his neighbors starts with his family. I’ve never met anyone who is so committed to ministering to his extended family as Stan is. He tells me story after story of spiritual conversations and practical service to his siblings, children, nieces, nephews, and grandchildren.

Loving his neighbors extends to his church family where he disciplines men and mentors leaders. His neighbors include people at work, where he loves and cares for each employee, sharing his faith in Jesus in appropriate ways, discipling people in the workplace. He regularly invites people to walk with him as he walks with Jesus.

Stan takes the Great Commandment of loving his neighbors seriously. This love is often one person at a time, one “neighbor” after another. Now, a neighbor is not necessarily someone who physically lives next door. A neighbor is anyone that I’m “next to” in a sustained relationship. They may occupy a physical space, such as a nearby house or workplace. They may also occupy a “space” in my relational network, like a sibling, spouse, or friend from church.

You would think that loving people in heart-to-heart relationships would be a given in discipling others. Stan should not be the exception. Unfortunately, our tendency to package programs and craft formulas for growth has diminished the relational side of the Great Commission. Here's an example.

After a friend met with a spiritual leader in his church, his wife asked, "So, did he ask you about your family? your marriage? your walk with God?"

"No," was my friend's sheepish reply. "At first, he asked how I was doing but we quickly moved to a discussion about church ministry. He gave some advice on my small group and encouraged me to think bigger when it came to the size of the group."

This was not heart-to-heart; it was activity-to-activity, program-to-program. When we relate this way, we're saying something about the value of people. What they do and participate in becomes more important than who they are and what God is doing in their lives. It's easy to invite people to attend a meeting; it's harder to ask them to walk with me as I walk with Jesus.

## **HEART-TO-HEART TREASURES PEOPLE**

The apostle Paul treasured people, loving and cherishing them as friends. He knew when to love and when to pull rank as an apostle. Most of the time he loved. Heart-to-heart words easily flow from his mouth to his new converts in Thessalonica:

He is "a nursing mother taking care of her own children"  
(1 Thess. 2:7).

## WALK WITH ME

He is like a “father with his children,” exhorting,  
encouraging, and charging each one (1 Thess. 2:11–12).

He calls them his “dear brothers and sisters”  
(1 Thess. 1:4; 2:1; 2:9 NLT).

They are his “joy” and “crown of boasting”  
(1 Thess. 2:19).

One commentary describes how the word “crown” means the victor’s crown for an athletic contest. “The only prize in life that [Paul] really valued was to see his converts living good lives. . . . Our greatest glory lies in those whom we have set or helped on the path to Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

Paul modeled how love, expressed in heart-to-heart relationships, is the vehicle in which discipleship travels. Real people with real stories were the recipients of his endearing comments. He loved and treasured people. What does that look like today?

Kim is a pharmacist, but her life mission is passing on her faith in Christ to other women. “I made a simple decision when I was in college,” she told me. “I wanted to always be discipling a woman, passing on my faith to another.” Coworkers have come to faith, friends in her neighborhood have embraced the Savior, and she’s even discipling a woman in eastern Europe via Skype. Kim treasures people.

Kim and her husband, Rob, have a new group of neighbors to treasure: international students at a nearby college. Here’s how she describes her heart-to-heart discipling ministry: “A great way to meet international students is to have lunch with them in the school cafeteria. On off days from work, I sometimes



visit the cafeteria to meet with students. One of the things we've discovered is that international students love hanging out with Americans. So, Rob and I take them apple-picking with us, or we invite them over for Thanksgiving dinner, or Rob recruits them to help him with yard work." Because they treasure people, they invite people into their lives.

Heart-to-heart ministry loves our neighbors, inviting them into our lives, walking with us as we walk with Jesus. They can be people who are exploring Christ or people in whom Christ lives. Kim and Rob are not doing this because of a church's program. They voluntarily spend their time with people because that's what Jesus' disciples do. When we love God, we will love our neighbors in heart-to-heart ways, inviting them to walk with us as we walk with Jesus.

## **HEART-TO-HEART IS INTENTIONAL**

Loving people in heart-to-heart ways is a nice ideal, but how do we get started? We can start by practicing a little **TLC**—transparency, listening, and caring.

### ***Transparency***

Remember my friendship with Ed? One of my most vivid memories was a conversation with him that happened before I came to faith. I was studying in my dorm room one afternoon and Ed knocked on the door to come in and talk.

"I have to talk with someone," he said.

"What's up?" I replied.

“I just lied to a good friend and my conscience feels terrible,” he admitted. “I have to talk with someone about this.”

I’m thinking, *What’s the big deal? I’m not ashamed of a little lie at times to get out of doing something.* This was my unregenerate self talking. While I dismissed the urgency that Ed felt, the conversation did get me thinking. I wasn’t this honest with people about my faults. While I wasn’t a practitioner of honesty, I was an admirer of Ed’s transparency.

Author Philip Yancy writes, “Relationships deepen as I trust my friends with secrets.”<sup>12</sup> A mark of a rich friendship is the ability to share our secrets, our lives together. Consider the example of Jesus.

In Luke 22:28 (NIV), Jesus takes His disciples away from the crowds and says, “You are those who have stood by me in my trials.” Picture the scene. Jesus has experienced the triumphal entry to Jerusalem, He has kept the Passover meal with the Twelve, and a disciple has left to betray Him. It is in this context that He expresses His appreciation for the disciples standing by Him.

Did you notice that His comment to the Twelve is in the past tense (“who have stood”)? It appears that He wasn’t talking about the cross because the cross hasn’t happened yet. What was He referring to? We know that He “in every respect has been tempted as we are” (Heb. 4:15). From the desert to the garden, from the road to the upper room, He constantly faced an overwhelming temptation to sin. A personal compromise would torpedo His mission. This drove Him to prayer (Heb. 5:7) and to confide in His closest companions.

What can we conclude from this? Observe what the Lord affirms with the Twelve: “You have stood by me.” Standing by someone means more than standing next to them physically. We

“stand by” people to support, encourage, and love them when they face trials. How will people know when to stand by us? They know because we tell them about the trial and we ask for their help. How could the Twelve know to stand with Jesus unless He was transparent enough to let them know what He was suffering?

Transparency takes place within relationships of trust and commitment. We could describe transparency as “a willingness to expose my personal struggles, fears, and life issues inside the safety of a [loving] friendship.”<sup>13</sup> Transparency invites people to walk with me, as I walk with Jesus, in heart-to-heart and committed ways.

Here are some simple steps to initiate transparency:

What is a current joy that I can share with someone?

What is a current concern that I can share with someone?

Is there a temptation or sin that I need to confess or ask for prayer from someone?

What is a current source of discouragement or a challenge to share with someone?

## ***Listening***

The second part of TLC is listening. Several years ago, Peggy asked me to get my hearing checked during my next physical. “Sometimes I don’t think you’re hearing me,” was her concern. Guess what? My hearing was fine but my listening was off. I heard but did not listen.

Listening is a biblical virtue. James puts it succinctly: “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak . . .” (James 1:19 NIV). I have a plaque I keep on my desk to remind me of the importance of listening. It reads:

## WALK WITH ME

LISTEN INTENTLY. QUESTION DEEPLY. SPEAK CAUTIOUSLY.

How can we listen well? These simple actions help.

- Pause before answering. I'm too often quick to speak but not quick to hear. A momentary pause helps me focus on the question or statement before I feel compelled to reply.
- Ask another question. It's a bit of a cliché that good teachers answer questions by asking questions. I return questions with questions to help understand what a person is asking. I ask questions to clarify or illustrate what the problem or inquiry is.
- Restate what someone else asked. This is called framing or reflective listening. We reflect back to a person what he or she said so that we are clear about the question or statement. Restating or reflecting back shows we are listening.

Restating or reflecting must be done cautiously and not mechanically. My friend Grady had attended a workshop on reflective listening and was trying to practice it in everyday conversations. As he sat across from a friend at breakfast, practicing reflective listening, the friend pushed his plate back and said, "I don't know what you're doing but I wish you would stop repeating what I just said!"

We build heart-to-heart relationships when we listen well (without merely echoing back what people say!).

## ***Caring***

In practicing a little TLC, we demonstrate care in relationships. We care by choosing to be empathetic. Empathy is “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another.”<sup>14</sup> Putting myself in the heart and mind of another means choosing to feel with them what they’re experiencing. Empathy can start with asking two basic questions: What is the other person thinking? and What is the other person feeling?

Empathy moves the focus off myself and onto another person. When I can understand how a friend thinks or feels, then I can take a practical action step and care for them.

Caring happens in small ways. Our friends Mike and Karen are struggling with some family issues. Karen unexpectedly received a phone call one day from two friends who said, “We’re taking you out to lunch today!” These friends considered the stress that Karen was under—they were empathetic—and they chose an ordinary act to show they cared. The time laughing and sharing their lives over lunch (which Karen didn’t have to pay for!) refreshed her in the midst of family challenges. She felt cared for. We engage people heart-to-heart when we care.

Heart-to-heart is up-close and personal. Educator and author Howard Hendricks wrote: “You can impress people at a distance. But you can impact them only up close. And the closer you are to them, the greater and more permanent the impact.”<sup>15</sup> We get close to people through a little TLC.

## TO WRAP UP: REMEMBER TLC

Living heart-to-heart is costly. It means intentionally giving up time, preferences, and energy to help another grow in Christ. For private people like me, we have to open up a little bit about our private worlds. We choose to move toward others even when they may not naturally move toward us. We choose to ask questions rather than talk about ourselves. We choose to spend time with people when we might prefer some personal down time.

I often pray Paul's "life-and-death" challenge:

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

—2 Corinthians 5:14–15

Loving our neighbors is a life-and-death challenge. It happens in practical ways, through transparency, listening, and caring. How can you practice being a good neighbor to someone this coming week? What will it take to do it in heart-to-heart ways? How can you practice some TLC? We invite people to walk with us as we walk with Jesus, and we do it in heart-to-heart ways.

## WALK HEART TO HEART



### TRANSPARENCY

---

Share a joy  
Share a concern  
Share forgiveness  
Share a life burden

### LISTEN

---

Pause  
Ask  
Restate

### CARE

---

Be empathetic  
Love in small ways

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